

LUCKNOW PACT (1916)

Change in the Attitude of the Muslim League

At the time of its creation, the All India Muslim League was a moderate party. Its basic aim was to maintain friendly relations with the Government. However, when the British Government annulled the partition of Bengal, its leadership decided to change its stance. In 1913, a new group of leaders entered the Muslims and the Hindus. The most important among those new leaders was Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He was already a member of the Indian National Congress. The Muslim League re-thought its goal and decided to cooperate with the Congress so that pressure could be exerted on the British Government. When Lord Chelmsford invited the Indian politicians for their suggestions on post- World War I reforms, there was further in the development of the situation.

Joint Sessions of the Congress and the Muslim League

Because of the efforts of Jinnah, the annual session was held at Mumbai in December 1915, in which both the Congress and the Muslim League met. The prominent leaders of both the political parties gathered at one place for the first time. Leaders from both the parties delivered speeches from a common platform which were also based on similar theme. After some months of the Mumbai meet, 19 elected members elected the members of the Imperial Legislative Council; both the Hindus and the Muslims, gave a memorandum to the Viceroy on the issue of reforms in October 1916. The suggestions they gave were not taken very seriously by the press, but they were debated, changed and accepted at a later meeting of the Congress and the Muslim League leaders which was held at Kolkata in the month of November, 1916.

The Lucknow Pact

An important step forward in achieving Hindu-Muslim unity was the Lucknow Pact, 1916. Anti-British feelings were generated among the Muslims following a war between Britain and Turkey, which opened the way for the Congress and Muslim League unity. Both the Congress and the Muslim League held sessions at Lucknow in 1916. This meeting settled the details of an agreement on the composition of the legislatures and the quantum of representation to be allowed to the two communities. The agreement was confirmed by the annual sessions of the Congress and the League held at Lucknow on 29 and 31 December 1916, respectively. The Congress accepted the separate electorates, and both the organizations jointly demanded dominion status for the country. Hindu-Muslim unity weakened the British attitude. In 1916, the British announced a policy whereby the association of Indians in the government was to be increased and there was to be a gradual development of local self-governing institutions. Sarojini Naidu gave Jinnah, the chief architect of the Lucknow Pact, the title ‘the Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity’.

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