

Legislative Assembly and Political Parties of Punjab during Provincial Autonomy: 1937-47

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Abstract

This research article gives a brief history of the role played by the powerful Unionist Party who ruled Punjab twice during the Provincial Autonomy: once in 1937-46 with absolute majority (its term extended due to WW-II) both under Sikandar Hayat Khan and Khizr Hayat Khan and then from 1946- 1947 under Khizr Hayat Khan, in coalition with Congress and Akalis, and prevented Muslim League, who passed resolution of the formation of separate Pakistan, from forming the last Government. Although, the Unionists were pro-British and had the dominion status as their political goal while both Congress and Akalis stood for complete Independence of India, yet the three joined hands as they had a secular outlook and were against the formation of separate Pakistan. The article also discusses Sikandar-Jinnah Pact, Sikandar-Baldev Pact, reasons for the decline of Unionists and phenomenal rise of Muslim League; weakness of Congress in Punjab, its splinter groups - Congress Nationalist Party and Congress Sikh Party; The Khalsa National Party, Socialists, Congress Nationals, Parliamentary Labor Board, Ittehad-i-Millat, The Ahrars and The Hindu Sabha.

Keywords

Punjab Legislative Assembly, Unionist Party, Pirs, Sajjada Nashins, Biradri, Congress Party, Muslim League, Akalis, Sikandar-Jinnah Pact, Pakistan Declaration, Khizr Hayat Khan

1.0. Introduction

Punjab, the land of the five rivers, was annexed by the British on 29 March, 1849. It was, by far, an important acquisition; its strategic location, fertile land and bellicose people were assets of prime importance to the Imperial power. Since Punjab was highly important for the British rule, the

British took maximum care to check the growth of political consciousness in the Punjab [1]. Thus, the official hold on such a province should have been very tight which explains the denial to Punjab of many constitutional privileges which were given to other provinces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century [2]. Whereas, the Act of 1861 made provision of the legislative councils in Bombay and Madras and 'authorized the establishment of similar councils in other provinces', it was thirty six years after the passage of the said Act, that Punjab got its first legislative council in 1897 comprising of nine nominated members. With the Government of India Act 1919, the strength of the Punjab legislative council was increased to twenty four, out of which only five were to be elected. In 1912, the number of elected members was raised to eight and it became sixteen in 1916[3]. Further, important changes were made in the sphere of provincial legislature by the Act of 1919. The members of the Council were increased to ninety four out of which twenty three were nominated and seventy one were elected. The former were nominated by the Governor and the latter were to be directly elected by the people from different types of constituencies- Muhammadans, Non-Muhammadans, Sikhs and Specials, which were further divided into urban and rural. The Reforms widened the cleavage by dividing the legislative seats between the rural and urban areas. Earlier, the passing of the Land Alienation Act 1900 had divided the society of Punjab into the categories of agriculturists and non-agriculturists which continued to afflict it throughout the first half of the twentieth century [4]. It injected the virus of communalism and separatism at the provincial level. The division of communal seats was done in a very arbitrary and illogical manner. The Muslims of Punjab (55.2%) were given 40.4 per cent seats whereas in Bengal (54.6%) were given 30 per cent seats. The Hindus of Punjab (32%) were given 25.5 per cent seats whereas Muslims of United Provinces (14.3%) were given 26 per cent seats [5]

.This spoiled communal harmony and caused urban-rural division.

With the implementation of Government of India Act of 1935, profound changes were made in the legislative area. Unlike most of the other provinces, the Act gave a unicameral legislature to Punjab i.e. Punjab legislative assembly (earlier it was Punjab legislative council); the official and nominated members were eliminated. Women and labor were given representation for the first time, There was no Executive Councilor. Henceforth, all the departments were to be headed by the ministers responsible to the Assembly .Last but not the least, the number of voters was enhanced from about 3.4 per cent of population to around 11.1 per cent (25.75 lakhs) [6]. The strength of elected members was further raised to 175 from different communities.

The Act of 1935 significantly increased the number of people who were enfranchised. About 24 per cent of the adult population of Punjab was enrolled for the Legislative Assembly; electoral process which was just about 12 per cent of the total population of the province [11]. With landowners comprising almost sixty per cent of the new electorate and non-agriculturists still not permitted to stand from the rural constituencies implied that loyalist supporters would continue to dominate all important posts and public life [12]. Of course, with regards to the number, voters of Punjab were better placed than the other provinces under the Act of 1935. The average number of voters for each of the 175 constituencies of Punjab Assembly was about 16,000 as compared to 33,700 in Madras, 18,600 in Bombay (including Sind), 32,000 in United Province, 33,300 in Bihar (including Orissa), 20,000 in Central Provinces and 18,600 in Berar [11]. The property /status qualification of Punjab legislative assembly voters for the elections of 1937 were specified for urban rural and special voters separately [10].

2.0. Methodology

The research material collected both from the official and non-official agencies using primary and secondary sources are already discussed in our previous publication [13].

3.0 Discussion

The bifurcation of seats into rural (138) and urban groups (19) out of 175 was based on the proportion of rural population but the decision was also and perhaps, more pointedly, in line with the British policy of sustaining goodwill among the rural people of the Punjab[8]. The special seats was composed of General(Women)-1,Muhammadan(Women)-2,Sikh (Women)-1,Anglo-Indians-1,European-1,Indian Christians-2,Commerce and Industry-1, Landholders- 5, Labor- 3 and University- 1[9].This number of seats was 2.46 times the earlier number of elected members. This increase was not encouraging as compared to Madras, Bengal and United Provinces; no matters better than those of Central Provinces and Berar, Bihar, Assam, the Sind and newly-created provinces of Orissa [10].Eight constituencies were reserved for the Schedule Castes as per the provision of the ‘Poona Pact’ [11]. The following table shows the distribution of the constituencies for the Punjab Legislative Assembly under the new Act:

Table1.Punjab Legislative Assembly Constituencies, 1937-47[7]

Constituencies	Urban	Rural	Total
General	8	34	42
Muhammadans	9	75	84
Sikhs	2	29	31
Special	-	-	18
Total	19	138	175

When the elections in 1937 (under the Act of 1935) were declared, various political parties such as the Unionist Party, the Congress, the Muslim League, Akali Party, Khalsa National Party, the Hindu Election Board comprised of sectional Hindu group, the Ahrars, Ittehad-i-Millat, Socialists, Congress Nationalists and Parliamentary Labor Board started preparing and strengthening their positions. and pushed their candidates into the election combat. A brief account of political parties, their manifesto and their policies would be given as under:

3.1. The Unionist Party

The Unionist Party, one of the important political parties in Punjab politics, formed by Fazl-i-Husain

and Chhotu Ram in 1923[14] remained in power from 1923-47. Its aim and objectives were to:

- (i) Attain dominion status within the British Commonwealth of Nations by constitutional means.
- (ii) Provide equal opportunities of advance to all and strive for the beneficent activities of Government to backward classes and areas.
- (iii) Secure a just and fair representation of all classes and communities in the public services of province.
- (iv) Secure fair distribution of burden of provincial taxes between agricultural and other classes.
- (v) Check the exploitation of economically backward classes by economically dominant classes.
- (vi) Preserve the Punjab Land alienation act as a measure of protection to backward classes.
- (vii) Promote indigenous industries.

The Land Alienation Act of 1900, demarcating 'rural agriculturists' from the 'non-agriculturists', was assumed as a central place in the ideology of the rural Punjabi leadership as it shaped Punjab's provincial politics[15]. With the implementation of the Reforms of 1919, the political spectrum in India weighed heavily in favor of the provincial or regional politics, eroding the national basis of trans-regional movements. The most important aspects of the said reforms from the Punjab's view point were the institutionalization of the existing political divisions between urban and rural political interests. Separate electorates were created for the Punjab's towns and countryside and only members of the agricultural tribe, as defined by the Alienation of Land Act, 1901, were allowed to stand as candidates for the rural constituencies. Further, the Punjab's rural political tradition of loyalty to the colonial regime and inter-communal co-operation culminated in the emergence of the Unionist party in 1923. The Unionist leaders' foresight fully built the foundation of their party on the neglected rural majority who formed almost 80% of the population with a special thrust on the interests of peasantry, the agriculturists and the poor so as to bring about just distribution of taxes between the over-taxed agriculturists, mostly poor and ruralities, and non-agriculturists-mostly urbanities including the rich. It was claimed to be a non-communal party based on an economic program that favored the "have-nots" as against the "have-gots", the debtors as opposed to the creditors [16].

The British government looked favorably towards the Unionist party for the two obvious reasons- one, the party standing for constitutional means to effect any political change was a lesser evil when compared with Congress which was, in almost, a total revolt against it. Secondly, the feudal element and others who formed the social base of the Unionists, were the government's own men its subordinate collaborators, if not lackeys. So, the British government gave it all support to weaken the nationalist forces spearheaded by the Congress [17]. Within two years of its formation, the Unionist party had become as much of a force in the Punjab as the Indian National Congress was in other provinces. Next to the Congress, the Unionist party was, perhaps, the best organized political party [18]. A section of Muslim leaders which played an important role in establishing the credibility of the Unionist party and supported Fazl-i-Husain were the *pirs* and *sajjada nashins*. The *pirs* were large landowners who had widespread religious influence. Their combination was strong enough to bring the masses under the complete subjugation and political control and ideally placed to play a leading role in rural politics. Their headquarters were known as *dargahs* (shrines) which were considered highly religious places. These religious leaders were even recognized as eligible 'landed gentry' for the grant of canal land. It was this recognition as landed rural leaders that provided for the basis of support of many of these '*sajjada nashins*', literally who sit on the prayer carpet but, otherwise, were custodian of the *durgah*. Such people would consider Unionist Party more reliable to preserve and protect their interests. Most of the people who constituted the Unionist party were its sympathizers or were, in some way or the other, indebted to the government and were always on the lookout for patronage.

The other political constituent of the Unionist party were the *biradari* leaders with feudal background. The Hayats, Tiwanas and Noons were three such families which acted as pillars of the Unionist party [19]. Thus, this party included all those tribal and territorial groups which had been backward in education in acquiring positions of power and profit in the administration of the province. "Special protection for the weak" and "special help for the backward" became the slogans of the party. The principles embodied in these slogans found expression in a vigorous and sustained policy of repelling attacks on the Alienation of Land Act, safeguarding its

effectiveness, proposing other measures of relief and protection for agriculturist debtors demanding other benefits for the rural population. The urban groups, despite their superior education and organization, were locked out of power as they neither had a landed base nor agriculturist status—two essential prerequisites for political power.

The Unionist party did not enjoy a large mass following though it included among its members Hindu and Sikh landlords and agriculturists as well. The Muslim leadership of the Unionist party in the Punjab realized that the successful working of the reforms was not possible without non-Muslim help. But the conflicts between the agriculturist and non-agriculturist and the fact that major sections of them belonged to two different religions, provided a basis for the strengthening of communal tendencies [20]. The leaders of the party would try to dispel these feelings and mobilize different communities for joint prosecution of a common program and gave an agricultural and rural bias to the legislative and administrative policy of the government and interpreted their existing difference between ‘have gotts’ and ‘have notts’.

As the prospect of being elected to power increased, so did the internal dissension and intrigues within the party. So much so, the founder of the party Fazl-i-Husain was keen to stay away from Punjab politics but was persuaded to reorganize the party in February 1936 so that the party could be strong enough to contest the forthcoming provincial assembly elections. After the re-organization in April 1936, the party became the strongest political party in the province and the most leading regional party in the whole country. So confident was Fazl-i-Husain of the victory of his party in the forthcoming general elections to the Punjab Assembly that he turned down Jinnah’s proposals for an electoral understanding twice; first time in January 1936 and second time in April of the same year [21]. Fazl-i-Husain had earlier opposed a joint electorate on any terms and insisted on separate electorate of the Muslims, he now nullified the whole spirit underlying the principle of separate electorate during the elections of 1937. He refused to act up to its implication and became a champion of the idea of contesting elections on non-communal lines on the ticket of a non-communal party based on an economic program.

But with the sudden demise of Fazl-i-Husain in July, 1936, a long, stable, and decisive period in Punjab politics ended. With his death, the Unionist party lost both its influence and prestige. The selection of Sikandar Hayat Khan as the leader of the party was a forgone conclusion because, being a Hindu, Chaudhri Chhotu Ram, the co-founder, was neither acceptable to the majority of the Muslim Unionist member nor to the British. The party fought elections under the leadership of Sikandar Hayat Khan who threw himself heart and soul in its electoral work by declaring that the aim of the party was to secure the formation of a permanent government in the province. It was “not only to advance and develop the culture of the Muslims, but also to protect the culture and to secure the interests of the minority communities”. The party whittled down the evil consequences of communal division of seats ever since its foundation through inter-community character, but it was through its election manifesto of 1936 as it tried to undo rural-urban cleavage by emphasizing equal opportunities for the development of all with special solicitude for scheduled castes, backward classes, backward areas and economically weaker sections of the society, both urban and rural and decided to go alone as it was well-entrenched in Punjab.

The election manifesto of the Unionist party declared dominion status as its political goal. But its economic program secured it so overwhelming confidence of the electorate that it won 25 seats unopposed [22]. Its manifesto declared that the party would (i) ameliorate the lot of masses, particularly of down-trodden sections of the society (ii) lighten the burden of the poorest of the tax-payers by diminishing the cost of administration (iii) boost cottage industries both in the towns and villages (iv) relieve the agricultural and laboring classes of their irksome burden of debt; (v) intensify campaign against the disease, unemployment, illiteracy and revamp the preposterous educational pattern so as to make it more practical and job-oriented. Sikandar Hayat Khan tried to assure the voters that his party was non-communal and secular and to dub it as a party of Muslim alone was wrong. To strengthen claim, he declared that if his party was voted to power, it would not hesitate to include non-Muslim groups in the cabinet. He also made a fervent appeal to the National Progressive Party (Hindu Election Board) to strengthen his hands in the elections.

3.2. The Indian National Congress

Though this party was formed in 1885 and the provincial branches were set up in the early 1890s, yet the party was almost a non-entity in the Punjab till 1919. The enthusiasm engendered by the anti-Rowlatt Act agitation, the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements, a meaningful organizational structure developed in the Punjab. But the Congress failed to capitalize and conserve their support for long. The Congress in the Punjab was like a 'poor-country cousin' as compared to its sister organization in the other parts of India. The decline in the popularity of the Congress prior to 1919 was, basically, due to disillusionment of a section of the Hindu elite with the Congress as the party did not take a clear position in the Land Alienation Act, 1900 which favored the agriculturist castes against non-agriculturists [23]. Its social base in the province was confined only to urban Hindu middle class and failed to bring large sections of the peasantry or rural Hindus into its fold. Moreover, the rural Hindus of Eastern Punjab (present Haryana) followed the lead given by Chhotu Ram and supported the Unionist party. The Muslims as well as a majority of the Sikhs did not come under the Congress banner. Thus, the party, mainly, representing urban interests and was more pro-Hindu than nationalist in its approach to politics. The Congress was weak, faction-ridden and failed to draw popular support in rural Punjab mainly due to its indifferent and often negative attitude to various pro-rural legislation measures initiated by the Unionist leaders in the previous Legislative Councils. In 1935, its total membership was only 12,168 in the province; 53% being the urban members. However, the number gradually started rising and by October, 1936, 26,511 were on the Congress rolls marking cent per cent increase over the last year enrolment. The party was financially, also, not sound and continued to suffer from local problems and internal rivalries into two main groups headed by Satyapal and Gopi Chand Bhargava since 1933[24]. Besides these, there were splinter groups having dubious devotion to Congress ideology and programs who gained greater importance in the provincial Congress organization causing consternation among genuine Congressmen. The Congress leaders banked on these splinter groups to acquire control over the organization. Whereas, Gopi Chand Bhargava relied on Akalis, a section of Congress socialists

and some neutrals like Satyapal depended on the Ahrars and a section of Congress socialists[25]. Dissensions and personal jealousies continued disturbing the Congress campaign and some Congressmen worked against the party candidates during the elections for to the provincial legislative assembly in 1937. The intra-party feud had weakened both the groups morally during these years and group interests overshadowed the national priorities of Congress. Even Jawaharlal Nehru felt disgusted and distressed with such a sorry state affairs of the Punjab Congress. He remarked:

“In the Punjab, the masses were behind the Congress; if given proper leadership, the Punjab Congress could give a good account of itself”[26].

In addition, Congress also had to face strong opposition from the Unionist party. The Muslim leadership of the Unionist party often indulged in propaganda saying that the Congress was, above all, a Hindu organization which was primarily interested in the welfare of Hindu money lending class and propertied sections of the urban society. Notwithstanding their disagreement with the Act of 1935 in its entirety, the Congress party decided to participate in the general elections of the province “in order to combat the government from inside and outside the legislature and render it inoperative” [27]. Since March 1936, Congress launched a vigorous campaign in Punjab for reaching both the urban and rural people, especially the latter and spreading among them the ideas of socialism with the argument that these would materialize only after the foreign capitalist government had been expelled. The Congress contested the elections under the following manifesto (August 1936) [28]:

- (i) that struggle for freedom still continues and must continue till India is free and independent
- (ii) for the vast millions of countrymen, the problem of achieving national independence can give us the power to solve the economic and social problems and end exploitation of our masses
- (iii) the Congress realizes that independence cannot be achieved through these legislatures, nor can the problem of poverty and unemployment be effectively tackled by them
- (iv) in regard to industrial workers, the policy of the Congress is to secure them a decent

standard of living, hours of work and conditions of labor ;

- (v) the Congress stands for the removal of untouchability and for the social and economic uplift of the Harijans and the backward classes
- (vi) it will encourage khadi and village industries;
- (vii) the question of accepting ministries or not in the new legislatures stands postponed for decision by the Lucknow Congress.

3.2.1 The Congress Nationalist Party

It came into existence as a result of the differences of M.M. Malviya and Aney with Congress High Command over Communal Award. Both resigned from the All-India Congress Working Committee and formed a new party to fight the election to vindicate their stand on Communal Award; thus lending strength to non-Congress opponents to the Award in the Punjab [29]. However, it failed to make any mark in the assembly election of 1937.

3.2.2. The Congress Sikh Party

The Congress also formed a separate Congress Sikh Party in the Punjab under the president ship of Sardar Sarmukh Singh Jhabbal to reach the Sikh masses independently [30] and, thus, widening the base of national movement as well as developing mass contact among the Sikhs for the elections. It also tried to woo the Akalis by making a compromise for election of 1937. It succeeded in forming a broad alliance with all those who were anti-imperialist in nature and contested election in collaboration with the Akali Dal and the Socialists.

3.3. Hindu Election Board: Hindu Sabha

The Hindu Sabha, the oldest party [31] in the province open to the Hindus next to the Congress, was established in 1907 with an aim to promote brotherly feelings amongst the various sections of the Hindu community; to help destitute and disabled Hindus; to protect and promote the interests of the Hindu community and to improve the moral, intellectual and material condition of Hindus. Till the early thirties, the party stature was not so strong but the agitation of the Punjab Hindus against the Communal Award raised its stature among them. Though claiming to represent Hindus, the Sabha lacked solidarity as it was a heterogeneous group of Arya Samajists and

Sanatan Dharmis having divergent social and religious outlook which generated enormous tension. Its leaders sought government patronage and avoided any confrontation with it. The rural and urban interests also divided its leaders. They formed Hindu Election Board to contest Hindu seats but succeeded only partially in building up a united front and sought votes on the basis of protecting the rights of Hindus.

3.4. The Punjab Muslim League

The Punjab Muslim League established in November 1907 was an off-shoot of All-India Muslim League founded in December, 1906 at Dacca, with an aim and object and constitution altered in 1912, having full responsible government for India with adequate and effective safeguards for Mussalmans, to protect and advance the political, religious and other rights and interests of Indian Musalmans, to promote friendship and union between Musalmans and other communities in India and to maintain and strengthen brotherly relations between Musalmans in India and those in other countries. But it remained inactive because Fazl-i-Husain, the driving force in Muslim politics, saw the Unionist party as a better vehicle for his community's interests. The League remained only a party of leaders with practically no cadre support and could not pose any challenge to the Unionists until 1937. Prior to the elections, Jinnah made efforts to fight the election by seeking cooperation of leading Muslims in the Punjab but faced hindrance from a coterie of feudal elements and money classes of the Unionist party. Ashiq Husain Batalvi in "*Iqbal Ke Akhri Do Sal*" exposes the Unionist party as follows [33]:

“Whenever there was any sign of political awakening among the people, the leaders of the Unionist Party, in collusion with the governor of the province, crushed it. This was a monopoly concern of some big landlords of the province. Taking advantage of this monopoly, these men, on the other hand, established a tradition of flattery and sycophancy, and on the other, they claimed to be representative of the people and thus enriched themselves through exploitation. The greatest harm they did was to split Muslims into urban and rural classes and stretch division to such an extent that the two classes looked upon one another as enemies”.

Since the Unionists was proving a hindrance in the mass-based Muslim political development in the province, Jinnah felt that The League had to, somehow, emasculate Unionist party's entrenched position in the countryside if it was to make any impact in the region during the new era of provincial autonomy to capture power in the province. He planned to wreck the Unionist party by splitting its ranks and by uniting all other Muslim political parties under the banner of League. But Fazl-i-Husain proved to be a deterrent in Jinnah's efforts [32]. To bring him into net, Jinnah offered Fazl-i-Husain the president ship of the All-India Muslim League (Bombay Session, January 1936). He wrote [34]:

"I feel, at this moment, no one can give better lead to the Musalmans of India than your self. We want a man of your caliber and experience, and nobody can well, at this critical moment, as far as I can see, perform that duty and render that service to the community as you would be able to do. Your refusal will be the greatest misfortune and terrible disappointment".

Fazl-i-Husain, however, refused the offer and instead carried talks with the Congress which did not materialize owing to the shortsightedness of the Congress leaders. Jinnah, again, pursued his mission to convince Fazl-i-Husain and urged upon him (April 1936) to fight the elections under its banner. But Fazl-i-Husain, again, repudiated the offer as he was of the view that joining hands with the Muslim League would mean taking the Muslims away from the mainstream and denying him of a chance to form ministry in the Punjab. Moreover, the League's communal approach could not be reconciled to that of the Unionist party which was open to and for the benefit of all communities of the province. Fazl-i-Husain was not sure that all the Muslims would accept it and the division between the Muslims in the House would greatly damage the Muslim cause [35] which would help the Congress to take away not only the minorities but also a good number of Muslim elected representatives. Of course, there was a section of Muslim leaders led by Iqbal, who wholeheartedly responded to Jinnah's call. They organized a Provincial Parliamentary Board and conducted the League's campaign in face of grave difficulties and handicaps. But the League remained a negligible force in the provincial

elections of 1937 without any significant support in the rural areas . It mainly remained confined to Lahore where urban elite patronized its annual sessions from time to time. The Muslim League's Central Parliamentary Board published a manifesto on 11 June, 1936, detailing its aims and objectives as follows:

- (i) to protect the religious rights of Musalmans
- (ii) to make every effort to secure the repeal of all the repressive laws
- (iii) to reject all measures which were detrimental to the interest of India and led to economic exploitation of the country
- (iv) to reduce the heavy cost of administration--both central and provincial
- (v) to encourage the development of industries including cottage industries
- (vi) to regulate currency, foreign exchange and price for the economic development of the country;
- (vii) to promote social, educational and economic uplift of the rural population and devise measures for the amelioration of the general conditions of the Musalmans
- (viii) to protect and promote Urdu language

3.5.The Ahrar Party : Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam

This party was established by Chaudhri Afzal Haq in 1929 at Lahore with the avowed aim of creating an Islamic state within the subcontinent that would manage its affairs in accordance with Islamic dictates of life. Its nucleus consisted of urban middle class Muslims who were former members of the Congress and the Punjab Khilafat Committee. Its leadership was primarily religious and was popular among the large Kashmiri population of Amritsar, Ludhiana and Sialkot. The "direct action" organized by the Ahrars in Kashmir paid great dividends in the form of popularity even in Punjab. But they lacked patience and discipline and, thus, failed to build trust among the *pirs* and *sajjada nashins*; the main supporters of the Unionist Party. Besides, their lukewarm attitude to communally flared matters like the Shahid Ganj Mosque dispute (Lahore. 1935) [36] made them lose considerable support among urban Muslims. The Ahrars reflected Congress policies in their political views but represented Islamic fundamentalism in their religious outlook. The party stood for the attainment of complete independence for India and hoped that with the

Congress support they would successfully oppose Unionist candidates in all Muhammadan constituencies of the province. This adversely affected their position in their own community. Owing to lack of any proper party apparatus, the Ahrars were not able to mobilize any stable support and frittered away their energies in an unplanned confrontations with the Unionists, the Ahmadias and the British [37]. Despite their small following in the community, the Ahrars were a force and could create difficulties for the Muslim League by joining hands with the Congress. They worked side by side with the Congress in 1930s, but would change sides whenever it suited their convenience.

3.6. Ittehad-i-Millat Party

This organization was founded by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan in 1935 to orchestrate Muslim protests during the Shahid Ganj agitation [38] as he developed differences with the other Ahrar leaders. Its aims were akin to those of the Ahrars and subscribed to the ideal of complete independence. But its influence did not extend beyond a few cities of the province. The government, generally, looked upon it as a body consisting of Punjab malcontents drawn chiefly from Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi and Multan. Although the Ahrar Party and Ittehad-i-Millat had reached an electoral adjustment in May 1936, yet their relations continued to remain strained after a conflict at Gujranwala [39].

3.7. The Sikhs Assert

The first provincial elections held on the basis of Government of India Act, 1919, marked the beginning of a new phase of competitive politics in Punjab which forced the Sikhs to stand on their own legs and make alignments with other parties instead of banking on British patronage and support. They sought cooperation from the Congress and other organized groups of Hindus and Muslims in their struggle. Their principal mission was to get rid of the Communal Award [40] and to safeguard the interests of their community. Sardar Joginder Singh, a leading member of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, proposed to constitute a Unity Board of all the Sikhs' political parties to contest the elections from one platform. But Shiromani Akali Dal and the Khalsa Darbar, the extremist organizations, refused to join the Board and decided to fight the elections from a different platform. The reason for Akalis' refusal to

join the Unity Board was that they did not want to join hands with the moderates against whom they had been fighting for the past fifteen years.

3.7.1. The Shiromani Akal Dal

The Shiromani Akal Dal was formed in 1920 as a fighting force in the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee in its struggle to liberate Sikh shrines from the hold of the corrupt *mahants*. It assumed the role of sole custodian and carrier of all political and non-political interests of the Sikh community. By 1937, it became a prominent political party of the Sikhs and claimed itself to be the sole spokesman of 'Sikh interests'. They launched powerful political agitations. It set up a separate Board to put up candidates for the forthcoming election. Their manifesto announced to strive to replace "Communal Award" by a just and national solution and would not join any government formed on the basis of this Award. They promised to fight for attaining the complete independence of the country and to cooperate with those political parties whose program and ideals approximated their own [41].

In the initial stages of the election to the assembly in 1936, a powerful section of the Akalis, especially Akali leader, Tara Singh was against any electoral alliance with the Congress and was opposed to the idea of any Sikh candidate contesting these elections on the Congress ticket. But it remained only for a short time. Both the parties took the stand of opposing the Communal Award. Also, the Akalis found their program to be identical with the Congress policy as both of them aimed at wrecking the constitution and working for the complete independence [42]. Akalis felt that their alliance with Congress would help those fighting elections against the Khalsa National Party. Finally to counter imminent Muslim domination, both these parties reached a compromise with the ostensible object of combating the reactionary forces and aligned with each other for the election; the Akali contesting 14 seats, while Congress would contest 10 seats. But the Akali party in the legislature would form a part of the Congress in all political matters and would be amenable to the rules and discipline of Congress [43].

3.7.2. The Khalsa National Party

It was founded in 1936 by two Sikh aristocrats-Sir Sundar Singh Majithia and Sir Jogendra Singh. When the Akalis refused to join the Unity Board, the Chief Khalsa Diwan decided to form a new party known as Khalsa National Party. According to Emerson, the party had been formed “with the object of getting back the influence which the Sikhs of the leading families in the province have lost”. They were opposed to pro-Congress or anti-government policies of the Akalis. Being moderates consisting of Sikh aristocracy and intelligencia, they believed in maintaining connections with Britain. Its leader Jogendra Singh held that it was not merely a party for contesting elections, but its main aim was to unite the Sikh community in every village and town and promised to “work for the abolition of the Award and for its replacement by a just and national solution [44]in its manifesto. Unlike Akalis, this party decided to cooperate with the other parties in the working of the new constitution with the main object of safeguarding the interests of the community.

3.8. The 1937 Elections

Nominations were invited by 23.11. 1936 and scrutiny was done on 30.11.1936 [45]. Eight parties, besides a few independents fought their way into the Punjab Legislative Assembly elections.483 candidates, belonging to different parties participated in the election fray. 26 seats including two scheduled castes reserved seats were filled without contest. Out of 2,686,094 electors only 1,593,435 (59.32%) voted. The Unionist party put up candidates in 107 of the 175 constituencies [46]. Polling took place from December 1936 to February 1937 and passed off peacefully barring a few incidents.

The results were announced on February 1, 1937 to find that the Unionist party had secured a great victory. A large number of independent candidates also announced their allegiance to this party. The seats won by the various political parties in the Punjab legislative assembly elections of 1937 were: the Unionist party- 95, the Congress- 18, the Khalsa National party- 14, the Hindu Election Board- 11, Akalis- 10, Ahrars- 2, the Muslim League – 2[47], Ittihad-i-Millat- 2, Congress Nationalist party- 1, Parliamentary Labour Board-1, Socialist- 1 and the Independents- 19. The Punjab became the first province to produce a

majority party, able and willing, to shoulder the responsibility of Government.

The 95 seats won by of the Unionist party had: (General-13, Muhammeden-73, Women-1, Anglo-Indian-1, European-1, Indian Christian-2, Landlords-3 and Labour-1) and thus, formed first provincial legislative assembly in the Punjab under the provincial autonomy. The party had an easy

Table2. Punjab Legislative Assembly Strength in 1937 Elections [48]

Communities	In the Unionist Party	In the Whole House
Hindus*	16	48
Muslims	81	90
Sikhs	..	33
Indian Christian	2	2
Anglo-Indian	1	1
European	1	1

*including members of scheduled castes

win in areas where it had nominated *pirs* and *biradari* leaders. In two of three Jhang constituencies, its candidates won unopposed. In Lyallpur, where it had complete support of the *pirs* and *biradari* network, it secured up to 77 per cent of the total votes and commanded an absolute majority in the total house with a membership of 101 seats (Table2).

With no Sikh among its members, the Unionist Leader initiated an interesting political and constitutional experiment where the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were working together in a friendly spirit. In a cabinet of six Ministers, Sikandar Hayat Khan chose 3 Muslims (including himself), 2 Hindus and 1 Sikh. In the matter of employment, he followed the old services formula and selected the following percentages among different communities: Muslims 50 %, Hindus 30% and Sikhs 20%. The two non-Unionist Ministers were Sunder Singh Majithia from the Khalsa National Party and Manohar Lal from National Progressive Party (he joined after having been elected on an independent ticket in the Landholder’s constituency). The decision to associate non-Unionist members in the ministry

was based mainly on the consideration that both the Khalsa National Party and the National Progressive Party were politically on the same platform as the Unionists, collaboratively loyal and, in most cases beholden, dependent in some way or the other on the patronage of the British Government. Their inclusion enabled Sikandar Hayat Khan to project himself as a secularist and as a representative of all the major communities in the state. They formed an impressive and influential block rivaled only by the Noon-Tiwana group from the Shahpur district. Its loyalty was assured once Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana was included in the Government [49]. However, the integrity of the party was threatened when Khizr Hayat pitted himself against Sikandar Hayat Khan for the office of Chief Minister of the Punjab. But Sikandar managed to overcome this crisis by including Khizr Hayat as a member and calmed down other seekers of power in his party by a policy of give and take, thus ensuring the stability of the party.

The Congress Party did not do well in the Punjab Legislative Assembly elections as compared to the other provinces, where it was in majority. It could secure only one seat by a narrow margin of 200 votes out of the four seats contested by it from the general constituency. The party was severely handicapped because of its little support amongst the rural population. A further setback was caused by the breakdown of its alliance with the Akalis who went back from their promise to withdraw candidates from the seats which the Congress was contesting.

Again the Congress which has put up candidates only for 32 seats out of 175 could win only 18 seats. Its leadership was aware of the poor organization of the Punjab Congress and thus the debacle. The position of Congress among the Muslims was weak in comparison to both the Unionist party and Muslim League was obvious from the fact that in elections it put up only 4 Muslim candidates, out of whom just 2 were elected. The seats of the Congress were divided among the following communities: 11 (General-Hindus), 5 (Sikhs) and 2 (Muslims) [50]. The Congress secured 13% of the total votes cast and captured 10.5% of the total seats in the Assembly.

But the Congress proved its popularity among the urban Hindus by winning all urban Hindu seats except one where the election papers of its

candidate were rejected. But in the rural constituencies, the Hindu election Board annexed a big chunk of Hindu seats. In the three divisions of Lahore, Rawalpindi and Multan, the Hindu Election Board won six out of seven seats of caste Hindus. The Board emerged as a strong rival of the Congress in Hindu constituencies as it captured 11 seats against 15 of Congress including 4 Sikhs. The Board won 9 (General), 1 (Landlords/Landholders) and 1 (Labour) seats.

The League put up a poor show in the elections despite the sincere efforts of Jinnah and one just two seats in the province where Muslims were in majority. One of its members, Raja Gazanfar Ali Khan, later, resigned from the party and joined the Unionist party leaving League with only one member, Malik Barkat Ali in the Assembly comprising 175 members [51]. The League had put up candidates only for 7 Muslim seats out of a total of 90 and thus failed in all the Muslim majority rural constituencies. It had only one landowner amongst its 15 members, seven of whom were lawyers or urban politicians from Lahore. Their policies had little appeal for the rural population of the Punjabi Muslims though it exhorted them to vote for them in the name of Islam. It was unable to garner votes through the traditional channels of political mobilization in the countryside, the *biradari* networks, the patron-client ties between landlords and tenants and the networks of disciples of the leading *pirs*. The victory of Unionist party created a major problem for the Muslim League and Jinnah's claim to be the sole representative of Indian Muslims proved embarrassingly hollow and weakened his bargaining position in the All-India politics [52].

The Khalsa National Party secured 14 seats from which 13 were from Sikh constituency and 1 from Landholder/Landlord constituency. With the joining of independents its strength swelled to 18 seats out of 33 seats of the Sikhs. This success of the moderate Sikhs was welcomed by the Government. Emerson wrote to Linlithgow on February 22, 1937:

“This is the first time for some years that the moderate Sikhs have come into open and seriously challenged the position which the Akalis have obtained. The results are gratifying”.

Emerson, further, wrote to the Viceroy: “The success of Khalsa National Party led by Sir Sunder Singh in the Assembly elections was greater than had been expected, although a good number of candidates were elected on the Akali ticket. The Akali success would have been fewer had they not used religious funds for the purpose of bribing the electorate. Master Tara Singh, who has been the outstanding figure in Akali circles for some years, is apparently involved in the embezzlements” [53].

3.8.1. The Punjab Cabinet during 1937-46

Sikandar Hayat Khan became the Premier of the first legislature under the provincial autonomy and held the exalted office from 1937 to 1942. His cabinet included Sir Chhotu Ram, Mian Abdul Haye, Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, -all from Unionist Party; Manohar Lal from National Progressive Party and Sunder Singh Majithia from Khalsa National Party; all being of moderate views and the majority of them represented the interests of the rich landed peasantry. On assuming office (April 1, 1937), Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan made an important public statement indicating broadly the outlines of his political policy and program. He remarked [54]:

“Punjab Cabinet is under no delusion as to the nature, the limitations and restrictions which the Government of India Act imposes on autonomy even in the provincial sphere. Nevertheless, in pursuance of the clearly expressed wish of the electorate, it has undertaken the task of running the administration and securing the utmost good out of the new constitution”.

Referring to Ministry’s program of work, he said:

“Lightening the burden of peasantry, tackling the problem of unemployment, development and expansion of nation building activities, uplifting backward classes, including our brethren of the scheduled castes and creating a more favorable atmosphere for the promotion of communal amity and goodwill are questions which had been a subject of universal comment not only in Punjab, but throughout India. In order to afford requisite relief to peasantry and to provide for the removal or even mitigation of unemployment and intensification of nation-building activities, it

would be necessary to explore fresh avenues and examine the existing sources of revenue with a view to augmenting our income to the extent which would enable us to appreciable action in these very desirable directions without adding to the burden of poorer classes” [55].

An appeal was also made to the Press and the public at large to help the government in dispelling communal ill-will. His statement was, in a way, reiteration of the Unionist’s party’s policy of giving priority to the program of the rural development in Punjab. The difference now was that in the legislative councils under ‘dyarchy’, the Unionists were often helpless and even well meaning legislations fizzled out mainly due to opposition in the council as also due to the hurdles created by the government. However, with the introduction of ‘provincial autonomy’, the ministry had a comparatively free hand to complete and pursue their reforms.

Soon the new government, found itself confronted with an outburst of subversive activity. There occurred a series of communal riots in various parts of the province. The cases of political prisoners were raised from time to time by the opposition. The new government devoted attention not only to questions of civil liberty, but also to the important problem of national liberty. Driven by political compulsion, Sikandar made several moves to defuse the communal controversy which put a heavy strain on the stability of the Unionist ministry. He convened a “Unity Conference” of the leaders of all parties and religious leaders at Simla in July, 1937[56] for maintaining communal harmony. The sub-committees of this conference examined various questions such as cow slaughter and music before mosque which occasioned inter-communal strife. However, this method did not lead to any concrete outcome and discussions had to be postponed indefinitely. Another step which the Government took to discourage inter-communal controversies was the adoption of a general policy of refusing to answer on the floor of the legislative assembly questions raising communal issues but without much success. The Ministry made an attempt to solve the vexed problem of inter-communal justice in the matter of recruitment to public services by reserving 50 per cent of all fresh recruitment for Muslims, 20 per cent for Sikhs and

30 per cent for Hindus and others, including Indian Christians and scheduled castes.

3.8. 2. Various Acts Passed by Cabinet

In early 1937, the Premiere launched a six year program of rural improvement which set aside money for the establishment of schools, medical centers, model farms and improved drainage and sanitation. The ministry also passed a number of measures to fulfill its promise of lightening the burden of the peasantry and uplifting the backward classes. The Unionist coalition continued the basic economic policy of Fazl-i-Hussain of favoring the "have-nots" against the "have-gots", the debtors against the creditors irrespective of their caste or creed; a proof of their non-communal politics. Many Agrarian bills, popularly known as the "Golden Bills" [57] of the Punjab were introduced in the Assembly and passed. These bills were aimed at reducing the burdens of the agricultural indebtedness and regulating money-lending business and , thereby, liberate the poor peasantry from the clutches of the money-lenders and middle men, most being urban Hindus, by prohibiting the non-agriculturists from owning land and by regulating markets in the interests of the producers. The ministry claimed that these bills were meant to protect the agriculturists against the non-agriculturists, though they were chiefly in the interests of landlords and rich farmers.

The Punjab Registration of Money-lenders Act, 1938 was passed by the Punjab legislative assembly on 16 July 1938. It made the registration of money-lenders and holding of a valid license by them necessary before they could file a suit in a civil court for recovery of a loan or apply for the execution of any decree relating to a loan. It was intended to check dishonest and fraudulent practices on the part of money-lenders. The Act was applicable to all money-lenders including those agriculturists who had taken to money lending as a principle or subsidiary business, i.e., to non-agriculturist and agriculturalist moneylenders alike. Only 8232 people got themselves registered out of the estimated 55,000 moneylenders in the Punjab which implied that the people involved in this trade had other methods and alternatives to recover their dues. The Bill was vehemently opposed by Gokul Chand Narang , the leader of the trading class on the plea that there was no provision in the Bill to safeguard the moneylender against the

dishonest debtors for the recovery of dues and, thus, would harm trade and industry in the province but the Unionists defended it by saying 'the need of the day was not the protection of the moneylender but the peasant'.

Before the passing of the Punjab Alienation Land (Second Amendment) Bill, 1938, the previous Act i.e., the Alienation of Land Act (1900) had prevented members of an agriculturist tribe from alienating his land permanently in favor of the 'non-agriculturist', was honored more in its breach than in its application. Frequently, the land was transferred by one agriculturist to another but the buyer, whose name appeared in the official records, was only a dummy under whose cover a 'non-agriculturist' enjoyed the actual possession of the land and its income. Such *benami* transactions had resulted in transfer of properties worth crores of rupees from the 'agriculturist' to the 'non-agriculturists'. Under the new Bill, the ministry aimed at declaring all *benami* transfers (between 1901- 1938, two-third of the land alienated away from the small peasants was in favor of the large landowners) null and void by entitling the original owners or their heirs and successors to recover their lands in some cases, after paying compensation to the buyers, and in others without paying it. In pursuance of an undertaking given by the government that the agriculturist moneylenders would be placed under the same disabilities as non-agriculturists in respect of permanent acquisition of land in the settlement of debts, the Punjab Alienation of Land (Third Amendment) Bill was introduced in the House during the same session. It laid down that when an agriculturist had advanced a loan to another agriculturist, the debtor would not alienate his land in favor of creditor until the debt had been repaid and three years had elapsed after the repayment. If, however, the debtor and the creditor tried to evade this restriction through a *benami* transfer of land to a third party, the Deputy Commissioner was empowered to cancel the transaction and restore the land to alienor(grantor) as in the case of *benami* transfer of land under Punjab Alienation of Land Second Amendment Bill [58].

The Punjab Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act, 1938 provided for the termination of mortgages of lands effected before 8 June 1901, the date on which the Punjab Alienation of Land Act came into force, and which still subsisted, on payment of reasonable compensation when necessary and for

the restitution of lands so mortgaged. It was intended to help those whose lands, having been mortgaged a long time ago, had yielded more than adequate profit to the mortgagees. It benefitted 306,738 mortgagors to redeem 756,131 acres of mortgaged land [59].

The Punjab Agricultural Produce Marketing Act, 1939 was an important milestone in the Unionist Party's policy of attempting to restore the financial health of the agriculturists. Its objective was to protect the growers of agricultural commodities, who brought their produce for sale in the markets, from malpractices on the part of shopkeepers and brokers as overweighing and *dharmarth* in the food grain markets. The bill moved by Chaudhri Chhotu Ram in 1938 but it was enacted in 1939.

The Punjab Debtors Protection (Amendment) Act of 1938 aimed to prohibit the execution of decrees by the appointment of receivers to administer property, which is protected from attachment or sale. It was also to provide for the termination of the existing receivership within 6 months from the date on which the said Act comes into force, unless terminated earlier by the Court which made the appointment.

The Punjab Village Panchayat Act, 1939 was repealed and replaced Punjab Panchayat Act, 1921, consolidated and amplified the law relating to village Panchayats. It extended the functions of Panchayats in regard to public health, safety and their civil and criminal jurisdiction. The Act was implemented in 12,000 of Punjab's 36,000 villages and contributed to the development of local government [60].

The Punjab State Aid to Industries (Amendment) Act, 1940 amended the Act of 1935 so as to promote the development of cottage and village industries through State aid to conduct research and purchase of machinery in case of industries other than cottage.

The Factories (Punjab Amendment) Act, 1940 provided for regulating the establishment of large industries for the promotion of key industries for levying fees for registration of factories.

The Punjab Primary Education Act, 1940 made provision for the compulsory attendance of children at primary schools.

The Ministry took measures to promote the uplift of members of the scheduled castes by issuing some circulars, such as warning the subordinate officials against the practice of taking *beggar and* declaring all publicly owned wells throughout the province to be open to all the members of the public.

These Bills passed by the government commanded the support of the majority of the agriculturists and bodies like district Kisan Committees.

But the introduction of Agrarian Bills resulted in a wave of resentment and anguish amongst the non-agricultural class of the province who saw these bills as these measures detrimental to the interest of the money lending class. The Hindu non-agriculturists particularly from Hindu Maha sabha considered the bills as 'Black Bills' formed to do the harm to the Hindus of the Punjab and to destroy their trade and commerce, freedom and independence by making their business entirely dependent upon the good-will of the Government and their minions. A section of the press representing the Hindu viewpoint [61] took a communal position saying that these bills were meant to favor the Muslim peasantry against the Hindu money-lending classes. The Akalis sided with Hindus non-agriculturists in criticizing these bills as it gave them an opportunity to condemn the Unionist party as a pro-Muslim party. Akalis believed that these measures were a calculated move of Sikandar to divide their community into agriculturist and non-agriculturist section. The introduction of various Agrarian Bills placed the Congress leadership in the province in a paradoxical situation as it could neither reject these bills out rightly (the party at the national level was committed to work for the peasantry), nor could it fully support them as it would annoy the urban Hindus from which it mainly derived its strength. Thus, the party at the time of introduction of bills decided to stand neutral but later reversed its decision of neutrality in favor of support. The failure of the Congress party to oppose these bills and to make a declaration of policy towards them was adversely criticized and roundly condemned in the Hindu Press. Several prominent Hindu nationalist papers which were previously strongly pro-Congress had bitterly attacked the Congress attitude of neutral impotence and had scathingly condemned its failure to oppose what its urban

constituents regard as discriminatory legislation. The Congress, however, supported these measures inside the Assembly keeping in mind the interests of its members who were engaged in agricultural work but outside the assembly, it decried all the bills. Agrarian legislation was not communal, but the opposition to these bills was blatantly communal as only non-Muslim non-agriculturists opposed some bills in the assembly.

In the Punjab Assembly, the Congress became the chief opposition party as it was supported by Akalis, Ittehad-i-Millat and the Ahrars in opposing the various measures of the government. By September 1937, the Congress had become so critical of Sikandar Hayat's political policies and programs that it withdrew its nominees from the All-Parties Unity Conference set up by Sikandar in June 1937. The Premier, also, had to face a formidable force of reinvigorated All India Muslim League which had begun concentrating on Muslim majority places to enlist wider support. The Unionist party political relations with other important parties in Punjab at the time were ambiguous and remarkably contradictory due to its opportunism as ideals, principles and ideologies had no place in its political functioning. In fact it was due to the remote controlling character of British bureaucracy as almost all important leaders of the Unionist party were, in some way or the other, beneficiaries of British patronage. This subconscious bond of loyalty towards British rule in India within the top leadership of this party as well as its main supporters gave a predictable character to its politics.

3.9 Jinnah Triumphs: Sikandar-Jinnah Pact

The position of the League, considered as the traditional spokesperson of Muslims as an all-India body on constitutional and political questions, had been severely damaged due to its inability to form the ministry in any of the Muslim majority provinces. Jinnah had, however, learned from the failure of his previous intervention in the politics of Punjab in 1936 that it would be a mistake to move too quickly against the Unionists [62]. So, in order to strengthen his party, he undertook a tour of different provinces, increasing membership, made efforts to bring various groups of Muslim legislators and small Muslim political parties into the fold of League. The steps taken by Sikandar to maintain communal harmony in the province made

him a suspect in the eyes of Muslims. Some Muslims, particularly from the middle class, began to believe that the Muslim League was the sole protector of the Muslim interests and all Muslims should join it. It was also apprehended that 25 Muslim members of the Unionist party might join the Muslim League. Though Sikandar was making endeavors to remove the communal virus from the province but he could not afford to loose the grip of the provincial politics. Further, the activities of the Congress had become a nightmare for the British bureaucrats while in the Unionist ministry, they found a true ally against the Congress. Taking into the consideration the aspect of the situation, Sikandar decided to strengthen, if he could, the hands of the League and Jinnah to checkmate the onslaught of the Congress on the citadel of power in the centre [63]. On the other side, the Government of India was feeling the need of organizing the Muslim opposition to the Congress mass contact program in order to strengthen their aim position. The Home Secretary in the central government and personal friend of Sikandar, Sir Henry Craik, gave full support to the move which would, from the government point of view, signify the strengthening of Jinnah's hands in the political fight against the Congress. Consequently, in October 1937, the Sikandar- Jinnah Pact was signed at the Lucknow session of the League. The significant part of its provisions was [64] that:

- (i) on his return to the Punjab, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan will convene a special meeting of his party and advise all its Muslim members, who were not its member previously, to sign its creed and join it subject to the rules and regulations of Central Provincial Boards of the All-India Muslim League. This will not affect the continuance of the present Coalition.
- (ii) in future elections and bye-elections, after adoption of this agreement, the groups constituting the present Unionist Party will jointly support candidates put up by their respective groups.
- (iii) the Muslim members of the Legislature who were elected on the League ticket will constitute Muslim League party so formed to maintain or enter into coalition or alliance with any other party, consistently with the fundamental principles, policy and program of the League. Such an alliance may be evolved before or after the elections. The existing combination shall maintain its present name, the Unionist Party.

(iv) with the aforesaid agreement, Provincial League Parliamentary Board shall be reconstituted.

Though the agreement was only a compromise, a “half-way house”, yet it sent a wave of jubilation among the League members, who were demoralized after the results of the 1937 elections. Khizr Hayat looked upon the Pact in retrospect as a “turning point in the history of India”. Sikandar’s calculation was to support Jinnah in all-India politics, while expecting the League not to create problems in the functioning of his ministry. He wanted to gain time to mobilize resources to work on the federal India scheme. Regarding the Pact, the Governor Glancy wrote that:

“One of the difficulties in the pact was its loose wording; the more he studies this document, the less he liked it as it was easy for Jinnah to twist the Pact to suit his own convenience than for Unionist party as it contains no satisfactory annunciation of doctrine that Central Muslim League were expected to refrain from interference in Punjab politics” [65].

The Pact caused a lot of confusion in the politics of the Punjab. There was no unanimity in political circles as to the possible reasons for Sikandar’s decision to join the League, especially at a time when his party seemed well-entrenched in the province. The agreement had far-reaching implications not only within the context of the Unionist-League relations but also for the overall future of politics in the Punjab. “Sikandar saved Muslim India by coming to the League session and infusing life into the organization. His association with League at this crucial hour in the fate of Muslim India is an event in history”[66]. The Pact not only strengthened the League’s position in all-India politics but also helped Jinnah to regain his prestige in the political arena.

Right from the very beginning, the Pact was under dispute and totally unacceptable to non-Muslim sections of the Unionist party. It made Sikandar’s position difficult. The Premier, who had refurbished his image as a champion of communal unity in the Punjab after the “Unity Conference”, suffered a loss of creditability among the non-Muslims. Sunder Singh Majithia called upon the responsible leaders of the Unionist party to issue an authoritative statement on the Pact. In spite of the

differences, the coalition partners – the Khalsa National Party, the National Progressive Party and the Chhotu Ram group did not resign; presumably to save Sikandar from being further pushed into the lap of Jinnah[67]. Sunder Singh Majithia did not leave the Unionists only on the reassurance of Sikandar that there would be no change in the policies of the Unionist party. The Akalis denounced the Pact as negation of nationalism and disruptive of inter-communal relations. The Pact convinced the Akalis that Sikandar was working exclusively in favor of the Muslims. Over all, the Pact had harmed the secular nature of the Unionist party. It started the disintegration of the non-sectarian regional parties in general and of the Unionist party in particular and proved that the regional parties were not strong enough to off set government promoted communal divisions at the All India level.

In order to divert and heal the wounded sentiments of the non-Muslims on account of Sikandar-Jinnah Pact, the Unionist government made all efforts to appease them, especially the agricultural classes, by its economic program but his premature death at the end of 1942 belied hopes and opened the gates for Jinnah’s politics and propaganda.

3.10. WW-II and Decline of Unionist party

The Second World War (1939-45) brought with it a completely new chapter in the history of the Unionist party and the League. The Unionist party, unlike Congress or League, gave unconditional support in the British war-efforts. It dominated the Punjab National War Front which coordinated the region’s contribution to this effort. In the course of an assembly debate, Sikandar deprecated all political bargaining and said:

“Let us give our unstinted and unconditional support to the British now and when the war is over that very strength and support which we extend to Britain to win the war will win us our freedom”.

The province contributed generously towards the War Fund, with its total donation standing at about one crore rupees in April 1942. Efforts were also made to provide due facilities to the soldiers’ families in their absence. The Premier even warned the people that those who would speak against or incited anti-recruitment activity during the period

of war would be arrested under the Defense of India Rules.

This won the confidence of the British Government but widened the rift between him and Jinnah. The Punjab government's support to the war efforts was not acceptable to the Akali Dal. The Congress ministries were pressurizing the Government of India to declare the war aim. They countered the failure of the British government to unequivocally declare its war aims by resigning in all the eight provinces where they were in power. Jinnah refused to support the British in war as he had reservations based on the argument that the government had not acceded to some of his demands particularly pertaining to Muslim representation in the central government. Since Sikandar's support was clear, he rejected Jinnah's point of view. During the war years, many Unionists, mostly landlords, deserted it in favor of the Muslim League and by 1946, the League was a major rival to the Unionist party in its rural heart land of power. Thus the WW-II dramatically changed political scene in seriously eroding the political influence of the Unionist party [68].

3.11. Pakistan Resolution passed

During these turbulent war years, All India Muslim League passed the Pakistan Resolution on March 23, 1940 which created crisis in the ruling party. The issue raised by the League in the form of demand for an autonomous Muslim majority state was thoughtfully and quite correctly based on the belief that it would generally be difficult for any Muslim, whether in the Punjab or Eastern India, to oppose the proposal. Sikandar and his Muslim associates in the Unionist party were truly outmaneuvered as they could neither support nor oppose the Pakistan Resolution. In March 1941, Jinnah sought a clarification from Sikandar on his stand on the issue. But in an assertive and changed tone, Sikandar, for the first time, came out openly and categorically against the proposal of Pakistan. He remarked:

"If Pakistan means Muslim *Raj*, he would have nothing to do with it. He wanted a *Raj* in which every community would be a partner"[69].

His stand was strongly resented by Jinnah. Relations between the two soured to such an extent that Sikandar even offered to resign from the

League Working Committee, saying that differences on the Pakistan issue with Jinnah were irreconcilable. But the British government, due to their own advantage, was keen to avoid the division and weaken the League at this stage as they thought that this would strengthen the Congress and cause more problems for the British government. Thus, on persuasion and advice of his British friends, Sikandar decided not to aggravate the situation. However, it did not help to eradicate the differences between the two completely.

3.12. The Sikandar -Baldev Pact

Sikandar's concession to the 'sub-national' groups for self-determination brought the Unionists and the Akalis nearer to each another. In an endeavor to encourage Sikh support for the war effort, Sikandar entered into an accord with the Akali leader, Baldev Singh on 15 June 1942 i.e. the Sikandar-Baldev Pact. It was meant to remove the existing irritants which had been agitating the minds of the Sikhs. The terms of the Pact were enunciated as under:

- (i) Issue of Jhatka: To check fanning of communal riots in the province, the Premier, with the approval of the Cabinet, made it public that instructions would be given to the government and semi-government institutions to allow every community to cook and use meat slaughtered, according to its own rituals and rites.
- (ii) Teaching of Gurmukhi: It was decided that wherever an adequate number of Sikh students sought to study it, Government would try to make arrangements. The Premier, further, assured to restore the glory of Punjabi as a second language in the province.
- (iii) Legislation regarding religious matters: Members of legislative assembly would be free to take proper decisions on every religious matters concerning their community but bearing in mind decorum of the House.
- (iv) Recruitment criterion: The Premier explained that the Government had already fixed proportions for the recruitment of the members of various communities in state government jobs and Sikhs had been allotted 20 per cent share. His government would try to implement it fully. He further added that the Sikhs would not be ignored in matters of promotions.

- (v) Sikh Representation at the Centre: He assured whenever there would be any reshuffle or change in the Executive Council of the Viceroy, the Sikhs' claim would have his full sympathy and support for a due share in the central services.

In lieu of these concessions, Baldev Singh joined the ruling coalition ministry. The Sikh representation in government departments was enhanced under the Pact. It further endorsed Sikh 'segmental autonomy' which signified a classic example of consociationalism at work. This was to no avail in the highly charged day of community consciousness in 1946 and the agreement could ensure only limited co-operation between the Akalis and the Unionists in order to mitigate the adverse effects of 'Muslim domination'. Baldev Singh remarked in 1944 that this Pact was meant to remove 'the besetting curse of inter-communal bitterness'. It was prepared with the moral support of the Akalis but in his 'personal capacity'. It left the Akali Dal to pursue its political program against the government and the Pakistan scheme. The fear expressed by Jinnah earlier proved correct when Baldev Singh used his new ministerial powers to favor his community at every possible opportunity. Thus Sikandar- Baldev Pact provided another cause of rupture and misunderstanding between Jinnah and Sikandar. Jinnah opposed the Pact as he felt that the Sikhs in Punjab had been the main hurdle in the League's demand for a separate Muslim state. The deterioration in relations between the two prominent Muslim leaders and their parties, in a way, also reflected the rapidly changing political scene in the Punjab. In conclusion, after Pakistan Resolution, the Unionist party lost its relevance and Jinnah established a firm hold in Punjab.

Sudden demise of Sikandar (1942) had an adverse effect and Master Tara Singh came up with a scheme of "Azad Punjab" in October 1943 as he thought that it was the 'only proposal' that could protect the Sikhs from the domination of a single community[70].

3.13. Khizr Hayat Khan: The New Premier

Since the Punjab legislative assembly had completed its five-year tenure by the end of 1941, and in the normal course, elections should have taken place at the beginning of 1942. But due to the

WW-II, it was decided to extend the term of the assembly and of the ministry for the duration of the War [72]. With the death of Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Khizr Hayat Khan became new premier of the Punjab in 1942. He reiterated the policy of protecting the communal harmony and unconditional support for the prosecution of the war. But the Unionist government's policies and style of functioning with the rapidly changing political situation led to a considerable erosion of its support in the rural Punjab. The small peasant and the tenant farmers who derived benefit from the pro-agriculturist legislations initiated by the Unionist government, were wiped out during the war years. As fear of disrupting the war effort prevented the ruling party from bringing forward any further legislation which favored the rural population at the expense of the non-agriculturists. Notwithstanding, the Unionists did not only have to carry the central governments unpopular policies during the war, but also had to abandon many of their ambitious programs of the rural uplift due to financial stringency. Economy was stagnating; prices were soaring and employment opportunities were shrinking. The new Premier promised to build the provincial economy by reviving and promoting industry, commerce and agriculture.

But the passage of Lahore Resolution had severely disturbed the communal harmony of the province. and the law and order problem became acute. Khizr had inherited an increasingly unpopular government. A despondent Chhotu Ram privately acknowledged in January 1943, saying that the 'party has been living on its past prestige' [71].

3.13.1. Acts Passed by Khizr's Cabinet

The Punjab Maternity Benefit Act, 1943 was meant to regulate the employment of women before and after confinement by granting payment of maternity benefits to the expectant mothers would avail 30 days maternity leave with pay or wage [73].

Baldev Singh, Minister of Development moved The Sugarcane(PunjabAmendment) bill in November 1943 which, after it was passed, became an Act. This Act amended the Indian Sugarcane Act of 1934 with a view to protect the growers of sugarcane to provide for the better cane supplies to

sugar factories and to prevent unhealthy competition among them.

The Punjab Pre-emption (Amendment) Bill was introduced by Chaudhri Chhotu Ram on 23 March, 1944 where a new section was added to restore the status quo in case of pre-emption suits wherein the vendor sought to improve his position by means of a voluntary acquisition of right of property made after the institution of the suit [74].

Punjab District Boards Bill was moved on December 4, 1944 with the sole object of making the benefit of enhanced local rate immediately available to the District Boards because their financial position had been adversely hit by the war conditions.

Colonization of Lands (Amendment) Bill introduced by Chhotu Ram on March 24, 1944, provided that the lands of the tenants in canal colonies could be resumed if they desired and the lands of the widows could be resumed by the concerned collector if the widows transferred their proprietary rights in the crown lands in colonies to scheming persons [75].

Before the passage of the Punjab Agricultural Produce Marketing (Amendment) Bill in December, 1944, any person could carry on trade in agricultural produce. But after the bill became an Act, any person desiring to carry on such a business either himself, or behalf of somebody, or on the behalf of the Crown, was required to procure a license. The Act also empowered the Magistrates to take punitive action against those who violated this provision.

The Unionist government also prepared a provisional scheme for the post-war development of the province in August 1945 to raise people's standard of living and to increase their purchasing power to enable them to a full and rich life. A sum of Rs. 100 crores was earmarked for reconstruction work. This was to be spent on over 200 separate schemes ranging from massive irrigation projects to the development of fruit-growing and bee-keeping societies, to improve the infrastructure and alleviate unemployment. But the plan failed partly because it had been announced too late and the League was making headway in the Unionist's rural heartland.

3.14. Decline of the Unionist Party

In the tenure of Khizr Hayat, the party became faction-ridden and lost its grip in the Punjab politics. Khizer included Shaukat Hayat in the Punjab ministry with an intention to placate his rival group, the Sikandar-Daultana faction. But it failed to bring the desired results. All the old ministries and Shaukat Hayat Khan (son of late Sikandar Hayat Khan) was inducted and Khizr's ministry continued in office throughout the term of the first assembly despite the defection of about twenty Muslim members to the Muslim League and the death of its stalwart- Chhotu Ram (1945). Shaukat Hayat's dismissal weakened the Unionist party as he shifted his allegiance to the Muslim League along with a large number of landowners and clan members who formed Hayat *biradari*. As a result, the Unionist party lost one-third of its assembly members. By the end of 1945, even the bedrock of the Unionists i.e., Hayats, Noons, Daultanas shifted their loyalties to the League. So they lost control over the network through which they had mobilized their peasant support. All this, gave not only a severe blow to the party but also caused demoralization. The League, on its part, spared no effort to consolidate into its fold the support of people who were deserting Unionist party.

Jinnah began to exerted pressure on Khizr to convert the Unionist party into Muslim League. But Khizr refused to succumb to pressure as he was being encouraged by the British authorities to maintain the identity of the Unionist party, at least, during the time when the war was on. He, however, assured to extend all his support to Jinnah on all such questions which related to the Muslim community and also promised to strengthen the Punjab Muslim League. In May 1944, he was expelled from the membership of All India Muslim League [76] even though he pledged his whole-hearted support to 'the Muslim ideal of self-determination as embodied in Lahore Resolution, popularly known as, Pakistan. His expulsion widened the breach between the Unionist party and the League. The League started program and campaign to strengthen the party, yielding rich dividends in terms of the League influence over the Muslim masses which unnerved the Unionist leadership. Though Khizr had shown commendable courage not to surrender to Jinnah, he failed to devise a political program as an alternative to the

two-nation theory and the demand for the Pakistan [77]. The Unionist party got further blow when it lost the support of *pirs and sajjada nashins*. This brought the League nearer to the religious leaders. *Pirs* considered it as an opportunity to create a new 'religious-cum-political platform'. The transfer of loyalty by a vital section of Muslim society, made the majority of Muslims believe that the Unionist party's non-communal approach to politics had out-lived its 'raison-d-etre' [78]. It was the *pirs and sajjada nashins* along with the *biradari* leaders whom the masses trusted and believed. Rallies were held at the *urs* of leading shrines and fatwas were issued through small leaflets, newspapers and wall-posters [79].

By the beginning of 1946, the Unionist party had lost the support of almost all leading *pirs and sajjada nashins* including *pirs* of Jalapur, Shah Jiwana and Jahaman Rajoa, who had been supporting the Unionists since 1923. In brief, the key to the failure of the Unionist party and success of the League lay in the inability of the former in preventing the dissertations from its ranks of the *pirs, sajjada nashins* and the *biradari* leaders [80]. The ferocity of the religious appeal made by the League, compelled the Unionist party to make similar religion based appeals to the masses but proved ineffective. Faced with loss of goodwill in rural areas, the Unionist party began to depend increasingly on the government for its survival. But the British support to the Unionists' which was so apparent before and during the war years, began to loose its grip considerably towards its close. The British government had realized that they could no longer ignore the Muslim League, more so, when the advantages of supporting the Unionist party politically were no longer valuable and attractive. Under these circumstances, the situation for the Unionist party had turned so adverse that it was not left with a viable election slogan and also sorely lacked a convincing election campaign cry. Congress tried best of its endeavors to improve upon its position, but its efforts ended in vain.

3.15. Clamour for Pakistan Becomes Louder

The elections of the central and provincial legislatures, which were postponed due to the war, were announced to be held in 1945-46. The Muslim League made fervent appeals to the Muslim brethren to cast their votes in favor of the League on the slogan of Pakistan to safeguard their

interests. Jinnah stated that every vote in favor of the Muslim league candidate means Pakistan. Every vote against the Muslim candidate means Hindu raj. That is the only choice and the only issue before us [81]. Despite the propaganda that the 1946 elections were fought on the Pakistan issue, the Punjab Muslim League succeeded in mobilizing votes through *biradari* and *sufi* on the same lines as Unionist once succeeded.

3.16. The Last Election before Partition

The Punjab provincial Muslim League Manifesto contained a program of radical national reconstruction. It outlined proposals on civil liberties, the immediate nationalization of public utility services, the public control of private industry, the protection of the rights of labor and the provision of humane conditions for agricultural labor, the progressive taxation policy and other social and democratic measures. It, also, propagated vociferously that the League stood for universal adult franchise. The clauses in the League Manifesto, which aimed at bringing radical changes, more or less similar to the Congress program, helped create illusions about the progressive image of the party.

The election manifesto of the Unionist party appealed to Punjab electors to weigh up its achievements during the past nine years and earlier and to consider their future program for moral, intellectual, spiritual and economic uplift of the peoples without bias. Its main aims would be to further ameliorate the condition of the burden of debt per head of the population and per acre of agricultural land which was heavy in Punjab but due to the strenuous and continuous effort of the Unionist party, a marked change for better was witnessed. The party was composed of representatives of all the communities and is so constituted that it guaranteed of fair dealing to all sections of the population.

(i) Provision of equal opportunities and facilities for all with special solicitude for backward classes and areas (ii) The economic uplift of the province (iii) Assures each community its religious and cultural integrity as the only firm basis of lasting national unity; denying the claim of any community to dictate to others and in case of conflicts, the party stands for setting disputes on the principle of toleration, negotiation and justice (iv) Apart from agricultural development,

the party stands for rapid industrialization and nationalization of key industries. Heavy industry and certain utility services may be nationalized but the party will encourage private industrial enterprise (v) An organization will be set up for re-settlement of all persons released from service of the armed forces. Potential employment demands in the post-war period would be studied

The creed of the party was:

(a) Attainment of complete independence by constitutional means as early as possible (b) Securing of an honorable status for Indians (c) Full provincial autonomy. (d) Acceptance of economic interests of all irrespective of caste, creed and residence (e) Provision for equal facilities and opportunities for all with special solicitude for backward classes and areas (f) Maintenance of peace and good government and the promotion of interests of the masses.

The objects of the party were:

(i) Develop national self respect (ii) Reduction of military expenditure without reducing the Indian element in the Army (iii) Take up economic reconstruction, reorganization of agricultural and industrial life of the province and solve problem of unemployment to raise the standard of living (iv) Overhaul the educational systems in all branches (v) Legislation for protection of backward classes (vi) Promote industries with special emphasis on cottage industries in rural areas (vii) Introduce co-operative marketing for agricultural produce and the products of cottage industries and to reform objectionable market usages and practices (viii) Secure purity of administration and removal of corruption (ix) Ensure religious/cultural and integrity of all (x) Distribute fairly and equitably the burden of taxation.

Only 25 of the sitting Unionist Muslim members chose to stand for elections again on that party ticket, while 40 others switched to the League including Raja Ghazanfar Ali, who had earlier jumped from the League to Unionist party. The members also included some erstwhile Unionists who held positions outside the Punjab such as Feroz Khan Noon [82].

The President of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee, Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, joined the League. The Congress election manifesto said that

in this general elections only thing mattered the most was:

“The freedom and independence of our motherland, from which all other freedoms will flow to our people. Many a time, the people of India have taken the pledge of independence which has yet to be redeemed and the well-beloved cause for which it stands and which has summoned us so often still beckons us. The time is coming when we shall redeem it in full” [83].

The dominant notes of the Congress election campaign in the Punjab were complete independence for United India, release of the Indian National Army prisoners and scathing criticism of the British rule.

On 29 September 1945, the Akalis at a meeting at Gujranwala decided to contest the coming elections to the provincial and central legislatures, which were to form the basis of the proposed constitution-making body whose decisions were bound to have far-reaching consequences on the future of the Panth. The Akalis participated in the elections under the ‘Panthic’ name but, in reality, all the members of the Board belonged directly or indirectly to the Akali Dal. The important points which carried their election propaganda were- ‘Free Panth and Free country; resist Pakistan to the last man; the communists were not Sikhs and they accept Pakistan; the Sikhs would only exist, if they elect their own representatives on Sikhs seats’. The Akali election campaign was marked by anti-communist slant [84]. They were bitter against the communists who had upheld the demand for Pakistan, but were non-committal on the issue of separate Sikh State. The party claimed to have two aims: reform of *gurudwaras* and freedom of the country. The party, for the time being, abandoned its “Azad Punjab” slogan and entered the “elections without any demand for Sikh homeland and safeguarding of the rights, language, culture and traditions of the Sikh people”. Sardar Baldev Singh appealed to the Sikhs to cast their votes for the Akalis. He stated that any vote cast for communists would be a vote for Pakistan and the League. He said that the Sikhs should have a determined group of members in the Punjab legislative assembly united by a common purpose and ideology so that they could effectively serve both the country and the community. Efforts to bring about an electoral alliance between the Akalis and the Congress failed

since no understanding could be reached on the distribution of seats. The Akali party, claiming to be the sole representative of the Sikhs, staked its claim to all the Sikh seats, which was unacceptable to the Congress. The Punjab Communist party supported the demand for Pakistan and offered to cooperate with the 'progressive' Muslim League in Punjab to overthrow the reactionary Unionist government [85]. The Communists' advocacy of the demand for Pakistan and their cooperation with the League won over a sizeable section of Muslim youth and intelligentsia to the League [86].

Other political parties like The Ahrar, the Khaksars and the Hindu Sabha also fielded candidates, but failed to muster the support of the masses.

Elections to the Punjab Assembly were held in January, 1946 where nearly 552 candidates belonging to various political parties participated for 175 seats. Out of these, 14 seats were filled without contest. The provincial percentage of votes polled in the contested constituencies was 60.34%. [87] The election results, declared in February, 1946 showed that the Muslim League, the Congress and the Akali party improved upon their positions considerably but other political parties, including the Unionist, were marginalized. The position of various political parties in these elections was as: the Muslim League captured 73 seats, the Congress secured 51 seats (40 Hindus, 10 Sikhs and 1 Muslim), the Unionist party got 20 seats, Panthic (Akali) party captured 21 seats, and Independent secured 10 seats. As per the analysis of the All India Congress Committee, the Congress performed better in Sikh seats than the Akalis. as it got 41.14% votes whereas the Akalis got 40.93 % votes. The communist secured 8.95% votes. The victory of the Akalis was largely to the expense of the Communist party whose none of the 24 candidates could make to the assembly [88].

Jinnah was very happy with the results. He felt himself too strong to insist on Pakistan with redoubled vigor as Punjab Muslims had given a clear mandate in its favor and further raised his morals. The League being the largest single party in the Punjab assembly, was expected to be invited to form the ministry, but it never happened. It was because of the fact that even after joining of six more Muslim members, its strength was increased to 79 but still was short of an absolute majority by

nine votes. The Akali leaders were absolutely clear that they would not join hands with the Muslim League if the acceptance of Pakistan was laid as the condition. Negotiations between the Congress and the League failed because the League was not prepared to have any Congress Muslim in the Cabinet. The only alternative was a coalition of the Congress, the Akalis and the Unionists. With some reluctance, Khizr Hayat Khan agreed to it [89]. *The Tribune* considered the proposal of this coalition as being in the nation's interest because the Unionist had, all along, been opposed to the proposal of Pakistan. Opposition to the League at this stage, actually, meant opposing the prospect of Pakistan. The formation of the Congress-Unionist-Akali coalition ministry became possible on 6 March, 1946. Ironically, for the first time in twenty five years, a predominately non-Muslim coalition was formed. The decision was communicated to the Governor B.J. Glancy, who invited Khizr Hayat to form the ministry. No doubt, the government represented an unholy alliance [90] far more than a grand coalition, but it was the best that could be achieved in the circumstances. Along with the premier, the other members of his cabinet were, Sardar Swarn Singh (Akali) as Minister of Development, Nawab Muzzaffarali Khan Qazilbash (Unionist) as Minister of Revenue, Main Mohammad Ebrahim Barque (Unionist) as Minister of Education, L. Bhim Sen Sachar (Congress) as Finance Minister and Chaudhary Lehri Singh (Congress) as Minister for Public Works. There was total lack of understanding between the legislative groups of parties both on the floor of the house as off it. Political reports submitted by Jenkins, Governor of Punjab to the Viceroy repeatedly remarked that the political system was heading towards chaos.

3.17. The Partition Casts its Shadows

The league called for hartal on March 7, 1946. After two days, it observed the 'Traitors day' by blaming Khizr to be a traitor [91]. There was unprecedented deterioration in the communal situation in the province. The sporadic communal killings took place all over the province. Looting and arson followed as sequel to widespread communal disturbances. The relations between the Muslims on the one hand and the Hindus and the Sikhs on the other hand were getting strained day by day. Communal relations in the province became embittered and the mere existence of

coalition government made any sort of reconciliation impossible [92]. The ruling government was unable to find any solution to lessen the communal differences and to maintain peace. The law and order situation in the province became hopeless. The utter weakness of Khizr government had been revealed as it failed to cope with this grim situation. The declaration of the British government on February 20, 1947 for the forthcoming transfer of British power into the responsible Indian hands gave an impetus to the League to further intensify their struggle in a bid to get its demands for Pakistan conceded. In order to control the situation, Khizr ministry made compromise with the League on February 26, 1947, though with efforts of the Governor of Punjab, Jenkins. Accordingly, the ban on processions continued in force but the ban on meetings was withdrawn and all those arrested in connection with the agitation were released. The League, on their behalf, agreed to discontinue the agitation [93].

The circumstances were against Khizr who was left with no alternative but to relinquish his office on March 3, 1947. His resignation stunned both the cabinet and the Governor and threw the province into a state of frenzy. The reasons given by him to public for resigning were instructive. He said [94]:

“It is now incumbent on me to leave the field clear for the Muslim League to come to such arrangements vis-a-vis the other parties as it might consider in the best interests of the Muslims and the Province. If I were now to continue to lead a Coalition in which the Muslim League is not represented, this might put in serious jeopardy such chances as might otherwise exist of a settlement being arrived at between the communities in the Province”.

Nevertheless, it is significant that within less than a week of Khizr's resignation, communal violence reached at an alarming proportion and Congress demanded the partition of the province [95]. The rumor that the Governor might invite League to form the ministry worsened the situation as it sparked off a wild agitation by the minorities. The Punjab was placed under the rule of the Governor as per the provision Section 93 as laid down in the Act of 1935. The March violence bleaked any hope that the Punjab might escape from partition. The collapse of Unionist influence created political and administrative chaos

accompanied by communal hatred which wrecked untold sufferings of innocent Punjabis [96].

4.0. Conclusions

The Unionist Party, a pro- British party with a secular outlook and having dominion status as its political goal was formed by Fazl-i-Husain (1923) with Chaudhri Chhotu Ram. It had the support of dominant Muslim *pirs*, *sajjada nashins* and *biradari* leaders and some Hindus and Sikhs landlords of rural Punjab. The party won a majority by bagging 101 seats out of a total of 175 seats and Sikandar Hayat Khan became the Premier followed by Khizr Hayat Khan after the death of the former in 1942. They ruled the Province from 1937-46 as the term was extended due to the ongoing WW-II. The Congress Party was quite weak in Punjab mainly due to internal rivalries into two main groups headed by Satyapal and Gopi Chand Bhargava. It bagged 18 seats. The Khalsa National Party secured 14 seats and Hindu Election Board won 6 seats. The Punjab Muslim League started with a scratch with just two seats in 1937 elections. But Mohammad Ali Jinnah was a determined lot and maneuvered a split in the Unionists and united all other Muslim parties under the League. Then followed his masterstroke: the passing of “Pakistan Resolution” which acted as a catalyst and united Muslims of all hues. Indirect support of the British was also forthcoming. The Unionists –Congress–Akalis tried after 1946-47 election results by forming a coalition government, but the dream of having a separate country for Muslims was the foremost and the partition became a reality.

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