

ORIGIN OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE (1906)

Fear of Minority Status

By 1900, although the Congress had emerged as an all-India political organisation, its achievement was undermined by its singular failure to attract Muslim. Who had by then begun to be aware of their inadequate education and under representation in government service. Muslim leaders saw that their community had fallen behind the Hindus. Attacks by Hindus reformers against religious conversion, cow slaughter and the preservation of Urdu in the Arabic Script deepened their fears of minority status and the denial of their rights if the Congress alone were to represent the people of India.

Loyalty to the British

For many Muslims, loyalty to the British crown seemed preferable to cooperation with the Congress leaders. **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan** (1817-1898) launched a movement for Muslim regeneration that culminated in the foundation in 1875 of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, UP (renamed Aligarh Muslim University in 1921). Its objective was to educate the wealthy students by emphasising the compatibility of Islam with modern Western knowledge. The diversity among India's Muslims, however, made it impossible to bring about uniform cultural and intellectual regeneration.

Simla Conference

When Lord Minto was appointed as the Viceroy of India in 1905, new reforms were indicated in which the electoral principle would be extended. The anti-partition agitation had convinced the Muslims of the futility of expecting any fair play from the Hindu majority. Therefore, to safeguard their interests, the Muslim leaders drew up a plan for separate electorates for their community, and presented it to Lord Minto at Simla, on 1 October 1906.

Syed Ali Bigham wrote the text of the plan. The Simla deputation consisted of 70 representatives, representing all opinions of the Muslim community, and headed by Sir Aga Khan who read the address. The long address said, among the other things, that the position of the Muslim community should not be estimated by its numerical strength alone, but in terms of its political importance and services rendered to the Empire. He also pointed out that the representative institutions of the West were inappropriate for India and that their application was raising difficult problems. He stressed the need for utmost care while introducing or extending the electoral system in whatever sphere, be it municipal or provincial. He started that the Muslim should be represented as a community. The Viceroy, in his reply to the Simla deputation address, reassured the Muslim that their political rights and interests as a community would be safeguarded by any administrative reorganisation under him.

The acceptance of the deputation's demands proved to be a turning point in the history of India. For the first time, the Hindu-Muslim conflict was raised to the constitutional plane. The Muslim made it clear that they had no confidence in the Hindu majority and that they were not prepared to put their future in the hands of an assembly selected on the assumed basis of a homogeneous Indian nation. It is in this sense that the beginning of separate electorate may be seen as the beginning of the realisation of the two-nation theory. its final and inevitable consequence being the partition of British India in 1947. The Simla deputation was successful because the Muslims strongly urged to protect their separate identity, and also because the British responded to their demands, as Lord Minto was anxious to apply the age-old 'divide and rule' policy of the British. Separate electorates were given statutory recognition in the Indian Councils Act of 1909. Muslims were accorded not only the right to elect their representatives in general constituencies. In addition, they were also given weightage in representation.

Foundation of the Muslim League

The major inspiring factor for the creation of the Muslim League was that the Muslim intellectual class sought representation the masses looked for a right kind of platform that could unite them. It was the knowledge of western thought of John Locke, Milton and Thomas Paine at the MAO college that began the rise of Muslim nationalism. On 30 December 1906, the yearly convention of the Muhammadan Educational Conference was conducted at Ducca (now, Dhaka). The chairman of the convention was Nawab **Viquar-ul-Mulk**. Nearly three thousand members attended the session. It was the largest-ever representative assembly of the Muslim in India. For the first time, the conference removed its ban on discussions over political issues. In the conference, **Nawab Sallimullah Khan** proposed the interests of the Muslims. In 1906, the **All India Muslim League** was formed. Aga Khan, Nawab Samlimullah of Ducca and Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk were its important founding leaders. Lucknow was chosen as the headquarters of the All India Muslim League. Aga Khan was elected as its first president, Other six vice-presidents, a secretary and two joint secretaries were also elected for a term of 3 years. The number of members was 400. They belonged proportionality to all provinces. **Maulana Muhammad Ali Jouhar** drafted the constitution of the League, known as the **Green Book**, **Syed Ameer Ali** set up a branch of the league in London in 1908.

The following were the objectives of the Muslim league:

1. To inculcate a feeling of loyalty among Muslims towards the government and to remove the misunderstandings and misconceptions about its actions and intentions.
2. To safeguard and put forward the political rights and interests of the Indian Muslims and to represent their needs and aspirations to the government.
3. To check the ill will between the Muslims and the other communities its own purposes.

A Muslim deputation met with the Viceroy. **Gilbert John Elliot** (1905-1910), seeking concessions from

the impending constitutional reforms, including special considerations in government service and electorates.

Recognition by the British

Many Hindu histories and several British writers have alleged that the Muslim League was founded at official instigation. They argue that it was Lord Minto who inspired the establishment of a Muslim organisation to divide the Congress and to minimise the strength of the Indian freedom movement.

The Freedom Movement

The British recognised the Muslim League by increasing the number of elective offices reserved for the Muslim in the India Councils Act of 1909. The Muslim League insisted on its separateness from the Hindu-dominated Congress, as the voice a 'nation within a nation'. The League supported the partition of Bengal, opposed swadeshi movement and demanded special safeguards for its community, and separate electorates for the Muslims. This led to communal differences between the Hindus and the Muslims.

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