



## Muslim Mass Contacts and the Rise of the Muslim League

*I do not subscribe to the belief that Muslims can be united on the basis of a common political belief. Politics is essentially dictated by class interests and every effort to obscure class differentiation will result in the suppression of the class elements.*

K. M. Ashraf<sup>1</sup>

*When the slogan 'Workers of the World Unite' is raised, nobody has a problem. However when the slogan 'Muslims of the World Unite' is raised, everybody has a problem!*

Unknown ML supporter<sup>2</sup>

Given the obvious affinities between Jinnah and a section of the central Congress leadership, as well as the local level understanding in U.P. between their two parties during the 1937 elections, the failure of the Congress to include the ML in a coalition ministry has generated much controversy among historians and remains one of the most hotly debated issues in Partition historiography. The *dramatis personae* involved on both sides in the Partition drama themselves had no hesitation in declaring that the pathway to Pakistan was paved from U.P. in the aftermath of this failure, even if they differed on the causes that led to it.<sup>3</sup> While the episode therefore clearly merits the scholarly attention it has received till now,<sup>4</sup> far greater attention needs to be paid to the actual process by which the ML gained strength in U.P. during the subsequent two years of Congress cabinet rule. Shut out of power and, at the same time, faced with an ambitious Congress drive outside the legislatures to enrol Muslim masses as

<sup>1</sup> Letter from K. M. Ashraf to Habib Hassan, 15 July 1938, AICC File G-68/1937.

<sup>2</sup> *Zulqarnain*, 28 July 1938.

<sup>3</sup> See M. A. K. Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Delhi, 1988); Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> For the latest discussion of the ministry making fiasco which closely evaluates all of the existing literature on the subject, see Salil Misra, *A Narrative of Communal Politics, Uttar Pradesh 1937–1939* (New Delhi, 2001).

its four *anna* members, ML began its own mass mobilization campaign in a desperate bid for survival. In the ensuing battle over the hearts and minds of the Muslim public the ML overcame heavy odds and came out victorious in the end. This first becomes evident from the much larger number of Muslims that were enrolled in the ML ranks clearly dwarfing its rival's more modest achievements. During this growth spurt, the ML itself was transformed from an elite moribund organization into a mass-based party that gave itself a new constitution, a more radical ideology and a revamped organizational structure. Also symptomatic of the party's rise were the pulverizing victories it scored over the Congress in almost all the by-elections that were held for Muslim seats in U.P. during this period. Along with these victories that gave it a commanding presence in the province, the influx into the ML's tent of influential Muslim groups and parties from all over British India, especially at the crucial 1937 Lucknow session, enabled it to stake its claim as the 'sole representative organization of the Indian Muslims.' Needless to say, an important consequence of these successes was Jinnah's elevation to the position of the *Qaid-i-Azam*.

A critical, but lesser known, factor in the ML's successes in the by-elections as well as its mass mobilization campaigns, was the support it received from an influential section of the, Deobandi *ulama* which was perturbed by the Congress dominance over national politics. Led by the redoubtable Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, this group aligned itself with the ML and as a result increasingly came into conflict with fellow Deobandis, especially the faction led by Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani that was allied with the Congress. By 1945, the developing cracks within Deoband caused a split in JUH, the premier organization of the Indian *ulama*, with the former group providing critical support to the ML in its campaign for Pakistan. For now though, there is a need to closely attend to the process of the ML's resuscitation in U.P. and its emergence as an all India party that neither the Congress nor the British government could ignore by the time the Congress ministries resigned in late 1939.

### **The Congress, Emerging Left Wing, and the Muslim Mass Contact Program**

Two factors determined the Congress party's mass contact strategy, as part of which the Muslims were also targeted. To begin with, even as large sections of the Congress were savouring its overwhelming success in the 1937 elections that underlined its reputation as the premier nationalist organization in the

country, Nehru, their chief election campaigner, expressed strong opposition to the party entering the new assemblies or accepting offices. This stance reflected Nehru's ideological orientation as also that of the left wing that was becoming increasingly assertive within the party. Nehru feared that such a move would infect the Congress with an effete reformist mentality and lock it in a collaborative enterprise with the British Raj. With the 'right wing' pushing in the opposite direction, the Congress initially was deadlocked on these questions. But even after it tentatively decided to enter the provincial legislatures and form governments, Nehru steadfastly insisted upon keeping up the revolutionary momentum outside the legislatures gained during the election campaign and mobilizing the Indian masses with the object of preparing them for a decisive confrontation with the Raj.

Muslims were specifically targeted for 'mass contact' since the 1937 elections had made it clear that the Congress held little sway over the community. All of the nine Congress candidates who had contested Muslim seats in U.P. had been unsuccessful in the elections. The result may have subdued a lesser man but Nehru maintained a sunny optimism, claiming that the Muslims were not opposed to the Congress as throughout the election campaign he had come across Muslim voters asking him for directions on how to cast their votes.<sup>5</sup> The Congress, he opined, would have done better had it only put up more Muslim candidates or campaigned harder in Muslim constituencies. Undaunted by the electoral failure, Nehru declared that the elections had, in fact, awakened the Muslim masses and they were looking for 'the right leadership and direction'. He went further by grandly announcing that the time had come to cast aside the older tactic of pacts and agreements with a 'reactionary' Muslim leadership and instead reach out to the masses directly.<sup>6</sup> When asked to explain how he planned to make millions of Muslims rally behind the Congress party, Nehru once declared that he would do so by approaching them as 'non-Muslims, i.e., approach them with the economic issue '... My appeal will not be to the top leaders but to the masses with whom the economic reality is bound to prevail.'<sup>7</sup> As Nehru explained, the communal problem was essentially a conflict between upper middle class Hindus and Muslims for jobs in the services, seats in the legislature and power under the new constitution. It had no connection with the masses for not a single communal demand made any reference to

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<sup>5</sup> S. Gopal, (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 8 (New Delhi, 1975), 22 (henceforth SWJN).

<sup>6</sup> *SWJN*, Vol. 8, 128.

<sup>7</sup> *SWJN*, Vol. 7, 277.

them.<sup>8</sup> The masses themselves were, therefore, not in the least bothered by the communal question. Nehru therefore refused to take cognizance of the 'so-called communal problem.' As he elaborated, the fundamental problems facing Hindu and Muslim masses alike were those of poverty and starvation. They required urgent economic relief and the only way in which these problems could be overcome was by achieving political independence. And the most expeditious way for achieving this result was for all Indians to rally behind the Congress, the only genuine nationalist organization in the country as it engaged in a decisive struggle against the Raj. All other organizations either did not matter, or were impediments in the process of attaining national independence, given their narrow concerns and susceptibility to the Raj's blandishments.

Nehru set up separate department to run the Muslim Mass Contact Program (MMCP) at Anand Bhavan in Allahabad under his communist lieutenant Kunwar Mohammed Ashraf.<sup>9</sup> Ashraf was a Meo from Alwar, a community famous for being neither fully Muslim nor Hindu, borrowing from the traditions and practices of both these religious communities. Ashraf was an arresting choice for other reasons as well. Before earnestly taking to Communism as a young man he had been a devout Muslim in the habit of saying his prayers regularly and keeping fasts. In a later autobiographical essay, Ashraf recalled a fascinating episode from his late teens that paved the way for his disavowal of religion and his evolution into a dedicated Marxist. At the time he had enrolled under a *Murshid* and started the arduous Sufi practice of *Chilla Kashi* that involved reciting a particular prayer 26,000 times over a period of forty days amidst fasting. As he reminisced, he had already had visions of the Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Ali during his school days, and was convinced that this arduous practice would allow him to 'perceive the Holy light of God.'<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> *SWJN*, Vol. 8, 7.

<sup>9</sup> In his personal message for a volume put together in memory of Ashraf after his death, Nehru in declining health seems to have forgotten Ashraf's role in the MMCP. In his message he wrote, 'I came in contact with Dr Ashraf in the middle thirties. I invited him to join the office of the All India Congress Committee when I was President of the organization. He was a hard worker and he did his work conscientiously. He was chiefly concerned with our contacts with countries of Western Asia and his knowledge of the Persian language especially helped him in his work. Nehru perhaps forgot that the foreign department at this time was handled by Ram Manohar Lohia.' See Horst Kruger (ed.), *Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf: An Indian Scholar and Revolutionary, 1903-1962* (Bombay, 1969), 339.

<sup>10</sup> 'K. M. Ashraf on Himself', in Horst Kruger, (ed.), *Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf: An Indian Scholar and Revolutionary, 1903-1962* (Bombay, 1969), 393.

whole ritual however ended in a disaster. On the thirteenth night of the practice, Ashraf reported to his teacher a dream in which he saw himself sitting with his Hindu friend Shankar Lal drinking cheap wine at their village, which ended with the two intoxicated young men collapsing to the ground and passing out. The *Murshid* on hearing the dream was less than impressed and asked Ashraf a number of questions ranging from whether he had fallen in love just before he started the practice to whether his father's income had ever been tainted by bribery. At the end of the interrogation, young Ashraf was firmly told that spiritual development was not a part of his destiny.

This strange episode marked his gradual turn away from spirituality and a growing inclination towards more secular pursuits. But Ashraf's academic trajectory too was not destined to be smooth for after enrolling for his B.A. at the Muslim University at Aligarh he quit midway through his studies once the Non-Cooperation movement under Gandhi gained momentum. He subsequently joined the Jamia Millia Islamia following the call of the Ali brothers but once Non-Cooperation had petered out, he rejoined the Muslim University taking his B.A. in 1924, an M.A. in 1926, and an LLB in 1927. A scholarship granted by the state of Alwar to study law in England in 1927 was perhaps the turning point in the young man's life for he finally found Marxism in England. His belief in the new ideology was strengthened on a trip back to Alwar to participate in the silver jubilee celebrations of his benefactor, the Maharaja, for he was revolted by the enormous amounts of money being spent on the affair even as there was desperate poverty all around. Returning to England with money given by his father, he proceeded to complete a PhD in history on social conditions in India between 1200 and 1550 under the supervision of Sir Wolseley Haig in London.<sup>11</sup> Among Ashraf's fellow students, friends and communist comrades in London were Z. A. Ahmad and Sajjad Zaheer. On returning to India, the three dedicated communists joined the Congress Socialist Party before joining the AICC office under Nehru when he became the Congress President in 1936. As Sajjad Zaheer reminisced, 'Nehru was very proud of our group. He introduced us to Gandhiji and Sardar Patel saying, people say Muslims are not coming in the Congress. Here is this brilliant group of young Muslims which went to England and took degrees there and had come back and joined the Congress.'<sup>12</sup>

The MMCP under Ashraf took upon itself the task of lifting the Muslim

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<sup>11</sup> This was later published as K. M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (Delhi, 1959).

<sup>12</sup> *Oral History Transcript*, Sajjad Zaheer, NMML (New Delhi).

masses out of the rut of communalism and encouraging them to abandon their old style leaders. This was to be done by enlightening them about their true interests and explaining how these would be fulfilled by joining the Congress, which would usher them into a new socialist utopia after leading them to a glorious victory over imperialism. At the more mundane level it involved boosting Muslim enrollment in the Congress as four *anna* members and for this purpose the cell organized membership drives and public meetings in order to reach out to the Muslim masses. Along with Nehru, Ashraf and his comrades sincerely believed that the primary reason for Muslim aloofness from the Congress was the lack of effort by the party to educate them about its own radical policies and programmes. The resulting disconnect was deemed as primarily responsible for the party's debacle in the Muslim seats in the recent elections. In order to therefore publicize Congress policies and programmes, they started a new Urdu newsweekly *Hindustan*.<sup>13</sup> In doing so, the protagonists of the MMCP were only following the tactics of the leaders of the erstwhile Khilafat Movement who had skillfully utilized their Urdu newspapers to educate and mobilize Muslims against the British government's alleged design to undermine the Caliphate. The articles published in the *Hindustan* thus explained the historic reasons for Muslim political backwardness, the rationale behind the new policy of Muslim 'mass contacts', the advantages that would accrue to the community and the country at large by joining the Congress party in large numbers, besides justifying the Congress decision to reject communal pacts with 'reactionary' leaders. Close attention needs to be paid to this overall message that the MMCP communicated to the Muslims and the idiom that was employed in this regard, for it is in response to this message that the ML fashioned its own more successful response that ultimately destroyed the Congress initiative.

Z. A. Ahmad made the initial case for this special Congress pitch towards the Muslims arguing that it was a long overdue and necessary step for radicalizing the Muslim community, which was politically backward and under the control of conservative leaders.<sup>14</sup> Muslim backwardness, he lamented, was particularly reflected in their lack of participation in any anti-imperial activities or their inability to set up any anti-imperial organizations. He contrasted the Muslim condition to the progress of the Hindus who had created the Congress, the

<sup>13</sup> The newspaper was started as a limited liability company with a paid-up capital of ₹ 10,000 and individual shares of ₹10. The directors of the company were G. B. Pant, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Narendra Dev, Husain Zaheer, K. M. Ashraf and Abdul Aleem. See K. M. Ashraf to Mian Iftikharuddin, 5 May 1937, *AICC Papers File G-68/1937*.

<sup>14</sup> Z. A. Ahmad, 'Congress Aur Muslim Awaam', *Hindustan*, 26 September 1937.

premier anti-imperialist organization in the country and also played a dominant role in its political activities. To explain this phenomenon, he relied on a Marxist theory of history that was heavily shot through with economic determinism. Ahmad explained that the critical factor that determined the political and cultural consciousness of any community was the nature of the class that economically dominated it. The Hindus had become politically advanced because they had been dominated in their recent history by the vital progressive force in the current stage of historical development – the capitalist class. This class had emerged by the end of Mughal rule holding a monopoly over trade, commerce and the professions, and fortuitously, was again the first to come into contact and collaborate with the East India Company when it arrived on the country's shores. Ahmad pointed out that while this collaboration may have been motivated by the desire for profits, it had had the crucial effect of introducing Hindu capitalists to modern education that led to the development of a new modern bourgeois consciousness among them, including a greater awareness of their own economic self-interest. The Hindu bourgeoisie were therefore the first to protest against British domination of Indian trade since it hurt their economic interests. Indeed, it is in pursuit of these interests that this class had gone on to form the Indian National Congress. To underline the class origins and character of the Congress, Ahmad pointed to the nature of economic demands made by the early 'moderate' Congress in petitions to the British government, a feature that the later 'Extremists' would call political mendicancy.

In contrast to the Hindus, Ahmad claimed that the dominant economic class among Muslims since Mughal times was the retrograde feudal class of jagirdars and zamindars that stayed away from trade and commerce and served mostly in the Mughal army and administration. This class dominated both the Muslim masses, overwhelmingly peasants who were neo-converts from Hinduism, and Muslim artisans, labour, shopkeepers, professionals and traders that lived in towns and *qasbahs*. Ahmad conceded that this urban Muslim class may have had the potential to propel the Muslim community in the same progressive direction as Hindus but rued the occlusion of this historical possibility due to its smallness in comparison to the larger rural Muslim population. This historical Muslim handicap that led to Muslim political backwardness was further compounded due to the community's delayed introduction to colonial modernity as a result of its active participation in the Revolt of 1857. The brutal British retribution had further alienated them from modern civilization as they sought to isolate themselves from the ways of the British. But the community's biggest misfortune, according to Ahmad, was its betrayal at the hands of putative

modernizers like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who thwarted political modernization of the Muslim community by keeping it away from struggles against British imperialism and its indigenous collaborators such as the zamindars. These urban Muslims thus did not have a progressive imprint on the Muslim mind. In explaining Sir Syed's reactionary attitude, Ahmad again fell back on economic determinism by attributing it to the fact that loyalist rural notables were the biggest donors backing Sir Syed, whose financial contributions had been instrumental in setting up the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College. The zamindars themselves were steadfast in supporting British rule since it granted them additional privileges at the expense of the rights of their peasants.

While acknowledging the Congress party's inauspicious origins in Hindu capitalist leadership whose forebears had collaborated with the English East India Company that led to India's subjugation in the first place, Ahmad explained how the logic of history had slowly transformed it into the best vehicle for securing India its freedom from colonial rule. It was evident for all to see that the Congress-led 1921 Non-Cooperation Movement had transformed politics in India into a mass phenomenon for the first time, spreading far beyond the towns and penetrating into the countryside. Ahmad understood this development in terms of the sharpening economic contradictions between the Hindu capitalist Congress leadership and the British. This class, cautious earlier, had been emboldened by economic strength it had gained due to booming profits it had made during World War I and was now beginning to search for new and more effective techniques to put pressure on the government. It found a ready ally in a new Muslim leadership that was emerging from the middle class and was frustrated since its economic position had declined over the War. Together, they invited the masses on both sides to perform civil disobedience who, he claimed, responded readily given the severe economic distress they themselves were facing.

Yet, in the end, Non-Cooperation had failed, repressed by British batons and bullets. In order to explain this failure, Ahmad delved into the reasons as to why, even though the objective historical conditions were seemingly ripe, participation of Hindu and Muslim masses in a joint movement had not resulted in overthrowing British rule. In the first place, he blamed the leaders of this movement who, he claimed, were reformists with limited ambitions. These leaders had wanted to bring about a mere regime change without forcing any revolutionary economic or social changes that would disturb status quo in Indian society. But the more important reason for the movement's failure, according to Ahmad, lay in the state of popular consciousness. The masses participating



in these struggles had ultimately failed to see their objective class interests and had instead been driven into even deeper and separate channels of false consciousness by their respective bourgeois leadership through their use of the religious idiom. Instead of mobilizing on the basis of real economic and social issues, they had been swayed by the language of Ram Raj or cries of Islam or the Khilafat in danger. Thus, when Non-Cooperation/Khilafat campaign failed in the end due to government repression, it was not surprising that mutual recriminations and horrific riots ensued between Hindus and Muslims since they had marched under the separate flags of their respective leaders.

K. M. Ashraf, the lynchpin of the MMCP, extended the analysis from this point to its contemporary context. Ashraf saw Congress victories in the 1937 provincial elections, as the first opportunity since 1921 for forging a unity between Hindu and Muslim masses so that they could jointly overthrow British rule and achieve economic and political independence under a free socialist state. The objective conditions were again ripe for a revolution since India had been thrust into the throes of a deep economic crisis as a result of the Great Depression. There was widespread hostility against the British and the ordinary man in India was experiencing the destruction of India's economy at a very personal level.<sup>15</sup> The global economic slump, itself a result of sharpening economic contradictions in world capitalism, would inevitably force sweeping transformations in all aspects of human existence breaking down older forms of community, politics, culture and indeed human consciousness. Given this gale force sweeping across the globe, Ashraf was confident that India would not be bypassed by the currents of history. Like Ahmad, he foresaw the coming of a free socialist state in India as inevitable in the face of this new era unfolding in human history.<sup>16</sup> The significance of this era for Ashraf can be discerned from his view that human beings were awakening from a barbaric (*haivaniyat*) phase and entering into the age of humanism (*insaniyat*).

While objective conditions were favourable for overthrowing British imperialism, Ashraf believed that the mistakes of 1921 had to be avoided at all costs so as to not repeat that failure. The MMCP, therefore, needed to urgently awaken Muslim masses to their real economic and political interests, radicalize them on the basis of a new programme that promised land for the landless,

<sup>15</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Muslim League Ki Siyasi Ahmiyat aur Hamara Tariqeqar', *Hindustan*, 11 September 1938.

<sup>16</sup> *Pratap* (Lahore), 15 June 1937, under the headline 'Hindustani Gharibi aur Ghulami ki Zimmedari Imperialism Par Hai. Imperialism ke Bhoot ko Marne ke liye Taaqat ko Paida Karne ki Zaroorat', *AICC Papers File 48/1937*.

security of tenure for peasant proprietors, fair wages and working conditions for workers, employment for the unemployed and freedom from hunger, poverty and starvation. Ultimately, the Muslim masses had to be awakened to an awareness of their class consciousness to enable them to embrace their true *qaum* – that of peasants and workers. This would also make them fully conscious of their class solidarity with Hindu peasants and workers. It is this combined class of Hindu and Muslim workers and peasants that the MMCP wanted to explicitly invite into the Congress fold to make it an effective agent of the revolution.

### *A New Definition of the Qaum*

As evident, this redefinition involved a radical repudiation of existing ideas of the Muslim *qaum* as a community of believers in Islam, with its own distinctive politics or culture. Ashraf emphatically repudiated this existing notion, insisting that he did not subscribe to the belief that the Muslims constituted a natural unity with common economic and political beliefs. As he wrote to a friend, ‘politics is essentially dictated by class interests and every effort to obscure class differentiation will result in the suppression of class elements.’<sup>17</sup> Thus, conflict between a Muslim peasant and a Muslim landlord was inevitable since their class interests were distinct and indeed antagonistic to one another. In his many essays, Ashraf continuously harped upon the fundamental contradiction between the so-called leaders of the Muslim community, compradors who propped up the system of foreign exploitation and were allied to indigenous feudal and reactionary vested interests on the one hand, and the Muslim workers and peasants opposed to these interests on the other.<sup>18</sup> Pointedly referring to the ML, Ashraf argued that its leaders had never played a progressive role since its formation by landlord elites in 1907, and it was evident as to which side they would join during the new round of mass struggles.<sup>19</sup> For him, the ML was undoubtedly an agent of British imperialism that wanted to channelize Muslim revolutionary consciousness into a civil war (*khana jangi*) with the Hindus. Its anti-kisan, anti-labour, anti-democratic credentials were evident as its government in Bengal had

<sup>17</sup> Ashraf to Habib Hassan, 15 July 1938, *AICC Papers, File G-68/1937-38*.

<sup>18</sup> *Searchlight*, 27 April 1937, *AICC Papers File G-18 (iii)/1937*. For a similar argument, see K. M. Ashraf, ‘Congress ki Shirkat se Kya Murad Hai’, *Hindustan*, 2 August 1938.

<sup>19</sup> K. M. Ashraf, ‘Muslim League ki Siyasi Ahmiyat aur Hamara Tariqeqar’, *Hindustan*, 17 September 1938. See also ‘Hamara Kaam’, *Hindustan*, 20 February 1938.

crushed civil rights, not released political prisoners and presented no concrete economic or political programmes for alleviating the misery of peasants or working classes. In his view, the ML as a whole was only trying to weaken the Congress led anti-imperialist front even as it claimed to be patriotic and the true political representative of the Muslim community.<sup>20</sup> Ashraf, therefore, accused the ML leadership of perpetuating a 'false' view of politics. It had led Muslims to believe 'through poetry, false history, and through many other such influences' that they could on their own, achieve freedom for India besides building up a strong and disciplined community. He dismissed them as patently false promises, which could never come to fruition. Independence for the country and rejuvenation of the Muslim community with its millions of peasants and workers, he insisted, could only happen by joining the Congress and uniting with forces 'dictated by the logic of history'.

Ashraf was, however, confronted with the task of convincing Muslims to join the Congress in large numbers for they had largely stayed away from it ever since the collapse of the Non-Cooperation/Khilafat Movement due to fears and suspicions of the latter being a Hindu body. At the outset, he acknowledged that there was indeed some truth behind the impression that Congress was dominated by a Hindu mentality (*zahnayat*). However, this impression, he argued, was superficial since it focused solely on the presence in the party of a Hindu capitalist class whose mentality was indeed communal. It was this Hindu capitalist class, which brought discredit to the Congress as a whole and gave it the appearance of a Hindu organization.<sup>21</sup> Muslims needed to make a distinction between such superficial appearances and the real nature of the Congress. Here, Ashraf took pains to point out that the Congress of today was not like the early Congress, which was indeed a party of Hindu capitalists. Now, it did not include just this single class, but a number of other groups, classes and interests which had joined the party ever since it entered into the phase of mass politics in 1921. Emphasizing this diversity in the Congress he wrote to a skeptical friend that, 'those outside the Congress do not know what a keen struggle goes on amongst the elements inside the Congress.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Congress Mein Musalmanon ki Shirkat aur Hindu Zahnayat ka Sawaal', *Hindustan*, 12 September 1937. Ashraf here also made an appeal that the Congress delink itself from *acchutoddhar* and other similar Hindu social reform activities and remain a purely political anti-imperialist organization in order to remove the impression from Muslim minds that it was a Hindu organization.

<sup>22</sup> Ashraf to Habib Hassan, 15 July 1938, *AICC Papers, File G-68/1937-38*.

Given this current historical conjuncture wherein the Congress was a vastly different political organization and indeed open to further transformation in a radical direction, Ashraf pointed to the historic role that lay in store for the Muslim masses. The time had come to purge the Congress of its capitalist, Hindu reactionary elements so that it could become a more suitable vehicle for bringing about a revolution in India. If only the radicalized Muslim masses joined the Congress in significant numbers, they could capture the party organization along with their Hindu counterparts already inside it and decisively overturn the domination of Hindu capitalists, reactionaries and right wingers. The Muslim working class and peasants were therefore a key factor. Their joining the Congress would have the additional salutary effect of destroying Muslim reactionaries who had arrogated to themselves, the leadership of the Muslim *qaum*. The resulting political revolution would bring an end to old style politics of pacts and agreements between self-styled leaders of religious communities geared towards dividing the spoils of office.

Ashraf, therefore, appealed to the Muslim masses to join the Congress in large numbers to be on the side of the progressives.<sup>23</sup> Their participation in its activities would not only alter the priorities of the Congress in the right direction but also provide the right channel for their revolutionary energies as it had during the Khilafat Movement. It would also give them better leverage in negotiating safeguards for their religious and cultural rights. In any case, he pointed out that the Congress party's Karachi declaration of fundamental rights had already guaranteed freedom of religion to the minorities and also included provisions for protecting their cultural and religious rights. This resolution was in marked contrast to the 1935 GOI Act which did not have any clause on fundamental rights for the Empire's Indian subjects. The MMCP, thus, was not simply a programme to attract the Muslim masses into the Congress but an attempt to change the very face of Indian politics by anchoring it in a new socialist, secular foundation.

Ashraf optimistically pointed to many positive signs to claim that history in India was moving in the right direction. Political consciousness among Indian Muslims was at an all-time high given their extraordinary poverty and employment. Muslim labour was showing visible signs that it was not communal in its outlook any more by declining to participate in communal rioting. Instead, it had demonstrated its class consciousness by assuming leadership of labour strikes in the city of Kanpur. Muslim peasants had shown the same level of

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<sup>23</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Congress ki Shirkat se Kya Murad Hai', *Hindustan*, 28 August 1938.

political maturity as evident from their overwhelming support to Swami Sahajanand in Bihar even though he was a Hindu. In Bengal, Muslim peasants had ignored communal Muslim parties and instead backed Fazlul Haq's Krishak Proja Party. Finally, Muslim students, too, were full of revolutionary fervour for they had taken the lead in forming the secular All India Students Federation (AISF).<sup>24</sup> Even the Congress, Ashraf approvingly noted, was moving in the right direction. While its critique against imperialism was earlier limited to the Drain Theory, it had now been expanded to recognize contradictions between capital and labour under the influence of the left wing.<sup>25</sup> What was needed now was for the Congress to start work afresh among the Muslim masses, a task it had ignored since the end of the Khilafat agitation.

### *Critique of Congress Left and Right Wings*

In placing their own version of a Bread, Peace and Land programme before Muslim masses, the protagonists of the MMCP expressed their strident opposition to any return by the Congress to old style politics involving pacts with self-styled Hindu or Muslim leaders claiming to be at the head of their religious communities. They also opposed participation in the new constitutional reforms instituted under the 1935 GOI Act, portraying such participation as a reformist move that would betray revolutionary ideals. These two positions however put them at odds with not just the Congress 'right wing' but even with some of their own comrades on the left. Ashraf and his colleagues, therefore, went on to articulate their critique of the positions held by both these groups on these issues. In the first place, they condemned the 'right wing' for its willingness to sign communal pacts with the so-called leaders of the Muslim community arguing that such tactics would push back the Congress movement by twenty years.<sup>26</sup> They went on to belittle the argument that another Lucknow Pact between the ML and Congress was necessary. Ashraf pointed to the simple fact that the current circumstances were not comparable to those of 1916. At that time the Congress was like the ML, a club of upper class gentlemen who were reformist in their mindset and modest in their aims. Now, the Congress was a radicalized party whose rank and file aimed at nothing less than a revolution. To go back to an earlier day and age was therefore nothing short of

<sup>24</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Musalmanon Mein Congress Ka Kaam aur Ishtarakkiyat Pasandon ka Aitraz', *Hindustan*, 10 October 1937.

<sup>25</sup> 'Muslim League aur Congress', *Hindustan*, 22 August 1937.

<sup>26</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Hamaara Kaam', *Hindustan*, 20 February 1938.

a travesty. Ashraf wanted the Congress to continue with its current strategy of radicalizing the masses and organizing them on class lines by spreading the web of *kisan* and *mazdoor sabhas* under its own umbrella throughout the country. He also urged Congressmen not to lose heart due to the party's defeat at the hands of the ML in a few by-elections to Muslim seats. There was no reason why the economic programme would not succeed. It would perhaps take time given the centuries of *jahiliyat* in recent Indian Muslim history. But change was around the corner as shown by the extremely encouraging results of work over just the last year. The Congress had just within a year enrolled 100,000 new Muslim members and if the present effort was persisted with, Ashraf was confident the ML would be slowly demolished just as surely as the Congress had succeeded against the communal Hindu Mahasabha. Ashraf further warned the Congress to not be taken in by the ML's new progressive political creed that declared complete independence as its goal, dismissing it as a plain farce and fraud.

MMCP propaganda also attacked the right-wing for trying to hoodwink the masses into believing that the best way to destroy the new constitution was by making jejune threats of civil disobedience while at the same time striving to avoid a confrontation with the government at all costs. Rajagopalachari's statement in Madras during his meeting with the provincial Governor was acidly commented upon in this regard.<sup>27</sup> It was pointed out that his stance was identical to that of the ML leadership, which was not surprising since neither wanted a revolution, but wanted to merely tinker with the constitution while happily sharing fishes and loaves of office. Ashraf was, therefore, harshly critical of the 'reformism' of Congress governments in the provinces that were dominated by right-wingers. He dismissed them as incapable of revolutionary change for they seemed happy with marginal increases in workers' wages or reductions in peasant tax. As he noted, whenever peasants and workers resorted to any independent or direct action, Congress ministries allowed the coercive apparatus of the imperial state to crush them. He excoriated the Congress right wing for actively trying to discipline peasants and workers, for giving them lofty sermons on the virtues of non-violence. He warned that the greatest danger lay in the Congress getting transformed into the liberal party full of reform minded, rather than revolutionary minded, members.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, 'Congress ki Wazaratein', *Hindustan*, 8 August 1937.

<sup>28</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Hamaara Kaam', *Hindustan*, 20 February 1938.

More than the perfidies of the 'right wing', it is the ideological backpedalling by sections of the left that upset the protagonists of the MMCP the most.<sup>29</sup> Thus, when the international Marxist ideologue M. N. Roy declared that the 'Hindu dominated' Congress should accept all 'Muslim' demands, Ashraf chided him for thinking along old lines. As he insisted, there was nothing like a Hindu-Muslim problem. There were only two choices before the Congress – either to accept all 'Muslim minority' demands and continue with old style politics, or to get rid of capitalists and landlords in the Congress who were a major cause for the problem itself being framed in a 'communal' manner. Socialists, he insisted, could not afford to be confused about the right solution. Similarly, Ashraf dismissed calls by fellow socialists for winding up the MMCP on the grounds that it was giving greater fillip to communalism, as evident from the vigorous activities of the Muslim League. As he noted, their objection seemed to imply that the Muslim masses were not ready for any radical programme for they had not yet reached the required level of political maturity. For Ashraf, such an attitude reeked of a defeatist mentality and he castigated socialists for behaving like Congressmen of the yore. Just like the latter were embarrassed by what they saw as the ignorance of their countrymen, socialists seemed to be embarrassed by the very existence of communalism. Both were also fearful of being cast as opponents of Hindu or Muslim culture (*ghair tamadduni*) respectively by their detractors and hence were content to stick to elite politics staying away from mass mobilization. He exhorted socialists to shed such fears and seize the Muslim question in the manner shown by the MMCP, instead of letting Congress right wingers and Muslim communalists reinstitute old style politics of communal pacts between elites.

#### *New Cultural and Political Vocabulary*

Finally, the ideologues of the MMCP were not just economic determinists in their understanding of historical development. Instead of waiting for economic contradictions of capitalism to bring about its own destruction they wanted the Congress party to forge a new revolutionary consciousness that would reflect the concerns of the masses who would be its agents. Their protracted 'war of position' thus extended to creating a new political vocabulary which would make terms such as 'progressive' (*taraqqi pasand*), 'reactionary' (*raj'at pasand*), 'socialism' (*ishtarakiyyat*), 'capitalism' (*sarmayadari*), part of the emerging common sense and the building blocks of this new political consciousness. Ashraf and his

<sup>29</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Musalmanon Mein Congress Ka Kaam aur Ishtarakiyyat Pasandon ka Aitraz', *Hindustan*, 10 October 1937.

colleagues also attempted to construct a fresh cultural consensus about what constituted the nation and national culture in order to supplant existing sectional and 'communal' ideas with their emphasis on narrow identification with pre-existing community and its culture. Thus, in one of his essays Ashraf controversially denied that there was anything like a 'Muslim culture' that could be identified with the seventy million Muslims of India.<sup>30</sup> A great majority of Indian Muslims, he argued, derived their origins and culture from the Hindus. The culture of these neo-Muslims who formed 85 per cent of the country's Muslim population was thus different from what was popularly known as 'Muslim culture'. 'Muslim culture', he further explained, was a category that changed according to historical contexts. In pre-British times it was the culture of the 'Badshahs', while now, it had become the culture of feudal elites, a microscopic minority who claimed descent from the Arabs. Hence, 'Muslim culture' in both its medieval and modern contexts was elitist and had nothing to do with the culture of the Muslim masses.

Elaborating on this idea, Ashraf made a distinction between medieval 'Muslim' culture and the existing modern one. The 'Muslim' culture of the Badshahs, he noted with some approval, was marked by great internal diversity and openness, there being no rigid uniformity among Muslims at that time. Arabic, Farsi, Chinese, Tartari were all languages of Muslims. High class Muslims delighted in wearing Western, Eastern, Roman, and Indian clothes. In matters of faith, doctrine and devotion as well, there was great diversity among Muslims for Shias, Sunnis, Kharijites, had their own sets of beliefs, rituals and practices. And yet, Ashraf emphasized, this diversity had never threatened these Muslims and was indeed a symbol and source of their strength. In contrast, he wittingly noted that 'Muslim culture' of the feudal elites under colonialism represented by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's school was so feeble that it felt threatened if someone wore a Gandhi cap or a few Hindus began to propagate Hindi. This culture therefore stressed a stifling uniformity and rigidity. As Ashraf sharply commented, 'If you don't wear a particular type of dress or don't speak high flown Urdu it becomes difficult for you to be seen as a proper Muslim. The truth is that pure and minted (*taksali*) Muslims are only those fortunate people who were raised in the atmosphere of Delhi or Lucknow or if they wear the dresses of Deoband or the Firangi Mahalis.'<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Congress ki Shirkat aur Musalmanon ki Tehzeeb ka Sawal', *Hindustan* 5 September 1937. Also see *Searchlight* 25 and 27 April 1937 for a report of Ashraf's speeches in Bihar and his clarification, *AICC Papers / File G-68 / 1937*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



Ashraf traced the enfeeblement of medieval 'Muslim' culture to Muslim loss of their ruling status and subordination under colonialism. The older Muslim culture of the Badshahs was dealt a death blow in 1857. It was further compromised by Sir Syed's school that had grown up in the shadow of the colonial educational system and had no organic connection with genuine older traditions of Muslims.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Ashraf lamented that all that now remained in the name of 'Muslim culture' were dead traditions. Yet, even if Ashraf saw some virtues in the older Muslim culture of the Badshahs, he was quite unsentimental in asking for both these 'dead traditions' to be abandoned and be replaced by a new national culture which would serve the demands of this day and age. This new national culture would be forged in the crucible of struggle against British imperialism and its indigenous support structures and would primarily be led by the middle and working classes. In this context, Ashraf saw the Muslim middle and working classes as possessing far greater revolutionary potential than any other social group because of their greater material and cultural impoverishment under British rule.<sup>33</sup> As part of the revolutionary vanguard, Ashraf and his comrades saw their role in terms of generating a new intellectual culture to meet the demands of the new age. As he wrote, 'we are today engaged in constructing a new and living *tamaddun*. Our political and social struggle is a prelude to this new *tamaddun*.'<sup>34</sup> This new culture, however, would not be a totally new invention. A composite culture had been shared by common Hindus and Muslims in the times of the Badshahs.<sup>35</sup> What was needed was its reinvention in the light of current demands.

The MMCP stalwarts therefore pioneered a number of initiatives in this regard. The most important one was their effort at developing and popularizing Hindustani, which, they claimed, had historically been the language of the masses in north India and the meeting ground between Hindi and Urdu.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *AICC Papers, File G-68/1937.*

<sup>33</sup> See K. M. Ashraf, 'Firqa-parvar Siyasi Anjumanon ke kaam Karne ke Tariqey aur Hamara Farz', *Hindustan* 29 August 1937.

<sup>34</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Congress ki Shirkat aur Musalmanon ki Tehzeeb ka Sawal', *Hindustan* 5 September 1937.

<sup>35</sup> 'Hamari Qaumi Zabaan', *Hindustan*, 15 August 1937. The rhetoric of the MMCP stalwarts matched the new nationalist historiography being written in this period, which stressed the composite Hindu-Muslim mass culture, the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb that developed in north India during the medieval period. Ashraf's own work *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (Delhi, 1959) reflected this trend.

<sup>36</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, 'Congress Ki Wazartein', *Hindustan*, 8 August 1937.

They saw their task at hand to be the further development of this language, making it linguistically capable of absorbing the latest developments in all the areas of arts and sciences. This became an ambitious nationalist project and involved creating everything from a basic primer in Hindustani to instituting a literary canon for this new language. While Dr Zakir Husain at Jamia Millia Islamia at Delhi got busy with the former, the Progressive Writers Association (PWA) arose to meet the latter demand. The manifesto of the PWA clearly stated its revolutionary aims. It was to produce literature, which drew its inspiration from the basic problems of the masses – hunger, poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation. The declared task of this literature was the arousal of critical spirit and the examination of existing institutions and customs in the light of reason.<sup>37</sup> The PWA also signaled its repudiation of older social identities based on religion and its espousal of new social identities grounded in rational class interests. Ashraf and his comrades coupled such efforts with strident criticism of ML's indifference towards matters pertaining to 'Muslim culture' over which the party had been raising such an enormous hue and cry. As Ashraf carpingly noted, old organizations such as *Anjuman-i-Taraqqi-i-Urdu* of Hyderabad and Muslim Educational Conference of Aligarh were 'dying out of sheer decay in spite of so much talk of Urdu and Muslim culture.' He bemoaned that 'there is an appreciable decrease in the quality and quantity of Urdu literature every day and our knowledge of Muslim classics and Islamic history is diminishing'. Muslims these days were usually content with 'third rate productions in Urdu and very few of us have either the leisure or the equipment to look into the originals.'<sup>38</sup> The MMCP, therefore, marked a hard hitting ideological campaign by Muslim Congress socialists to capture the imagination of the Muslim community, which had stayed aloof from the Congress at least since the time of the Civil Disobedience movements. The ML, caught in a pincer attack with the MMCP trying to capture the Muslim political base outside the legislatures and the Congress government's trying to win over its members of legislative assemblies (MLAs) was certainly not going to take it lying down.

<sup>37</sup> Hafiz Malik, 'The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (1967), 649–64; Shabana Mahmud, 'Angare and the Founding of the Progressive Writers Association', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (May 1996), 447–67.

<sup>38</sup> Ashraf to Habib Hassan, *AICC Papers File G-68/1937*.

### The ML Response to the Congress MMCP

Nehru had set the tone for the Congress offensive by characterizing the ML as representing 'a group of Muslims, no doubt highly estimable persons, but functioning in the higher regions of the upper middle classes and having no contacts with Muslim masses and few even with the Muslim lower middle class'.<sup>39</sup> Jinnah himself was castigated as an elitist and a reactionary by the organizers of the U.P. Muslim Congressmen Conference that met in Allahabad in March 1937. As their statement contemptuously asked, 'Has Mr Jinnah ever identified with the sufferings of the Mussalmans? Some of us have concluded that Mr Jinnah and his compeers are made of totally alien stuff which has nothing in common with the masses.'<sup>40</sup> The first signs of stirring on the ML side are evident from the letter an alarmed Sir Muhammad Iqbal wrote to Jinnah pleading with him to summon an all India Muslim convention to take on Nehru's challenge.

To this convention you must re-state as clearly and as strongly as possible, the political objective of Indian Muslims as a distinct political unit in the country. It is absolutely necessary to tell the world both inside and outside India that the economic problem is not the only problem in the country. From the Muslim point of view the cultural problem is of much greater consequence to most Indian Muslims. At any rate it is not less important than the economic problem.'<sup>41</sup>

Jinnah described the Congress programme as 'massacre contact' following his earlier warnings about its intentions. 'Do not be led away by the cries of *Dal-Bhat*. You must remember that nobody in the world can solve the fundamental economic, financial and social problems of a country overnight.'<sup>42</sup> He appealed to Muslims to instead join the ML and make it a strong representative parliament of Muslim India, a body that may speak with unchallenged authority on behalf of eighty million Muslims of India.<sup>43</sup> The AIML urgently instituted a series of changes in its organizational structure, its ideology and declared goals in order to meet the Congress challenge. The charge was led by the U.P. men. A committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Nawab Ismail Khan to draw

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<sup>39</sup> *Towards Freedom*, Vol. 1, 25.

<sup>40</sup> *AICC Papers*, File 12/1937.

<sup>41</sup> *Towards Freedom*, Vol. 1, 261.

<sup>42</sup> *Star of India*, 4 January 1937.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

up a new organizational blueprint with the intent of remaking the ML as a radical political party.<sup>44</sup> Here the committee borrowed several leaves from the Congress book. Under the new party constitution, Town and Tehsil Leagues were designated as primary units of the ML organization. These units were to elect District Leagues which, in turn, would elect provincial Leagues. These provincial Leagues in turn, would elect the Council of the AIML besides sending nominations for the election of the party President. Another significant recommendation called for abolishing the position of permanent President in order to underline the ML's new democratic culture. The party membership fee was now fixed at two *annas*, below the Congress party fee of four *annas* as part of this new drive to shed the ML's image as a party of landlords and Nawabs. The ML's constitution was also revised to bolster its anti-imperialist credentials with its declared goal now being the 'attainment of the status of a free and independent country for India by all legitimate means with a democratic form of government'.<sup>45</sup> With these changes in its party structure and declared goals, the ML now appeared no less radical or anti-imperialist than the Congress. In U.P. itself, the UPML next chalked out an ambitious programme of 'mass contacts'. At the suggestion of Khaliqzaman, it was decided that all the twenty seven ML members of the U.P. Legislative Assembly would raise ₹ 100 each from their respective constituencies while each member of the provincial working committee would contribute ₹ 30 over the next three months for carrying out propaganda among the Muslim masses.<sup>46</sup> Another committee was charged with the task of enrolling 25 per cent of the adult Muslim population in U.P. as ML members over the next three months.<sup>47</sup>

The UPML also began a propaganda offensive bitterly criticizing the MMCP as an attempt to break the solidarity of the Muslim community by utilizing the strength of the Congress organization, its financial muscle, and the backing of its provincial governments. In contrast, it pointed out that the Congress had made extensive efforts to preserve the solidarity of the Hindu community during the crisis created by the Communal Award a few years earlier. Gandhi's fast unto death in response to the Award and the subsequent Poona Pact with Ambedkar were pointedly referred to by Nawab Ismail Khan, the UPML President, in his correspondence with Nehru that was published soon after in the newspapers.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Pioneer*, 7 May 1937.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *AICC Papers, File 16/1937.*

<sup>47</sup> *Towards Freedom*, Vol. 1, 492.

It will be recollected that when separate electorates were provided for the untouchables at their own request, the Hindu leaders were most vehement in their denunciation of the Muslim attitude towards the question. They were charged with breaking up the solidarity of the Hindu community. Muslims entertain similar resentment against the Congress leaders today for launching the mass contact movement.<sup>48</sup>

However, it is the ideological response to the MMCP that proved to be the most potent weapon in the UPML's armoury. One of its most prominent campaigners was the young Raja of Mahmudabad. The Raja was the one of U.P.'s prominent landlords, the youngest member of the Central Working Committee of the ML, its National Treasurer, besides being its chief financier in U.P. He was the also the chief organizer of the Muslim League National Guard that was formed to defend Muslim lives and property besides countering the MMCP. In addition, he was the chief patron of the All India Muslim Students Federation (AIMSF) formed by Muslim students who had broken away from the All India Students Federation (AISF). His Kaiserbagh palace in Lucknow was the virtual headquarters of the UPML. Even though he belonged to the landed aristocracy, the Raja cultivated an austere personal style. He habitually wore *khaddar*, was known for his generosity towards his tenants, and his piety as a practicing Shia. Finally, young Mahmudabad was one of those rare individuals in the ML who had something approaching a warm and close personal relationship with Jinnah on account of old family ties.<sup>49</sup>

Mahmudabad decried the Congress refusal to recognize the existence of the Muslim community and work with its accredited leaders. Warning Muslims to 'counteract efforts made in interested quarters to divide the Muslim community amongst themselves', he offered Islam as a total ideology which had answers to all the problems of modern society.<sup>50</sup> Mahmudabad credited Islam as the greatest emancipatory creed that the world had ever known. As he noted, if Muslims were deeply desirous of political liberty it was because their 'religion teaches them liberty, without which they cannot truly live.'<sup>51</sup> Islam was also

<sup>48</sup> Ismail Khan to Nehru, 16 January 1938 in S. A. I. Tirmizi (ed.), *Paradoxes of Partition, 1937-39* (Delhi, 1998), 320.

<sup>49</sup> See The Raja of Mahmudabad, 'Some Memories', in Phillips and Wainwright (ed.), *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives, 1935-1947* (London, 1970).

<sup>50</sup> Mahmudabad's speech at the Bombay Provincial Muslim League Conference reported in *Asar-i-Jadid*, 13 January 1938 in Syed Ishtiaq Husain (ed.), *Khutbat-i-Raja Sahab Mahmudabad: Raja Sahab Mahmudabad Mohammad Amir Ahmad Khan ke Khutbat, Irshadat, Interviews aur Chand Aham Dastavezat ka Majmua* (Karachi, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> *The Leader*, 18 October 1937.

socially liberating since it sought to break down the barriers of class, colour, and race and considered all Muslims whether belonging to the masses or the higher classes as brothers. Mahmudabad, however, specified that Muslims wanted liberty not only for the country but also for their own community and therefore outlined the ML's programme for the Muslims. Responding to the Congress MMCP's offer of a fully-fledged socialist programme to the Muslim masses, Mahmudabad offered them a vision of Islamic socialism.<sup>52</sup> Addressing the Bombay Provincial Muslim League conference, he credited the Prophet with inaugurating the oldest socialist creed in the world 1300 years earlier. Mahmudabad explained that the Prophet himself had been an orphan and a poor 'commission agent' and knew what poverty meant. Islam was, therefore, quintessentially the religion of the poor. Islamic socialism was not just a chimera or a slogan but would bring about a real reduction in social disparities between the rich and poor ensuring that every individual had a comfortable existence. He further claimed that the current disparities between the rich and poor was due to greed of the capitalists who had denigrated the message of Islam to such an extent that time had come to wage a *jihad* against poverty. Stalin too, he grandly remarked, was compelled to take the path of socialism that Islam had inaugurated. However, Mahmudabad posited a fundamental difference between socialism and Islam. While Islam was based on *ijma* (consensus) socialism was not based on any such popular consent of the community. But more importantly, socialism was a result of mere intellectual enquiry and had nothing to do with the heart. Islam, on the other hand, represented both the heart and the mind and hence would be enduring.<sup>53</sup> An ML supporter summed up the critique of Congress socialism by remarking that when the slogan, 'Workers of the world unite' is raised, nobody has a problem. However when the slogan 'Muslims of the world unite' is raised, everybody has a problem!<sup>54</sup>

Mahmudabad was the main mover of the socio-economic resolution at the ML's 1937 Lucknow session. The resolution was progressive and sufficiently broad-based besides being directed at specific social groups. For the industrial labour it sought minimum wages, regulated work hours and hygienic housing conditions. It also favoured state assistance for cottage and small scale industries.

<sup>52</sup> Mahmudabad's speech at the Bombay Provincial Muslim League Conference reported in *Asar-i-Jadid*, 13 January 1938 in Syed Ishtiaq Husain (ed.), *Khutbat-i-Raja Sahab Mahmudabad: Raja Sahab Mahmudabad Mohammad Amir Ahmad Khan ke Khutbat, Irshadat, Interviews aur Chand Abam Dastavezat ka Majmua* (Karachi, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> See Mahmudabad's later essay 'Pakistan ki Taarif', *Sidq*, 11 May 1941.

<sup>54</sup> *Zulqarnain*, 28 July 1938.

The resolution's stance against Hindu capitalists and traders was evident from its demand for the establishment of a state industrial development board to develop industries and for the elimination of middlemen. For the peasants it sought reduction of rural and urban debt, abolition of usury, security of tenure, fixation of fair rents and abolition of forced labour.<sup>55</sup> Mahmudabad also borrowed a leaf from Gandhian constructive programmes, advising Muslims to wear *garba* cloth woven by Muslim weavers,<sup>56</sup> enforce picketing of liquor and toddy shops<sup>57</sup> and join the Muslim League National Guards to participate in social work among the Muslim masses.<sup>58</sup>

### Resisting National Symbols Fashioned by Congress

#### *Gandhi's Wardha Scheme of Education and the Pirpur Report*

In addition to taking on the MMCP, the ML gained prominence by launching a ferocious attack against the symbols of India's national life that the Congress attempted to institute through its provincial governments. Questioning the view that India constituted a single nation, the ML through its indignant opposition to these symbols laid the basis for its claim of a separate nationhood for Muslims. The lightning rod in this regard was the Wardha Scheme of Education, which Gandhi laid out soon after Congress ministries had assumed office in 1937. The scheme envisaged a rural education programme spanning primary, middle and high school, extending over a period of seven years, which focused on providing vocational training to villagers that would allow them to earn their livelihoods.<sup>59</sup> Gandhi called the scheme 'Rural National Education through Village Handicrafts'. As he elaborated, 'rural excludes the so-called higher or English education, national at present connotes truth and non-violence, and through village handicrafts means that the framers of the scheme expect the teachers to educate village children in their villages so as to draw out all their faculties through some selected village handicrafts in an atmosphere free from super-imposed restrictions and interference.'<sup>60</sup>

Behind the scheme lay Gandhi's own philosophy of education that saw

<sup>55</sup> *The Leader*, 21 October 1937.

<sup>56</sup> *PAI for the week ending 3 September 1938*.

<sup>57</sup> *PAI for the week ending 14 May 1938*.

<sup>58</sup> *The Leader*, 18 August 1938.

<sup>59</sup> 'Doing Not Idle Thinking', *Harijan*, 2 October 1937, in *CWMG*, Vol. 66, 191–93.

<sup>60</sup> M. K. Gandhi, 'Foreword', in *Basic National Education: Report of the Zakir Husain Committee and the Detailed Syllabus* (Wardha, 1938).

literacy not as the end of education but 'only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated.'<sup>61</sup> What Gandhi had in mind when he thought of education was not simply various forms of handicraft being taught side by side with liberal education, but the 'whole process of education to be imparted through some handicraft or industry.'<sup>62</sup> He specifically recommended *takli* spinning as a useful craft through which total education could be imparted to rural children. He admitted to using the same method to teach his grandson who he said 'scarcely feels he is being taught, for all the while he plays, laughs and sings.'<sup>63</sup> It was at present also being used throughout the country for training people to make their own cloth. Primary education could thus revolve around *takli* but the Mahatma was open to other forms of handicraft being made the mode for his total educational scheme. Gandhi was, however, careful to point out that a balance between manual and intellectual work would be maintained in this scheme since subjects such as history, geography, arithmetic, besides elementary principles of sanitation, hygiene and nutrition would also be taught as part of this primary education programme.

An integral part of the scheme was that it had to be self-supporting, which Gandhi insisted would be 'the acid test of its reality'. This was especially imperative since funds which were currently scarce due to military expenditures, would become scarcer once drink revenues would be lost due to Prohibition. But independent of funding problems, Gandhi felt that the condition of self-sustainability had its own merits. Children would become more self-confident if they paid for their own education rather than receiving it as a dole from the government, which could make them lazy and helpless. Gandhi claimed that manual training would not involve making articles fit for school museums or useless toys but marketable articles. As far as the saleability of the articles was concerned, Gandhi noted that while nobody would be compelled to buy the children's manufactures, 'the nation is expected to buy with pardonable pride and patriotic pleasure what its children make for its needs.'<sup>64</sup> On another occasion, Gandhi stated that the state would take over these articles and find a market for them,<sup>65</sup> while another time he declared that 'the state is bound to

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<sup>61</sup> Basudev Chatterji, *Towards Freedom, 1938*, Vol. 1, 755.

<sup>62</sup> *CWVG*, Vol. 66, 264.

<sup>63</sup> *CWVG*, Vol. 66, 264.

<sup>64</sup> *CWVG*, Vol. 66, 241.

<sup>65</sup> *CWVG*, Vol. 66, 118.



find employment if needed, for all the pupils thus trained.<sup>66</sup> At the same time he insisted that care would also be taken so that children's manufactures would not compete with indigenous manufactures. Khadi, village paper, palm *gur*, were mentioned as some of the many items in this regard.<sup>67</sup> Gandhi also welcomed the suggestion that young men and women be conscripted to work as teachers in the villages for which they would be given 'maintenance on a scale keeping with the economic level of the country.'

Finally, given his well-known position regarding the importance of religion not only in private lives of individuals but also in public life, the Mahatma surprisingly declared that he wanted religious instruction to be excluded from this educational scheme. In response to questions regarding this exclusion, Gandhi declared that he was rather for teaching the children practical religion, the religion of self-help.<sup>68</sup> The Mahatma also expressed his firm opinion that religious instruction could best be granted to children in their own homes. What the new scheme would however emphasize was the essential unity of all religions, the idea that they taught the same great truths. Finally, as far as inculcation of ethical values was concerned, Gandhi optimistically declared that the exemplary lives of their teachers would provide children with the best instruction in ethical and truthful living and would also help in eliminating communal strife.

Gandhi's scheme had laid out general principles, which needed to be translated into policy. This task was delegated to a committee headed by Zakir Husain, the Principal of Jamia Millia Islamia, an educationist by training who had returned to India after receiving a doctorate in Germany. It included as its members, another educationist Aryanayakam, a Jaffna Tamil who had studied in England and was teaching at Tagore's Shantiniketan, his wife Asha Devi, K. Saiyidain, Director of Education in Kashmir, and finally Gandhians such as Vinoba Bhave, J. C. Kumarappa, Kishorelal Mashruwala, Shrikrishnadas Jaju, K. T. Shah, and Kakasaheb Kalelkar. After reviewing Gandhi's ideas on education and extensively discussing and debating the matter with the Mahatma himself, the committee expressed skepticism about whether the principle of self-sustainability could be achieved in practice. It, however, acknowledged that the basic scheme of education was sound in itself. After much deliberation, it finally came up with a seven year scheme for educating rural boys and girls

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<sup>66</sup> *CWMG*, Vol. 66, 265.

<sup>67</sup> *CWMG*, Vol. 66, 241.

<sup>68</sup> Basudev Chatterji, *Towards Freedom, 1938*, Vol. 1, 762.

with syllabi for eight subjects. They included basic craft,<sup>69</sup> mother tongue, mathematics, general science,<sup>70</sup> social studies,<sup>71</sup> drawing, music and Hindustani. The medium of instruction was to be the local mother tongue. The schools were expected to work for 288 days a year, 24 days a month on an average with daily instruction spread over five and half hours. Teachers were to undergo a three year training programme, which would help them develop skills in the basic craft, knowledge of local economics of village industries, principles of physical culture and hygiene and, most importantly, a thorough knowledge of Hindustani in both Hindi and Urdu scripts.<sup>72</sup> Teachers were to be mostly recruited locally through a careful selection procedure while the scheme as a whole would do away with the examination system and be replaced by a new sample testing method in order to check the progress of pupils and schools. The Wardha Scheme was endorsed at the Haripura Congress session which further recommended the setting up of an All India Education Board. This body came into being on 23 April 1938 and was renamed Hindustani Talimi Sangh. It was charged with the responsibility for preparing textbooks, chalking out specific plans for each province, setting up teacher training schools, testing the existing syllabus and suggesting improvements for the future.

<sup>69</sup> For basic craft the committee chose spinning and weaving, carpentry, agriculture, fruit and vegetable gardening, leather work, with a provision for any other craft appropriate for local conditions. All students though taking up other craft forms were expected to learn the basics of *takli* weaving.

<sup>70</sup> It would include study of local ecology and environment, botany, zoology, chemistry, hygiene, physical culture with an emphasis on *desi* games, astronomy, to be topped off with inspiring stories of great scientists and explorers.

<sup>71</sup> It would include a course on history, civics, geography and current events along with a study of different religions of the world to show their underlying unity. Knowledge of history was to be dominated by that of Indian history focusing on the 'social and cultural life of the people as they moved towards greater political and cultural unity.' The treatment of the subject was to be biographical in the lower grades and social and cultural in the higher grades. It was hoped that the study of the history of India's national awakening would prepare pupils to bear their share of burdens joyfully and to stand to the strain and stress of the period of transition. Geography would include a study of local natural and human ecology, weather phenomena, maps and map making, means of transport and communication, industries and agriculture of both the locality and the nation and their inter-linkages.

<sup>72</sup> The scheme explicitly stated that the object of the scheme was not to produce academically perfect scholars but skilled, intelligent and educated craftsmen with the right mental orientation who are desirous of serving the community and anxious to help the coming generation realize and understand the standard of values implicit in this educational scheme.

The Wardha Scheme attracted criticism from many quarters<sup>73</sup> but the strongest criticism came from the ML. A party committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Raja of Pirpur, a Shia landlord from U.P., to assess its implications for the education of Muslim boys and girls. Its report charged the Congress with trying to convert Muslim youth to its own ideology and attempting to wipe out the distinct identity of Indian Muslims. It pointed to the example of Communist Russia where the state through educationist and propagandist activities had converted its citizenry to the goal of communism and wiped out religion. Fascist Italy through its education system, as well as Fascist party organizations had similarly captured the minds of the youth with its spiritual creed. The report specifically charged the scheme with spreading 'Gandhian totalitarianism' to brainwash students about the virtues of non-violence. It warned that, 'if from their childhood boys and girls are made to think in terms of superiority of non-violence, it may produce the same results as the doctrine of superiority of race has done in certain totalitarian states.'<sup>74</sup> Moreover, it argued that non-violence did not symbolize the final truth for Muslims and was contrary to the principle of *jihad* that was obligatory for them under certain conditions. The report also criticized the reverential study of different religions as envisaged in the scheme. It took particular exception to the idea that all religions had an essential unity when it came to their fundamental precepts, and instead asserted that 'there are many essentials of Islam which are exclusively Islamic and which cannot be harmonized with the teaching of other religions.'<sup>75</sup>

The Pirpur report further criticized the Wardha Scheme for not taking into account the special place of religion in Muslim life since Islam was distinct from Hinduism.<sup>76</sup> It argued that while religious education was restricted to the Brahmins amongst the Hindus, it was an important aspect of life for all people belonging to the Abrahamic faiths. Indeed, among Muslims every respectable

<sup>73</sup> Tagore criticized the scheme as did the economist VKRV Rao besides Socialists such as Mino Masani.

<sup>74</sup> K. K. Aziz, *Muslims Under Congress Rule 1937-1939: A Documentary Record* (Islamabad, 1978), 180.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>76</sup> Dr Ziauddin Ahmad, 'Wardha Scheme se Mazhabi Taleem ka Akhraj', *Muslim University Gazette*, 1 August 1938. Ziauddin as the Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University also wrote to Jinnah warning that the Wardha scheme was a serious threat to Muslim education. Ziauddin Ahmad to Jinnah, 7 May 1938, in Tirmizi, *Paradoxes of the Partition, 1937-1939*, 388.

family had to have the ability to lead the *namaz* for which it needed to be cognizant in matters of the *Shariah*. It therefore charged those who wanted to substitute ethical instruction (*ikhlaqi talim*) for religious education (*mazhabi talim*) as being totally unaware of the fundamentals of Muslim religious education. It further pointed out that when a government convened conference in 1916 debated this question, it had come to the conclusion that the former was meaningless without the latter. The government was forced to conclude that the teaching of Islam was integral to the education of Muslim boys and provisions were thus made for religious instruction among Muslims through separate institutions.

The Pirpur report came down most heavily on the History syllabus arguing that Amir Khusro, Kabir, Akbar and Dara Shikoh had been held up as Muslim heroes simply because they attempted to forge a synthesis with Hinduism, while Muslim heroes with the 'Islamic outlook', who had made seminal contributions to Islamic history or Muslim society had been ignored. The syllabus was also held guilty for glorifying only Hindu heroes such as Harsha, Prithvi Raj, Shivaji, and Ranjit Singh. Indignation was also expressed at Muslim history being broken up into 'insignificant and unimportant portions.' The Report further pointed out that in the history syllabus for grades II–IV, the first three years were devoted to teaching Hindu history alongside fragmentary histories of other ancient races such as Romans, Greeks, Chinese, Persians, etc. Only after four years of studying other peoples' histories was the Muslim child introduced to Muslim history in Grade V. The syllabus was, thus, charged with undermining the real significance of Islamic history by ignoring the fact that Islam was the dominant force in world history for a thousand years, and had introduced 'a revolution in the social, cultural and political concepts of mankind.' The report also expressed unhappiness with its treatment of the Indian national movement since it dealt almost exclusively with the Congress and its leaders ignoring the contribution of Muslim leaders. Furthermore, it expressed serious reservations about the importance given to socialism as a force against the tyrannies of imperialism and capitalism all the while ignoring its character as an anti-religious movement. In this regard, it also condemned the omission of any reference to Islamic socialism in the syllabus. Finally, it deprecated the teaching of pre-history of the primitive man and his surroundings from a materialistic point of view since the evolution of man or human society had not been given a spiritual background.

The syllabus on social studies was also deemed un-Islamic. The Pirpur Report condemned it for subordinating love for religion to the love for the motherland, which it claimed, was against the tenets of Islam. It also expressed strong opposition against music and dances in the syllabus, as also the celebration of

Hindu holidays, which it deemed to be in serious conflict with the Islamic way of life. The Report came down heavily on an alleged suggestion in the syllabus that Muslims suffered from social disabilities that were similar to Harijans. It charged that such imputations were calculated to develop an inferiority complex among Muslims. The Wardha scheme was also denounced as being detrimental to the progress of Urdu language and script. Hindustani was dismissed as a non-existent language. The Report claimed that under its garb, the Wardha scheme was trying to impose Hindi on Muslims. It pointedly referred to the U.P. Education Minister, Sampurnanand's use of Sanskritized Hindi as a sign of the dangers that lay ahead. The Report asserted that the only solution to the problem was to make Urdu the national language of India and demanded that Urdu be declared the mother tongue of all Muslim boys in the country. It also demanded the setting up of different educational systems for Muslims in which they would have complete control over their own education. For this purpose, it called for the creation of a Central Muslim Education Board along with state level Muslim education boards exclusively manned and supervised by Muslims. In order to finance Muslim education the committee further recommended that Muslim representatives in legislatures seek funds from government, solicit donations from the rich, contributions from Muslim *waqfs* and the general public. Finally, the ML decided to convene a committee under the Chairmanship of Nawab Kamal Yar Jung of Hyderabad to go into the specific problems of Muslim education and make recommendations for remedial action.

### *The Question of Hindustani*

As part of the Wardha Scheme of education, the Congress efforts to establish Hindustani as a national language, which would replace English over a matter of time, became a hugely controversial affair. Congress attempts to justify Hindustani as occupying the middle ground between Hindi and Urdu backfired as it found itself in the firing range of both Hindi and Urdu enthusiasts. The indignation was felt not just among north Indian Urdu-speaking Muslims, for Fazlul Haq the Premier of Bengal was vociferous in his calls for Urdu being made the national language. The Lion of Bengal declared that under him the province would increase the number of *madrasas* to spread Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. Though Bengali was the mother tongue of his province and would be the medium of instruction, Haq insisted that Urdu needed to be made the compulsory language for Muslim students 'so that they may come in contact with the spirit of Islam.'<sup>77</sup> In what now sounds like a far cry from the position

<sup>77</sup> Basudev Chatterji, *Towards Freedom, 1938*, Vol. 1, 368.

taken by East Pakistanis in the aftermath of the Partition, Haq warned that unless Bengalis adopted Urdu for primary religious instruction, their boys and girls would be de-Muslimized through the anti-Islamic influences of the local environment. He further lamented that the reason why the Bengali Muslims were backward in pan-Islamist revival activities was that linguistically and culturally they were cut off from the rest of Muslim India due to their lack of proficiency in Urdu. Haq therefore wanted to make them full-fledged and active members of the Islamic fraternity by having them compulsorily learn the language.

Haq's views were supported by Maulana Saiyyid Sulaiman Nadvi, the rector of the *Nadwatul Ulama* of Lucknow, known for his sympathies for the ML.<sup>78</sup> Nadvi wanted Urdu to be made the national language claiming that it was the joint creation of Hindus and Muslims. He argued that even if it were the language of Muslims alone, it needed to be accepted by the Hindus for it could never threaten the culture and traditions of the majority community, which could always assert itself in any case due to its numerical superiority. Nadvi dismissed Hindi as a newcomer, the product of British policy at College Fort William in Calcutta. Sanskritized Hindi, he insisted, needed to be given the same classical status as Arabic and its imposition in the name of Hindustani to be avoided at all costs or else it would lead to communal strife. He also rebutted Nehru's view that Urdu was understood in the towns and Hindi in villages, claiming that the Hindi found in newspapers and magazines was little understood in towns and even lesser in the villages. Finally, Nadvi pointed out that it was misleading to say that the use of Sanskrit words in Hindustani was necessary to carry along the south Indians or Bengalis since none of these languages had anything to do with Hindi. In this regard, he also noted that Tamil Muslims spoke Urdu while the songs of Sufi mystic Gisuḍaraz in the Deccan were also in Urdu.

Scholars such as Maulvi Abdul Haq, a doyen of Urdu who had been involved in the establishment of Osmania University at Hyderabad as an Urdu medium university, supported Nadvi's contention. He dismissed the claim that Hindi with its stock of words from Sanskrit would be better understood by south Indians by arguing that Sanskrit did not dominate the ordinary speech of south Indians. He further noted that the south Indians themselves had been vociferous in their protests against attempts to foist Hindi in the South.<sup>79</sup> Delving into the history of the language problem, Abdul Haq pointed out that when Persian

<sup>78</sup> Z. A. Ahmad (ed.), *National Language for India: A Symposium* (Allahabad, 1941).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

was replaced by Urdu in 1837, not a single voice had been raised. But later Hindus under Swami Dayanand Saraswati and his Arya Samaj began this whole controversy, which was given further fillip by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya through his *shuddhi* and *sangathan* movements. But the greatest villain of the piece according to him was Gandhi who had provided legitimacy to Hindi by accepting the Presidentship of the *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*. This move had led to Hindi making great progress in Madras, North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and Punjab where earlier there was no affinity for Hindi. He also criticized Gandhi and his lieutenants such as Rajendra Prasad and Kakasaheb Kalelkar for increasing the use of Sanskrit words in their language on the grounds that people south of the Vindhya would be able to understand them better due to the greater stock of Sanskrit words in the Dravidian languages.

Abdul Haq foresaw problems in creating a new language like Hindustani with a new canon along with a vocabulary that could accommodate modern and scientific ideas. Hindi and Urdu, he insisted, were separate languages and that was a reality that needed to be acknowledged. Writers in these languages were bound to fall back upon their parent tongues to absorb and express new ideas that were developing in the modern scientific world. Hindustani as a language at present served only basic conversational needs. But Haq also expressed his willingness to find the common ground for the creation of a national language. In order to tackle the problem he proposed the creation of a common dictionary consisting of all Persian and Arabic words that had passed into Hindi speech and literature and a list of Sanskrit words that Urdu had adopted. This dictionary could then be placed before a representative body of writers after whose approval it would be published as the basis for further development. This body would also be responsible for the incorporating new words from Hindi and Urdu necessary for the growth of Hindustani, which could then be given adequate publicity. Haq, like Nehru, boldly suggested that the script problem could be resolved by introducing the Roman alphabet so that all languages of the country could be written in the Roman script. He concluded that in case it was not possible to achieve these different tasks, Hindi and Urdu should be left to their own devices. Haq was therefore requested by the Bihar Government to participate in a project of compiling a dictionary with common words from Hindi and Urdu. In this regard, it must be noted that voices in favour of Urdu included non-Muslim Urdu enthusiasts and aesthetes such as the constitutional lawyer Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. Sir Tej flatly declared that Hindustani was a cover for uprooting Urdu and replacing Urdu words in Hindustani with Sanskrit words. Sapru, however, opined that he was not in favour of creating a single national

language and felt that the best thing would be to leave Urdu alone and allow it to occupy the same space it had over the past two hundred years. As Sapru sagely observed, Telugu, Bengali and other languages in India were as much national languages as Urdu, Hindi or Hindustani.

From the Congress side Maulana Abul Kalam Azad attempted to reassure Muslims in various ways about the Congress government's language initiative. Maulana Azad declared that the whole controversy had arisen due to indiscriminate use of the term Hindi by people from Bombay, Madras and Bengal. In a letter to Premiers of all the Congress-ruled provinces he therefore asked them to use the word Hindustani whenever the national language was mentioned. Attempting to reassure Muslims, Azad declared that the national language of India, though called Hindustani, was 'clear and simple Urdu which is generally spoken in the cities of northern India', which could be written in both Devanagari and Urdu scripts. He noted that a Hindustani reader was being prepared by the Jamia Millia Islamia and would be published by the Madras Government in both Urdu and Devanagari scripts for the primary classes. Azad also deplored the controversy being raised by Jinnah on the language question. Referring to Jinnah's address to the Memon community in Bombay wherein he accused the Congress of being a rank communal organization seeking to impose Hindi over the country, Azad derisively declared that Mr Jinnah neither knew Hindi or Urdu for his mother tongue was Gujarati, while he had spent his entire life reading and writing in English. Whatever Jinnah had said on the language question was based on hearsay or gossip in newspapers and hence irresponsible. The controversy however refused to die down and became one in the long list of Muslim grievances against Congress rule in the 'minority provinces'.

### *National Flag and National Song*

Finally, the ML vociferously opposed the flying of the tricolour by government institutions and in public spaces and the singing of *Bande Mataram* during official functions, especially in government schools claiming that these were Hindu symbols that were alien to Muslim culture. The Congress response to the ML offensive was one of incredulity and rage. It took pains to point out that the author of the Wardha Scheme, Dr Zakir Husain, was a Muslim. It denounced suggestions that the scheme was a way of brainwashing Muslim students into accepting Congress ideology. On Hindustani too the Congress pointed out that the Bihar Government had constituted a committee headed by Abdul Haq to prepare a comprehensive dictionary of Hindustani words and insisted that the U.P. and Bihar governments would follow the guidelines and recommendation



of this committee. On the question of the national flag it pointed out that the tricolour represented all of India's communities. It emphasized the fact that Jinnah, the Ali brothers and other Muslim leaders who had attended several Congress sessions, had never once objected to the tricolour being unfurled at these sessions.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, only in March 1937, Khaliquzzaman had invited G. B. Pant to unfurl the tricolour at the Lucknow municipality building of which the former was the Chairman. And as far as *Bande Mataram* was concerned, the party insisted that there was nothing 'Hindu' or communal about the song. Only the first two stanzas of the song were usually sung at Congress sessions which described the beauty of the motherland and her abundant bounty. It was not intended to represent a challenge to any community or group in India. The very fact that it referred to thirty crores of Indians made it clear that it included all Indians. The Congress also pointed to the historical context in which the song assumed significance. It explained that the song, though appearing in Bankim Chandra Chatterji's *Anand Math*, was written independently of and long before the novel was published, and that it was incorporated only subsequently into the book. It noted that the song was set to music by Rabindranath Tagore in 1896 and assumed particular significance after the Bengal Provincial Conference that was held in Barisal in 1906. This session was chaired by a Muslim, A. Rasul, which was broken up by a police lathi charge. Since then the song 'had inspired innumerable sacrifices across the country' and assumed 'special and national importance'. The song had not been formally adopted by the Congress as the national anthem of India, but 'past associations, with their long record of suffering for the cause as well as popular usage may have made the first two stanzas of this song a living and inseparable part of our national movement and as such they must command our affection and respect.'<sup>81</sup>

The Congress however expressed its willingness to accommodate the ML's newly developed sensitivities on these issues.<sup>82</sup> K. M. Ashraf pointed out that the slogans and culture of the Congress only reflected the presence of various communities in the Congress. Thus, during the Khilafat movement the slogan of *Allaho Akbar* was popular at Congress meetings. Ramprasad Bismil's *Sarafroshi ki Tamanna* and Muhammad Iqbal's *Saare Jahaan se Accha*, both of which were in Urdu, had also become very popular songs at Congress gatherings. As far

<sup>80</sup> Nehru to Jinnah, 6 April 1938, in *SWJN*, Vol. 8, 238.

<sup>81</sup> CWC Statement on *Bande Mataram* on 28 October 1937, AICC Papers File 42, in P. N. Chopra (ed.), *Towards Freedom, 1937* (New Delhi, 1985), Vol. 1, 1089.

<sup>82</sup> Gandhi's Draft on Congress Policy on the Communal Question, 30 July 1937, quoted in Tirmizi, *Paradoxes of the Partition, 1937–39*, 223–25.

as Congress slogans were concerned, Ashraf noted that the most popular one was *Inqilab Zindabad* which was a Farsi slogan. Muslims in the Congress were free to use *Allaho Akbar* while Sikhs could likewise use *Sat Sri Akal*. Regarding *Bande Mataram*, Ashraf again explained that the song was in Bengali not Hindi. Expressing reservations about summarily discarding the song, Ashraf indicated that the right way to approach the issue was to have poets write a new national anthem, which could then be incorporated into the national movement. In this regard he noted that his friend Azhar Karzai had sent a song to Nehru that the latter had liked immensely and forwarded it to various Congress committees across the country so that it could attain popularity.<sup>83</sup> As far as the tricolour was concerned, Ashraf sought to play down its importance. Interestingly, he indicated its provisional nature while also happily pointing out that the Red Flag was increasingly making an appearance besides the tricolor at several Congress meetings.

But the ML remained unrepentant. The party went in for a radical image makeover. Its most visible symbol, Mr Jinnah, discarded his western suits in favour of *sherwani*, *pyjamas* and a *samur* cap for his public appearances by the time of the 1937 Lucknow AIML session.<sup>84</sup> The ML also came out with a new flag for the Muslims, unfurled for the first time at its Bombay meeting in 1938. On this occasion, Jinnah solemnly exhorted Muslims to rally under this flag 'several centuries old, given to us by our Prophet'.<sup>85</sup> A new national song for the Muslims, *Tarana-i-League* was adopted and sung at the Patna ML session in 1938. And it is at the Patna session that Mr Jinnah was honoured with the title of the *Qaid-i-Azam* or the Great Leader of the Muslim community, in an attempt to raise him to a position of equality with the Mahatma. The ML's offensive against the symbols of national unity promoted by the Congress and its creation of alternative symbols of Muslim nationhood, were critical steps in the process of constructing a Muslim political community. The contrasting fortunes of the Congress and the ML and the fate of their respective campaigns to mobilize Muslim support were reflected in a series of by-elections that were held for Muslim seats between 1937 and 1939.

<sup>83</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Congress Mein Musalmanon ki Shirkat aur Hindu Zehniyat ka Sawaal', *Hindustan*, 12 September 1937.

<sup>84</sup> See M. A. H. Ispahani, *Qaid-i-Azam Jinnah as I Knew Him* (Karachi, 1967), 37–38.

<sup>85</sup> *The Pioneer*, 7 June 1938; *The Leader*, 9 June 1938. For a more detailed treatment of the issue of the national flag see Arundhati Virmani, *A National Flag for India: Rituals, Nationalism and Politics of Sentiment* (Ranikhet, 2008).

### By-elections to Muslim Constituencies in U.P.

The first election in Bahraich in March 1937 was won unopposed by Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, as the UPML refused to put up a candidate against him. This walkover for Rafi was facilitated by Khaliquzzaman, who at the time was parleying with the Congress leadership over ministry making, much against Jinnah's wishes. Jinnah during his talks with leaders of the JUH in fact threatened to resign as the ML President if a candidate against Rafi was not put up, even if he did not follow up on it.<sup>86</sup> The next election, held in the shadow of the Congress' MMCP, was for the Orai-Jhansi-Hamirpur Muslim rural seat in Bundelkhand. It was occasioned by the death of the previous victor, who had been an Independent.<sup>87</sup> Jhansi became the scene of a bitter fight between the Congress and the ML. The Congress nominated Nisar Ahmad Khan Sherwani, the brother of the Congress veteran Tassadduq Ahmad Khan Sherwani, who had died two years earlier. Nisar was an outsider in Jhansi, hailing from a Bilona Pathan branch of the Sherwani family that had settled in Aligarh. He had been a superintendent in the post office department before resigning his post during the Non-Cooperation Movement and joining the Congress on a full time basis. This was his second entry into the electoral battlefield for he had earlier been fielded by the Congress during the recently concluded provincial elections from another constituency but had lost. Nisar Sherwani was assisted during this campaign by his brother Fida, who was the manager of a sugar factory in neighbouring Etah district.

The Congress campaign started on an awkward note, betraying internal stresses and strains within the party over the selection of its candidate for this seat. These were reflected in the emotional letter written by Fida Sherwani to Nehru two weeks before the election as he lay bedridden in Saharanpur due to kidney pain. Fida let loose his frustrations against what he saw as the U.P. Pradesh Congress Committee's cruel indifference to his brother's all important election at Jhansi.<sup>88</sup> Even the Congress Muslims, he bemoaned, seemed unwilling to help Nisar's campaign. The party's most potent Muslim orator Maulana Ataullah Shah Bukhari had refused to come to Jhansi on the pretext that he was too busy with his Ahrar conference. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, the star Congress campaigner during the previous round of elections, had declined to come claiming rather curiously that nobody knew him in Jhansi.

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<sup>86</sup> *The Leader*, 30 March 1937.

<sup>87</sup> Polling for this by-election occurred on 15 July 1937.

<sup>88</sup> Fida Sherwani to Nehru, 30 June 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61/1937*.

More importantly, Rafi Kidwai, the Congress campaign in-charge had become scarce and was not even traceable. Fida rued that while Pant and Mohanlal Saxena had expressed their sympathy for the Sherwanis' predicament, they had not been of any real help either with money or men. He bitterly concluded that the 'heartless neglect of us by the so-called socialist party in power has made me believe that a Musalman has no place in the Congress and that a good and true Musalman like myself has no alternative but to commit suicide. None of the general elections in February was so hopelessly neglected as this one (sic).' In a dramatic flourish, Fida warned Nehru that he was 'going to ask his brother to withdraw from the contest', and if his body permitted, immediately go to Jhansi himself and perform *Satyagraha* until Nisar actually withdrew. The previous election loss had left the Sherwani family financially broke and Fida fumed at the 'callous neglect of the Congress' in this election, which was 'nothing short of an outrage from the Congress executive'. Defeat, Fida asserted, was certain. He ended this emotional letter with a threat to release it to the press if he was not given an opportunity to prove his charges against the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee.

Nehru also received panicky letters from Nisar Sherwani. The Congress nominee feared that the Raja of Mahmudabad was going to pump in astronomical sums of money, about ₹ 15,000 as the rumours went, to ensure that the ML candidate would win.<sup>89</sup> The ML thus seemed willing to purchase votes if necessary. His own resources were at an end since his defeat in the previous election, and the lack of money was particularly hampering the organization of workers since mobilizing and moving them around was expensive.<sup>90</sup> Nisar also drew Nehru's attention to the ML slogans of Islam in danger and their communal propaganda which alleged that this election was a battle between *kufir* and Islam. He, therefore, wanted visits by prominent *ulama* sympathetic to the Congress to be quickly arranged in order to boost his election prospects.

An annoyed Nehru responded to Nisar Sherwani, first expressing dismay at Fida's extraordinary missive after having 'lost his balance due to illness.' At the same time, he tried to instill courage in the Congress candidate, assuring him that the party regarded this election as the most important one given its far-reaching consequences. He promised Sherwani that the party, though financially broke, would make all the necessary arrangements to support him.<sup>91</sup> Since

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<sup>89</sup> Nisar Sherwani to Nehru, 2 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>90</sup> Nisar Sherwani to Nehru, 4 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>91</sup> Nehru to Nisar Sherwani, 5 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

Sherwani was keen on having the *ulama* to campaign for him, Nehru asked Azad to request Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani to go to Jhansi. But Nehru clearly did not have much confidence in the '*maulvi* type of individuals' and told Nisar that the election could be lost if he thought too much of them.<sup>92</sup> He cautioned his nominee, that while it was alright to have such people plugging for him, 'the correct approach should be on economic lines.'<sup>93</sup> Finally, giving some advice on the nitty-gritty of campaigning, Nehru discouraged Sherwani from wasting money on motor cars as bicycles were good enough,<sup>94</sup> and suggested that 'quiet organization and silent workers going to the villages' was what counted in the end and 'not just flashy personalities coming for a day like myself.'<sup>95</sup>

Nehru also took personal charge of the campaign after expressing his annoyance with Rafi Kidwai, the Congress election in-charge, for not having sent him any news about the Congress efforts at Jhansi.<sup>96</sup> A sum of ₹ 700 was cobbled up for election expenses, with Nehru borrowing money on his own personal surety. Nehru also wrote letters to the Congress MLAs from Jhansi district R. V. Dhulekar and Atmaram Kher and to the Congress MLAs from neighboring Banda, Diwan Shatrughan Singh and Thakur Har Prasad Singh, besides the Jalaun MLA Manni Lal Pandey exhorting them to work hard and impressing upon them the enormous importance he attached to this election. Diwan Shatrughan Singh's wife, Rani, was asked to campaign among Muslim women so that they could be persuaded to come out and vote for the Congress. Nehru also requested Abul Kalam Azad and Ghaffar Khan to accompany him to Jhansi where he himself intended to spend two full days campaigning for Sherwani. He finally deputed to Jhansi, one of his trusted lieutenants, the resourceful Congress MLA from Jaunpur, Keshav Dev Malaviya, to organize the Congress campaign while also requisitioning Muslim political workers from his hometown of Allahabad. K. M. Ashraf too was sent to Jhansi overruling suggestions that he might invite hostility due to his communist views.<sup>97</sup> Dismissing criticisms levelled against Ashraf, as the handiwork of Shaukat Ali and a handful of communal Urdu newspapers who were trying to discredit a popular Congress Muslim, Nehru confidently

<sup>92</sup> Nehru to Mohanlal Saxena, 23 June 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>93</sup> Nehru to Nisar Sherwani, 3 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>94</sup> Nehru to Nisar Sherwani, 30 June 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>95</sup> Nehru to Nisar Sherwani, 5 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>96</sup> Nehru to Rafi Kidwai, 1 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>97</sup> Nehru to Mohanlal Saxena, 22 June 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

asserted that Ashraf had had a very successful tour of Punjab as part of the MMCP and also knew Bundelkhand quite well. It must also have crossed Nehru's mind that Ashraf's presence could perhaps help swing the sizable Malkhan Rajput vote in the constituency. Diwan Shatrughan Singh too was pressed to work on his Muslim Rajput relatives in the *biradari* to persuade them to vote for the Congress. Paying attention to minute details, Nehru also made arrangements for loudspeakers, now an important part of electioneering, besides making plans for Congress workers to man each of the eighty polling booths in the constituency.

Perhaps feeling that his authority was being undercut, Rafi Kidwai seemed to go into a sulk. Admonishing his protégé Nehru responded, 'I feel sometimes that you are much to blame because you imagine things and seek no explanation for them. Or some little thing happens and you magnify it enormously. Others are of course often to blame also. The only possible way to get on in corporate life is to be continuously in touch with each other, and if necessary to quarrel with each other. Danger lies in holding oneself aloof or functioning separately without constant consultation.'<sup>98</sup> A chastened Kidwai got into the act by reaching Jhansi to help in the electioneering. Nehru also confronted his old friend Khaliqzaman who had lent his name to a religious appeal on behalf of the ML candidate in Shaukat Ali's newspaper *Khilafat*.<sup>99</sup> Nehru pointed out that this was a fight between 'progressive thought and action' on the one side, and 'sheer communalism, religious bigotry, and political reaction on the other', and wanted to ascertain where Khaliq himself stood in this regard.<sup>100</sup> Yet, at the same time, after requests from Rafi Kidwai and Keshav Dev Malaviya,<sup>101</sup> more *Maulanas* on the Congress side were pressed into the campaign.<sup>102</sup> Thus, while the Congress employed the slogans of its mass contact programme, the rhetoric of the *ulama* was also being utilized to fortify that message. Finally, Nehru came into Jhansi in the last stages of the campaign and along with Syed Mahmud of Bihar canvassed support for Sherwani for two full days. The extent of hostility and bitterness in this

<sup>98</sup> Nehru to Rafi Kidwai, 5 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>99</sup> *SWJN*, Vol. 8, 135.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Telegram to Nehru, 6 July 1937 asking for Maulvis and Khansahebs to be sent to Hamirpur; K. D. Malaviya to Nehru, 8 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>102</sup> These were Maulana Hifzur Rahman of Amroha, Maulana Bashir Ahmad from Delhi, Maulana Muhammad Mian and Maulana Shahid from Allahabad.

campaign can be gauged from the fact that Nehru's car was stoned by ML supporters as it traversed this vast constituency.

The ML candidate was a local barrister, Rafiuddin Ahmed, hailing from the Malkhan Rajput caste, which comprised a quarter of the Muslim electorate in the district. The caste *panchayat* had already thrown its weight behind Rafiuddin threatening various 'pains and penalties' against anyone who would vote against him.<sup>103</sup> This gave the ML a huge starting advantage. The ML had chosen its candidate wisely, for Rafiuddin had contested the previous election as an Independent and lost narrowly against the eventual winner. 'Islam in danger' was the ML campaign war cry during this election and it was amplified especially by Shaukat Ali, the chief ML campaigner. The veteran Khilafatist introducing himself as *Khadim-i-Kaba* (servant of the Kaba) in the many public meetings that he addressed,<sup>104</sup> talked of a possible civil war in India between Hindus and Muslims, and declared that he would work towards making a 'Spain of India'.<sup>105</sup> The ML was also helped by a quirk of fate when Rafiuddin Ahmad was wrongfully delivered a letter that Nehru had sent to Rafi Ahmad Kidwai in Jhansi. The ML candidate now proceeded to milk it for propaganda purposes, with Urdu newspapers sympathetic to the ML carrying a purported translation of the letter in which Nehru allegedly discussed details of payments to be made to the *ulama* in return for their support for the Congress candidate. Soon, these *ulama* found themselves portrayed as betrayers of their community for the sake of money, a charge that was to stick for the remainder of their lives in British India.<sup>106</sup>

But even as the ML excoriated the *ulama* on the Congress side as mercenaries and betrayers of Islam, it was actively soliciting support from anti-Congress *ulama*. In this regard, they turned to the Deobandi cleric Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi. As the scholar Muhammad Qasim Zaman in his recent biographical work on this renowned *alim* has noted, Thanawi was a 'pivotal figure in South Asian Islam'. His enormous corpus of 'juridical writings, numerous fatwas addressing questions directed to him by Muslims from all over the Indian

<sup>103</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, 13 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>104</sup> Handbill from the Bundelkhand by-election under the title 'Zaim-al Hind Maulana Shaukat Ali Sahab ka Paigham Banaam Musalmanan-i-Bundelkhand', *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>105</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, 13 July 1937, *AICC Papers, File G-61*.

<sup>106</sup> *AICC Papers, File G-61*. Newspaper cutting from *The Deccan Times*, Madras, 6 September 1937, under the headline 'Did the Congress bribe the Jamiat?' carrying the text of Nehru's letter to Rafi Kidwai, released by K.M. Ashraf to repudiate the false rumours being circulated by the ML.

subcontinent, came to be influential in his own day and have continued to shape discourses on Islamic law in post-colonial India and Pakistan'.<sup>107</sup> Thanawi was also the author of the widely influential *Bibishti Zewar*, a book seeking to guide Muslim women on what constituted proper Islamic norms, and was a part of every bride's dower in late colonial north India.<sup>108</sup> Thanawi's skepticism of the Congress and Gandhi was well known since the time of the Khilafat Movement.<sup>109</sup> His disdain for Gandhi in particular was striking as evident from his descriptions of the Mahatma as a *taghut* (idol), *shatir* (cunning), and *ayyar* (impostor) among other things. The senior cleric received a query (*istifta*) sent by voters from Jhansi asking for his opinion over whom they should vote for in this election. Thanawi consulted his protégés Zafar Ahmad Usmani and Shabbir Ali Thanawi over the *fatwa* that he should send to Jhansi.<sup>110</sup> Even though he preferred the ML over the Congress, Thanawi at this point in time clearly had reservations against the ML, unsure of its Islamic credentials, and whether it would indeed 'support Islam if it became powerful.' Zafar Ahmad Usmani's counsel resolved the impasse in the elder cleric's heart. If his *Pir* had misgivings against the ML, Usmani suggested that he send a wire to the voters of Bundelkhand asking them not to vote for the Congress.<sup>111</sup> This after all was not against his heart's desire. Thanawi expressed his happiness at this solution and a wire was accordingly sent to Jhansi with this brief advice.

The ML won the election with a comfortable majority. The party polled 2652 votes or 60 per cent of the total votes cast, an impressive accomplishment if one were to take into account the measly 180 votes its candidate had secured in the previous election held just six months earlier, ending last in the list of candidates.<sup>112</sup> The victory came as an elixir of life to the ML. A jubilant Jinnah,

<sup>107</sup> Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia* (Oxford, 2008), 1.

<sup>108</sup> See Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's Bibishti Zewar; A Partial Translation with Commentary* (Berkeley, 1990).

<sup>109</sup> See Chapter 2 in M. Q. Zaman, *Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>110</sup> A *fatwa* is 'a non-binding advisory opinion' given by a juri-consult (*mufti*) in response to a query (*istifta*) by an individual questioner (*mustafti*). *Fatwas* have 'carried high degree of authority' in Islamic history and its closest modern 'equivalent is Anglo-American legal mechanism of case-law precedent'. See Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers, *Islamic Legal Interpretations: Muftis and their Fatwas* (Cambridge and London, 1996), 3–4.

<sup>111</sup> Ahmad Said, *Maulana Ashraf Ali Sahab Thanawi aur Tebrik-i-Azadi* (Rawalpindi, 1972), 125.

<sup>112</sup> P.D. Reeves, B.D. Graham and J.M. Goodman, *A Handbook to Elections in Uttar Pradesh*,



who had not campaigned in the election, requisitioned the car and a flag used by Shaukat Ali in this election, 'like a Napoleon collecting mementoes of his war campaigns'.<sup>113</sup> Flush from this victory Shaukat Ali grandly declared that he would change his name if Congress candidates did not henceforth lose their deposits.<sup>114</sup> Along with another Deobandi *alim* Maulana Mazharuddin he visited Ashraf Ali Thanawi to thank him for his support and a *jalsa* (public meeting) was also organized at Thana Bhawan to commemorate this epic victory.<sup>115</sup>

But the Congress too came away from this election with a sense of hope, for as Nehru wrote, 'it had considerably enhanced the prestige and strength of the Congress'. Explaining his optimism, Nehru pointed out that of the 4700 votes cast in the constituency the Congress had secured nearly 2000 votes, a substantial number. The constituency itself included three sprawling districts – Jhansi, Orai and Hamirpur. In the first two districts, Nehru noted with happiness that Congress had won a clear majority and it was in Hamirpur alone, that Rafiuddin, as a local resident had won an overwhelming majority. He also pointed out that if one compared the performance of the two parties in the rural and urban areas, the Congress did overwhelmingly well in the former while the ML took the towns and the *qasbahs*. The Congress, Nehru added, would have pulled in even more of the rural vote but for the fact that the rainy season had made the roads and paths often impassable in these scattered areas. Elaborating on the reasons behind the ML's success, Nehru obliquely alluded to the ML's purchasing of votes, by referring to 'undesirable practices' and 'a small electorate of poor persons as an invitation for such practices'. He also regretted that the ML had no issues to discuss and had simply raised cries of Islam in danger. Many Muslims, he bluntly noted, had been made to swear on the Holy Quran that they would vote for the ML candidate, while the Malkhan Rajput *biradari* too had piled pressure on its caste members to vote for him. Thus, in just one polling station in Hamirpur, Rafiuddin got 900 such votes, which made all the difference. The Congress, on the contrary, had 'talked the language of politics and economics'. The Jhansi result only reinforced Nehru's belief that

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1920-1951 (Delhi, 1975), 300.

<sup>113</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Congress Aur Muslim League ka Doosra Election: Bijnor ke Intekhabat par Ek Nazar', *Hindustan*, 28 November 1937.

<sup>114</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Firqa-parvar Anjumanon ke Kaam Karne ke Tariqey aur Hamara Farz: Bundelkhand ke Zimni Intekhab ke Baz Numayan Pehloo', *Hindustan*, 29 August 1937.

<sup>115</sup> Ahmad Said, *Maulana Ashraf Ali Sabab Thanawi aur Tehrik-i-Azadi*, 125.

the MMCP was working since 'the Congress candidate who was a stranger to the constituency did remarkably well' in spite of such enormous handicaps. Among the many good things that this election accomplished was that it brought Muslims from all over the province to Jhansi, including students from Aligarh. Congress propaganda, which began a mere ten days before the elections, was much appreciated by many of these Muslims, thus raising hopes that they would go back to their respective hometowns and raise Muslim consciousness in favour of the Congress. Nehru therefore concluded on a remarkably positive note. 'The Bundelkhand election is one of the most encouraging signs of the times. It points to the inevitable growth of the Congress among the masses, both Hindu and Muslim.'<sup>116</sup>

The next election held in late October for the Bijnor and Garhwal districts seat, was seen as a test of which way the wind was blowing. It was a crucial contest held against the backdrop of the Congress ministry assuming power in Lucknow and a full blooded attempt by the party to mobilize Muslims through its MMCP. The contest would decide the fate of Hafiz Muhammad Ibrahim, the ML 'renegade', who had resigned this seat that he had won unopposed on the ML ticket a few months earlier. A protégé of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, Ibrahim had crossed over to the Congress along with his mentor and had subsequently been inducted as a Minister in the Congress government. He was seeking a fresh mandate as a matter of principle, this time on the Congress ticket again from his old Bijnore and Garhwal districts seat. Against him, the ML had again put up a local lawyer, Khan Bahadur Abdus Samih. The mood in the Congress was distinctly upbeat as Ibrahim was a local notable and also quite popular. The ML too however was buoyed by its annual 1937 session held in Lucknow that had brought into its fold, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan and his Unionists from the Punjab and Fazlul Haq and his Krishak Praja men from Bengal, besides assorted Muslim groups from all over India. As the U.P. Governor Harry Haig reported to Linlithgow, Jinnah had given the Muslims 'a very strong and definite communal lead which seems to have inspired great enthusiasm, and will obviously have a most important bearing on political developments in the near future'. Sir Sikandar, the Punjab Premier, told his Governor that such was the energy generated at the session combined with hostility towards the Congress, that if any Congressman had come to the

<sup>116</sup> See Nehru's Statement to the Press on the result of the Bundelkhand Election, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, 171–72. Nehru's sentiments were echoed by K. M. Ashraf. See 'Firqaparvar Anjumanon Ke Kaam Karne ke Tariqey aur Hamara Farz: Bundelkhand ke Zimni Intekhab ke Baaz Numayan Pehloo', *Hindustan*, 29 August 1937.

conference he would definitely have been lynched.<sup>117</sup> This, therefore, promised to be a cracker of a contest.

Shaikat Ali again led the ML charge but was joined this time by gifted Muslim orators from other parts of India such as Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, the editor of *Zamindar* of Lahore, and Khwaja Hasan Nizami from neighbouring Delhi. Zafar Ali Khan's verses set the tone of the ML campaign.

*Hafiz Ibrahim Udhar hain, Abdus Samih Idhar,  
Hardwari dars udhar hai, Shari'i taleem idhar  
Us Taraf Gandhi ke farman par Sar-i-Taslim Kham,  
Aur Rasul Allah ki Taslim ki Tanzim Idhar  
Us Taraf Nehru Paraston ke liye Bharat ka Raj,  
Hift Aqleem Idhar  
Vote Dene waalon Sunon Kaan Dil ke Kholkar,  
Khatra Imaan ko Udhar se Hai, Nabi yeh baham Idhar*

On that side stands Hafiz Ibrahim, here stands Abdus Samih  
On that side is Hardwari learning, here we have Shari'i training  
On that side lies submission to Gandhi, here stands the organization that  
submits to Allah's Prophet  
On that side is Nehru's Bharat, here you have the whole world  
O voters, open the ears of your hearts and listen, the threat to your Faith  
comes from the other side,  
There are no such dangers here.

The ML declared that a vote for Congress was a vote for *kufri*. It alleged that Hafiz Muhammad Ibrahim had committed that most reprehensible of crimes, apostasy, having gone to a temple and applied Hindu marks on his forehead and was now going around closing down mosques.<sup>118</sup> The Agra ML leader Syed Zakir Ali, whose responsibility for creating the fake poster with Jinnah's religious appeal during the Bundelkhand by-election had by now come to light, bombastically claimed that the Congress wanted to pull the Muslims down from the heights of *Furan* and *Sinai* and force them on a circumambulatory pilgrimage of Wardha *teertha*. He further alleged that while Europe had tried to wipe out Muslim culture and civilization through its cannons, the Hindus

<sup>117</sup> Emerson to Linlithgow, 21 October 1937, Linlithgow Papers, in *Towards Freedom*, Vol. 1, 1059.

<sup>118</sup> K. M. Ashraf, 'Congress aur Muslim League Ka Doosra Election: Bijnor Ke Intekhabat Par Ek Nazar', *Hindustan*, 28 November 1937.

were trying to do the same in the electoral field. Nehru was accused of banning *namaz* and *azaan* and tearing down green flags with the slogan of *Allaho Akbar* since he was an atheist. Another set of leaflets described how the Muslims would be relegated to the status of untouchables under Congress Hindu Raj, luridly portraying the scenario in 'medieval colors'.<sup>119</sup>

Khwaja Hasan Nizami repeated the allegations made at Bundelkhand that the *ulama* and Urdu papers supporting the Congress had been bribed by the party. He exhorted the electorate to fight the Congress, which was trying to conquer the Muslims through such paid quislings.<sup>120</sup> Hafiz Ibrahim was described as a Mir Jafar, while K. M. Ashraf was reviled for allegedly stating that unlike the Russians, Mussolini, or Hitler, the Congress would destroy every relic of religion and kill every religious person. It was also alleged that the Congress wanted to eliminate Urdu, stop *tazias*, end cow-slaughter and force Muslims to wear *dhotis* instead of *pyjamas*. Shaukat Ali raged that the Congress was using revenue officials to pressure tenant farmers to vote for Hafiz Ibrahim. Violence also erupted as an ML volunteer stabbed a Congress worker, Maulvi Nasir, and voters were allegedly physically intimidated by ML workers at various polling stations.<sup>121</sup>

Yet, in this election held on 27 October 1937, the Congress candidate won hands down, trouncing the ML candidate by an impressive margin. While Hafiz Ibrahim polled 7271 (70 per cent) votes, his opponent polled 2102 (30 per cent) votes. The voting percentage in the Bijnor election also climbed from a moderate 60 per cent during the Bundelkhand by-election to an impressive 71 per cent, demonstrating the keen interest that these elections were now generating in the Muslim electorate. A delighted Nehru in his speech to the assembled delegates at the AICC Calcutta session declared that:

our mass contact move has succeeded beyond our most optimistic calculations, so much so that today the Congress claims a far larger number of Muslims than the ML can do. A few days ago at Bijnor there had been a test of strength between the Congress and the League nominee and you

<sup>119</sup> *AICC File G-32/1938*: 'Some Notes on the General Approach and Propaganda Methods of the AIML with Special Reference to Communal Relations'. Hasan Nizami was taken to court by the local newspaper *Madina*, which supported the Congress. Nizami had to subsequently withdraw his allegations and issue a formal apology to the newspaper.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Nehru to Ismail Khan, 10 November 1937, in *Jinnah-Nehru Correspondence, including Gandbi-Jinnah and Nehru-Nawab Ismail Correspondence* (Lahore, 1960).

will hear shortly that the Congress nominee has succeeded with a thumping majority.<sup>122</sup>

The decisive Congress victory also sent shockwaves through the ML circles. A local notable wrote to Jinnah that 'the defeat at Bijnaur has spread a very bad effect among the Muslims all over the country and particularly in the neighbouring districts. In my own village where the majority is of Muslims, are thinking of where to go (sic).'<sup>123</sup> Ibrahim's opponent in the Bijnaur by-election, Abdus Samih, soon resigned his membership of the ML and became a four-anna member of the Congress.<sup>124</sup>

With the rubber tied at 1–1, the Congress and ML workers began fanning into Moradabad, Saharanpur and Bulandshahr for the next three by-elections, to be held on 9, 13, 18 December respectively. These elections were expected to provide a clear indication about which party enjoyed support among the Muslim electorate and in all three seats the ML won decisively delivering a serious blow to the Congress. The losses were particularly unsettling for the Congress and Nehru himself since all three by-elections were held in predominantly rural constituencies whose Muslims, especially the lower class *Momin*, were believed to be sympathetic to the Congress. Nehru again campaigned intensively in all three constituencies even as Jinnah stayed away, with the ML campaign mostly being run by its U.P. leadership. Stunned by this reversal the Congress could only come up with stock responses expressing dismay at the ML's communal propaganda and anger at its avoidance of real economic and political issues. An article in the *Hindustan* analysing the debacle of the luckless Nisar Sherwani who was again fielded by the Congress in Bulandshahr but again bit the dust to complete a hat-trick of defeats, provides a classic example.<sup>125</sup> It argued that even though this was a predominantly rural constituency, the poorer Muslims only had a slight majority over the zamindars, taluqdars, and the upper classes. While the ML got all the upper class votes, the paper regretted that the Congress could not achieve the same with the poorer Muslims. The reason given was that the latter were economically dependent on the former and thus

<sup>122</sup> *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 30 October 1937, in *Towards Freedom*, Vol. 1, 1093.

<sup>123</sup> See Rao Hamid Ali Khan to Jinnah, in Mukhtar Masood (ed.), *Eyewitnesses of History: A Collection of Letters Addressed to Quaid-i-Azam* (Karachi, 1968), 95–96. Also see Shafaat Ahmad Khan to Jinnah, 70–72.

<sup>124</sup> *The Leader*, 18 November 1937.

<sup>125</sup> Rafiq Sehbai, 'League Jiti Ya Congress: Moradabad, Saharanpur aur Bulandshahr ke Zimni Intekhabat par ek Nazar', *Hindustan*, 16 January 1938.

could not risk their livelihoods by voting against their patrons' wishes. The article bemoaned that besides facing economic pressure, the poor were also given money for their votes, and therefore went against their hearts desire and voted for the ML. Adding up the votes of the upper classes with those of the deserting poor, the ML victory was thus a foregone conclusion. The Congress, however, took heart from the fact that its candidate still won a majority of the votes among the rural poor. It also expressed optimism that before long the MMCP would raise their revolutionary consciousness, enabling them to smash their economic shackles and overthrow their oppressors on the path to independence and a socialist state.

In the same vein, the explanation for the Moradabad debacle made particular mention of two widely circulated 'communal' cartoons. In one of them the Congress candidate for Moradabad, Maulvi Basheer Ahmad, was depicted as being carried on a Hindu bier for cremation. The cartoon portrayed Gandhi, Nehru, Malaviya and Pant conducting the bier to the burning *ghat* while the funeral pyre was ignited by Hafiz Ibrahim and Rafi Kidwai, the two Congress Muslims. At the center of the cartoon the figure of Shaukat Ali exclaimed 'contrast the beginning to the end', implying that a Muslim who joined the Congress ended up being a *kafir* (infidel) in afterlife'.<sup>126</sup> In another cartoon, Congress leaders were depicted in humiliating positions after being beaten by Jinnah even as the Kings of Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan applauded his victory.

But it is to the Saharanpur election that one must turn to, for it allows one to examine the critical nexus developing between the ML and a section of the Deobandi *ulama* led by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi. This election had an added significance since Deoband was part of the Saharanpur constituency and the contest here was in many ways a proxy battle between the Thanawi and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani camps at the Darul Uloom. Thanawi took a more decisive stance this time, shedding the reticence he had shown during the Jhansi election. He first debunked the alleged *fatwa* issued by Madani, which claimed that voting for the ML candidate was impermissible (*najayaz*) and cause for punishment (*maujab-i-azaab*). He further decried the claims of the 'nationalist' *ulama* that voting for the Congress candidate was not only good for liberation of the country now but also for achieving personal liberation in afterlife. Categorically supporting the ML candidate Maulvi Munfai Ali, Thanawi in his own *fatwa* (given in response to a query by a voter) declared

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<sup>126</sup> Some Notes on the General Approach and Propaganda Methods of the AIML with Special Reference to Communal relations', *AICC File G-32/1938*.

that the ML candidate was someone who was personally known to him as an observant Muslim and an experienced, honest lawyer.<sup>127</sup> The Congress candidate, Thanawi asserted, was not a well-wisher of Muslims. Any efforts by Muslims to help the Congress candidate would be harmful to the community while support for the ML candidate was both excellent and permissible for the Muslims (*jayaz aur fazal*). Big posters with Thanawi's *fatwa* written in bold letters were put up in all the constituencies to underline his support for the ML.<sup>128</sup>

The Congress pushed back forcefully, condemning Thanawi's *fatwa*.<sup>129</sup> An essay in the *Hindustan* pointed out that the Maulana, by asking voters to vote for the ML candidate on religious grounds, seemed to think of votes as *zakat* or *khairaat*, which a good Muslim should donate. A vote, on the contrary, it argued, was a very worldly thing and in order to put it to good use, an unemployed person needed to give his vote for someone who would raise the prospects of employment, a peasant for tax reduction and a worker to effect a wage enhancement. It further asserted that the Maulana's designation of the Congress as a Hindu *jamaat* was a misnomer since the Hindus were as divided as the Muslims along class lines. Reiterating the emphasis on class as the basic marker of community as opposed to religion, it pointed to the fallacy of assuming that the Muslim community as a whole had common economic, political, or social interests. It noted that conflicts between a peasant and a zamindar or between a capitalist and a worker were imminent since they were class enemies even if both happened to be Muslim. Finally, the article ridiculed Thanawi for warning Muslims against any intimate friendship (*dili dosti*) with the Hindus on the grounds that it would destroy them. As the article dryly noted, joining the Congress was not tantamount to making friendship with Pandit Nehru. Indeed, there were several Congressmen who had never even met or spoken to Nehru. But the Congress charge again was in vain. Munfai Ali, the ML candidate, easily won the election taking in nearly 60 per cent of the votes polled against the Congress candidate's 40 per cent. The Congress was now faced with a growing nexus between the ML and an

<sup>127</sup> Mufti Muhammad Shafi (ed.), *Ifadat-i-Ashrafiya dar Masail-i-Siyasiyya: Siyasat-i-hazira, Muslim League, Congress Vaghaira ke Mutalliq Hazrat Mujaddid al Millat, Hakim al Ummat, Hazrat Maulana Ashraf Ali Sahab Thanawi ke Irshadat ka Majmua* (Deoband, 1945), 65–66.

<sup>128</sup> Rafiq Sehbai, 'League Jiti Ya Congress: Moradabad, Saharanpur, aur Bulandshahr ke Zimni Intekhabat par Ek Nazar', *Hindustan*, 16 January 1938.

<sup>129</sup> 'Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi Election Mein', *Hindustan*, 19 December 1937.

influential section of the Deobandi *ulama*, which would prove crucial for the ML's growth as a mass organization.

### Ashraf Ali Thanawi and the Muslim League

Thanawi had initially been skeptical about the ML as evident from the *fatwa* he had sent to the Jhansi voters in which he merely asked them to oppose the Congress, without committing himself in favour of the ML. He had even described the ML to his associates as a one eyed man as compared to the Congress' blind man, hardly a vigorous endorsement for the party. Thanawi, however, began to show greater interest in Muslim politics and the ML in the aftermath of the assumption of power by the provincial Congress ministries in 1937. The consequent split that developed within the Muslim ranks as a result of the JUH siding with the Congress, and the ML viscerally opposing it, clearly worried the senior *alim*. This split had assumed an especially pronounced form among the *ulama*, and Thanawi, therefore, took the initiative to repair this breach by attempting to mediate between the JUH and the ML. He, therefore, sent a detailed questionnaire simultaneously to both the groups in order to ascertain their views on a variety of questions facing the Muslim community in India.

The questionnaire to the JUH enquired about its relationship to the Congress, its views on Congress policies and sought to explore the possibilities of bringing peace between it and the ML.<sup>130</sup> Was it better for Muslims to join the Congress in an individual capacity in order to influence its policies to their own advantage from within? Or would an overarching communal pact between the ML and the Congress be more advantageous for securing Muslim communal rights? Was the Congress serious over its demand of complete independence or did it seek to rule over India under the shadow of the British sword? Would independence be good for Muslims given that it would not result in an Islamic government, but a government dominated by the Hindus due to their numerical superiority? How could one be sure that the Hindus really wanted complete independence as they were claiming? What was the JUH doing to counter Hindu atrocities on Muslims in the aftermath of the Congress ministries assuming power? Did it have any advice for Muslims over *Bande Mataram* or saluting the tricolour which were un-Islamic activities? How was the JUH support for the Congress justified since the latter had a number of prominent socialists and other godless elements

<sup>130</sup> Mufti Muhammad Shafi (ed.), *Ifadat-i-Ashrafiya dar Masail-i-Siyasiyya: Siyasat-i-hazira* (Deoband, 1945), 53.



in its ranks? Did the JUH have any plans to counter the Congress land tenancy legislation that was aimed against Muslim landlords? What was the nature of the JUH's differences with the ML? Was it aware of the harm that this split was causing to the Muslim community? Could the JUH instead of opposing the ML join it and proceed to purify it from within, ridding it of atheists and ungodly elements? The JUH however refused to respond to this lengthy questionnaire from Thanawi revealing a serious split among the Deobandi *ulama*.

The ML was sent a different questionnaire.<sup>131</sup> It had a dozen thoughtfully formulated questions. Why was joining the Congress by Muslims on an individual basis deemed harmful by the ML? Was independence possible without allying with the Congress, and if so, what would be its nature? Would Muslim aloofness from the Congress delay independence? Could the ML stop Muslims from joining the Congress? Many Muslims had already joined the Congress especially after it assumed power. If it was able to stop a few Muslims now, what would it gain when a greater portion had already joined the Congress? Was there any truth behind the newspaper report in the *Madina* of 13 December 1937, that most functionaries of the ML were supporters and well-wishers of the English and that the ML was an 'English poison'? How did the ML react to the allegation that it was not an active organization with any ideology or programme and had not taken any practical action so far for the benefit of Muslims? Since it was fighting the Congress would it not strengthen the English and weaken the Congress thrust towards independence? What steps had the ML taken for organizing the Muslims and for their economic, religious and cultural progress, and what were its future plans in this regard? If after seeking necessary assurances the ML were to join hands with the Congress, would it be better to dissolve itself in the Congress or continue its separate existence as an organization of the Muslims? If the *ulama* wanted to become ML members, would they be given a position in the organization only through the process of an election? And if they did not like the election method would there be any other option left for them? What honour and respect would the *ulama* receive in the ML, and in case of a disagreement among these *ulama* themselves, how would a dispute between them be resolved? How would the ML end the schisms that had emerged in the community on account of its conflict with the JUH and what was the nature of the agreement it visualized to end this conflict with the JUH? Had the ML understood the importance of *tabligh* (proselytization) among the Untouchables not just for religious but

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 55–65.

political purposes? If so, what practical steps had it taken in this direction and did it have any future plans in this regard?

In stark contrast to the JUH's studied silence, Nawab Ismail Khan, the UPML President, crafted detailed responses to each of these questions. He was ably assisted in this exercise by Syed Hasan Reyaz, a party Secretary in U.P. who would go on to become the editor of the *Manshoor*, the ML's flagship Urdu newspaper that was financed by Jinnah and published from Delhi. The ML was clearly eager to convey the impression that the party attached great significance to the concerns of Muslim divines, and was keen to solicit their support in its battle against the Congress. In response to the first question, Ismail Khan was emphatic that an unmitigated disaster would befall the Muslim community if Muslims all over the country were to join the Congress on an individual basis. Muslims would always remain a small minority in a Congress dominated by the numerically superior Hindus, and their opinion would never have any impact on Congress ideology. In order to substantiate his claim, he pointed out that of the twenty one members in the existing Congress Working Committee only one was a Muslim, while of the 300 AICC members only seven or eight were Muslims. Ismail Khan also debunked the argument that Muslims would be able to capture the Congress organization, make it responsive to their concerns, and indeed bend it to their will if they joined the party in sufficiently large numbers. He dismissed this line of reasoning as fallacious, arguing that on the contrary, such a move would only trigger a massive counter response from the Hindu side as they would hurry to join the Congress in ever larger numbers in order to maintain their control over the party organization. Ismail Khan brought up another serious handicap that the Muslims would face in this numbers game. While Muslim women stayed in *purdah*, Hindu women were under no such constraints and thus were always free to join the Congress. Hindus would, therefore, outnumber the Muslims by a much larger margin of 5:1 and consequently the Muslims would never be in a position to get any of their resolutions passed against any decisions made by the Hindu majority.

Ismail Khan next turned to the provincial implications of Muslims joining the Congress on an individual basis. The logic of numbers meant that Muslims would be in a majority in the provincial Congress committees in the Muslim majority provinces like Punjab, Sind, Bengal and NWFP. But these majorities, the Nawab contended, were again going to be futile since the AICC and Congress Working Committee could always shoot down the decisions made by these provincial committees. These bodies would not be able to even protest against such decisions of the Congress High Command given its rigid code of

party discipline. Besides, the Congress had explicitly ruled out provincial self-determination. Ismail Khan therefore insisted that the best course for Muslims to adopt would be to organize separately under the ML. Only then would they be able to emerge as an independent second force. Even though their numbers would be inferior as compared to the Hindus, they would be powerful due to their distinct status. While Muslim voice inside the Congress was sure to be silenced by the Hindu majority, by standing apart from it, the Muslims would be able to make their voice heard throughout the world.

Ismail Khan conceded that it was true that independence could only be gained through Hindu–Muslim unity. Yet, by joining the Congress on an individual basis, there was a great danger of Muslims losing their Islamic identity and being left with only an Indian identity. On the contrary, Ismail Khan assured Thanawi, that if the community as a whole were to join the ML their separate identity would be greatly reinforced. Such a move would also give strength and stature to the ML to negotiate with the Congress as the sole representative Muslim organization. The Congress too would be left with no option but to then come forward and present itself as the representative organization of the Hindus. Once this was achieved, the two parties could have their separate independent existence but come together on specific issues. In this regard, Ismail Khan made a significant comparison which is noteworthy. The UPML leader argued that if England and France could ally together to take on Germany without forsaking their separate identities, the Hindus and Muslims could likewise do the same. Ismail Khan, therefore, wanted the Muslims to maintain their separate identity so that the Congress would be forced to come to them for a comprehensive communal settlement. Under no circumstances could or would the ML ever dissolve its separate entity.

Responding to the third question Ismail Khan warned that Muslims finding themselves perpetually dominated by the Hindus in the Congress party would lose their passion for freedom. And just like the English regime had lost the passion of its Indian soldiers and could make them fight only by throwing money at them, Indian independence would end up getting delayed if Muslims lost their ardour for freedom. On the other hand, if Hindus and Muslims organized separately, and Muslims were assured that their Islamic identity would remain secure in a free India where they too could live as an independent nation (*azad qaum*), then Hindus and Muslims could certainly fight for freedom as allies, thus hastening independence.

In response to Thanawi's query about the ML's ability to stop the reportedly large-scale Muslim influx into Congress ranks, Ismail Khan described these

claims as an absolute fabrication. He expressed confidence in the ML's ability to not only stop Muslims from joining the Congress but indeed stopping the Congress' victory juggernaut in the provincial elections. As he pointed out, the ML had in the recent past contested five by-elections and won four of them. It had lost only in Bijnor, a loss that the Nawab attributed to the party's lack of proper organization at the time and the personal popularity of Hafiz Muhammad Ibrahim, the Congress candidate. Ismail Khan had no hesitation in telling Thanawi that the ML would emerge as an equally large and mighty organization as the Congress party. As he noted, the Congress too had started off as a weak party that had to contend with the formidable might of the colonial state and its Hindu allies who were a part of the state apparatus. Yet, over time, it had grown to render those very Hindus powerless and unrepresentative. Ismail Khan compared Muslims currently in the Congress to those earlier *sarkari* Hindus. They would certainly be rendered helpless once the ML organized itself vigorously on a strong communal basis.

In response to the question about the ML being full of well-wishers of the British government, Ismail Khan reminded Thanawi that the ML was no longer the old moribund party of yore but an active mass-based party with a new programme and creed whose central motif was complete independence for India. A total revolution (*mukammal inqalab*) had swept through the party at its October 1937 Lucknow session. It was now a democratic organization whose doors were open to all Muslims and no longer restricted to an exclusive few. All of its committees were now manned by elected members. Indeed, it was now more democratic than the Congress since it had a two *anna* membership compared to the Congress party's four *anna* membership. As regards the ML being an 'English poison', Ismail Khan noted that this was a term coined by Sir Akbar Hydari, the Prime Minister of Hyderabad state. The same Sir Akbar Hydari had not given permission to even the Congress to organize in Hyderabad. As for the presence of loyalists of the Raj in the party as alleged by the ML's detractors, Ismail Khan assured Thanawi that such individuals had no chance of influencing it from within, leave alone dominating its affairs. He reminded the senior *alim* that all ML members were now required to sign the party's pledge that they stood for India's complete independence. However, if in spite of their taking this pledge, some ML members still remained loyalists of the Crown in their hearts, the ML could do not do much about the matter. Ismail Khan compared this problem to the one faced by the *ulama* themselves when it came to unobservant Muslims. It was after all customary for the *ulama* to accept as Muslims, those who affirmed their adherence to the essentials of the

faith and to not question what lay in their hearts. The ML stood in a similar predicament and could not vouch for what lay in the hearts of some of their members. Ismail Khan, however, assured Thanawi that in spite of the possible presence of some *munafiq* (dissemblers) in ML ranks, given the new conditions in the party, they would not be able to bend the organization to their point of view. To further ease Thanawi's burdens on this count, the Nawab also pointed out that the Congress too had such *munafiq* and yet it had never refused them admission.

Protesting at the depiction of the ML as an inactive organization with no ideology or program, Ismail Khan strongly defended the ML's record since its formation by pointing to its strong policy vis-a-vis the British government. The ML, he reminded Thanawi, had been a key ally of the Congress in the efforts to force the government to promulgate the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919. The importance of the ML as a key player in Indian politics had never been in doubt right from its inception or else the Congress would never have signed the Lucknow Pact of 1916. Ismail Khan went on to make the astounding claim that the ML was at the very forefront of the Khilafat agitation since the Khilafat Committee was a part of the ML. Perhaps, he was retrospectively claiming that glory since Jinnah had stayed out of it while the leaders of the movement such as Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali became active in ML politics again only after the collapse of Non-Cooperation. But whether this claim would have impressed Thanawi or not is doubtful given the Maulana's decidedly dim view of the Khilafat agitation, and particularly of its leadership as noted earlier. Nonetheless, having underlined the ML's activist record as well as its mass following, Ismail Khan also provided reasons for why the party had not participated in the latest round of anti-colonial struggles during the Civil Disobedience Movement. The simple reason for Muslims staying aloof from this latest round of mass struggles was that they were not directed against the British Government but against the Muslims themselves, reflecting Hindu anger over Muslim rejection of the Nehru Report.

Ismail Khan next outlined the steps the ML had taken since October 1937 to organize itself in order to protect the economic, religious and cultural rights of the Muslims. The party's political programme was now clear in as much as it demanded complete independence for India while at the same time seeking to protect the rights of Muslims and other minorities against the communal designs and domination of the Hindu majority. The ML was actively organizing ordinary Muslims to build strength of the community in every town, village and *qasbah* and common Muslims were being made its members. Ismail Khan also

informed Thanawi that the ML was organizing a large youth body, presumably the Muslim League National Guards, popularizing Muslim artisanal products in order to ensure their economic well-being and also agitating for banning interest on loans (*sood mansukh*). This last reference was no doubt meant to burnish the party's Islamic credentials and also please the senior *alim* who was very much in favour of such a move. Ismail Khan also asked Thanawi to look at the ML's socio-economic resolution to satisfy himself that the ML had a well-thought-out and clear-cut socio-economic programme.

Finally, addressing the crucial question about the position of the *ulama* in the ML, Ismail Khan declared that if they wanted to join party committees, they did not have to necessarily go through the process of elections in the party organization since they could always be co-opted into them by the party executive. He also solemnly promised on behalf of the ML that the *ulama's* opinion in religious matters would receive the same importance in the party as it did in the Muslim community at large. And as far as resolving disagreements that might emerge among the *ulama* themselves on various matters, Ismail Khan played it safe by noting that they could be resolved in a manner that was in accord with the Quran and the Hadith. Responding to Thanawi's concerns over the damage that the ML's rift with the JUH was causing to the Muslim community, Ismail Khan's proposed solution was that the JUH confine itself to the religious field, leaving the political, communal, cultural and other matters to the care of the ML. Finally, on the question of *tabligh* among untouchables, Ismail Khan acknowledged the obvious importance of such a programme. He, however, pointed out that the ML had not taken any steps in this direction since it had not had any cooperation from the *ulama* thus far. The party, he suggested, would only be too happy to ally with the *ulama* whenever they commenced upon this important work.

These replies were no doubt to Thanawi's liking for a subsequent *istifta* (query) by Maulvi Munfai Ali, the Saharanpur MLA belonging to the ML, gave the *Hakim al Ummat* the pretext for expressing his close relationship with the ML as also his unambiguous opposition to the Congress. This *fatwa*, which came to be known as *Tanzim-al-Muslimeen*, was eventually read out at the AIML Patna session by his protégé Zafar Ahmad Usmani.<sup>132</sup> Expressing happiness at the signs of Muslim awakening in India, Thanawi emphasized the urgent necessity of politically organizing the community under its own separate organization, for otherwise its identity would get erased. Such a *tanzim* however

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 67–74.

had to be modeled in accordance with the commands of the *Shariah*. Thanawi acknowledged that no organization as yet existed in the country, which could perform this task. Even the ML was not organized on Shari'i principles at the moment. Yet, Thanawi concluded that between the Congress and the ML, the latter was certainly better for the Muslims to join. After all the ML was an organization of Muslims who affirmed the *Kalima* in contrast to the Congress which was full of unbelievers. It was, therefore, easier to bring it closer to the *Shariah*, since its members saw Islam as the true faith, as against the Congress whose members did not accept it at all. He, therefore, saw Muslims joining the ML as a welcome first step in their awakening. The ML leadership needed to take the next step and start reforming the organization to bring it in line with Shari'i principles. Thanawi wanted the party's ordinary members to keep their leaders on their toes in pursuance of this task, and help them in the removal of deficiencies from the organization. The ML leadership could always turn to the *ulama* for guidance, advice, as well as practical help as they attempted to improve the overall health of the party. Thanawi expressed satisfaction that the community was getting organized in Allah's name and not in the name of nationalism (*watan parasti*). He hoped that the ML would eventually become Allah's *lashkar* (army).<sup>133</sup> He concluded the *fatwa* by exhorting the ML to keep their *tanzim* going, and not let it merge it with the Congress.

A letter threatening to assassinate Thanawi in his Sufi lodge if he did not withdraw this *fatwa* did nothing to budge him from his stance and only served to make the senior cleric even more determined.<sup>134</sup> While placing this matter before the public in a statement, he further underlined his active engagement with the ML. He now claimed that he sent regular letters of advice to the party in connection with its reforming efforts and pointed to the delegation that he had sent to the recent Delhi meeting of the ML in 1939.<sup>135</sup> He regretted that another delegation that was to be sent to the earlier 1938 AIML Bombay

<sup>133</sup> Ahmad Saeed, *Maulana Ashraf Ali Sabab Thanawi aur Tehrik-i-Azadi* (Rawalpindi, 1972), 137.

<sup>134</sup> *Ifadat-i-Ashrafiya*, 84.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. As Mufti Muhammad Shafi in his 'Introduction' to *Ifadat-i-Ashrafiya* noted, a *majlis* of the *ulama* under the title *Daawat-al-Haq* was created whose delegates at different times and places worked to propagate religious values among the leaders of the ML as well as the vast body of ordinary Muslims. Thanawi himself wrote several letters (*khutoot tablighi*) to Mr Jinnah and other leaders of the ML. He was optimistic that if the *ulama* became united and worked hard at *tabligh* the ML organization would be transformed in a very short time. Shafi claims that in response these leaders expressed their intentions of incorporating these religious commands.

meeting under the leadership of his protégé Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, had to be cancelled at the last moment owing to Usmani's mother sudden ill health. Thanawi concluded his statement with the optimism that if Muslims in general and *ulama* in particular were to put relentless pressure on the ML leaders to compel them to become more religiously oriented, the Muslim League would become a Muslim League in the truest sense of the word.

The senior *alim* conceded that the ML leaders still had some work to do before they could be seen as conscientious and observant Muslims. However, he decried any public criticism of the ML leadership for their shortcomings in this regard as he feared that it would only make them more stubborn and unyielding. He instead emphasized the virtues of patient and quiet counseling. This method was perhaps slow but its effects, he insisted, would be long-lasting. At the same time though, Thanawi dismissed criticisms of ML leaders as being non-observant Muslims as a case of the pot calling the kettle black. This was a charge which was bound to singe the nationalist *ulama* who had been most vocal in their denunciations of the ML leadership and Jinnah in particular. The ML leaders, even if they were not practicing Muslims, were still Muslims and it was always possible for them to someday become proper Muslims. The Congress leaders, on the other hand, were not even Muslims and hence beyond redemption.

To further justify his alliance with the unobservant ML leaders, Thanawi invoked the *seerat* literature on the biography of the Prophet. He pointed out that the Prophet was quoted as clearly stating that it was permissible for Muslims to fight alongside the *Khawarij* (Kharijites) in their battles against the *Mosbreks*. Thanawi, however, hastened to add that the ML leaders, even though their shortcomings were obvious, were certainly not as debased as the *Khawarij*. Hence, joining them in their battles against the Congress was eminently suitable.<sup>136</sup> It needs to be noted that nowhere did Thanawi make an issue of Jinnah being a Shia. From these arguments Thanawi made it clear in no uncertain terms as to where his preferences lay. Indeed, he claimed support for his position from other Deobandi colleagues declaring that he had shown the *fatwa* to several of these eminent divines and had received their wholehearted endorsement.

Thanawi's protégé, Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani later commented on Thanawi's impact on ML affairs while recounting his memories of the 1939 AIML Patna session, which was attended by a Deobandi delegation.<sup>137</sup> When the delegation reached Patna the day before the ML's annual session, Shabbir

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>137</sup> Ahmad Saeed, *Maulana Asbraf Ali Sahab Thanawi aur tebrik-i-Azadi*, 130.



Ali Thanawi, Ashraf Ali's nephew and a member of the delegation, made it known that the *ulama* would not participate in the next day's sessions till they had an opportunity to meet Jinnah and ascertain his views regarding various aspects of the ML's ideology. Reacting with alacrity, Liaquat Ali Khan arranged their meeting with Jinnah that very same evening, clearly indicating the ML leadership's eagerness to please the *ulama*. At the meeting the delegation, according to Zafar Ahmad, expressed its strongly held view that the Muslims were a religious community (*mazhabi qaum*) and until and unless religion was attached to their politics, the ML would not succeed in gaining their affection. They particularly pointed to the political careers of the Ali brothers, Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, which they argued, had taken off only after they 'applied some religious color' to their politics. Jinnah too was, therefore, urged to combine religion in the ML's politics. Zafar Ahmad recounts Jinnah's initial hesitation and his view that religion and politics should be kept free from each other. The *ulama*, however, swiftly responded stating such a model of politics was European and quite contrary to politics in Islam where no such separation had ever existed, and religious and political authority were usually fused in one personality. They argued that this had indeed been the state of affairs when Islam was flourishing. It was only after political authority was divorced from its religious role that problems arose in Islamic world as in the case of Turkey under Mustafa Kamal. His abolition of the Caliphate along with other reforms had devastated Turkey, completely depriving it of all of its previous power and prestige and reducing it to just another state in the world. This line of reasoning, Zafar Ahmad claimed, had a deep impact on the *Qaid's* mind for in his next day speech at the Patna session he proclaimed that Islam was not just a religion but a total way of life. The speech prompted Maulana Mazharuddin, the editor of *Al Aman*, Delhi, to plaster the front page of the following day's newspaper with the headline, 'The impact of *Hakim al Ummat* Thanawi's thoughts on Jinnah's speech'.

The delegation finally impressed upon Jinnah that while they did not wish to make any great demands of the ML leadership, they expected them to at least become regular *namazis*. To emphasize their seriousness on this count, they suggested that Jinnah should perform *namaz* along with the whole community on the following day. The *Qaid* apprehending trouble exclaimed that disputes could arise over even the seemingly trifling matter of who should be the prayer leader – whether it should be a Deobandi, a Sunni, or a Shia? This would therefore not be good tactics especially at a time when the ML was trying to present the Muslims of India as one united political community. The

*Qaid's* apprehensions were however laid to rest after he was assured that given his popularity the whole community would perform *namaz* behind whomever Jinnah himself stood during the prayer session. And as Zafar Ahmad recalls, that is what exactly happened. At 1 pm on the following day, the Patna ML session was adjourned for prayers. The *Qazi* of the town assumed the role of the prayer leader. Jinnah then went up and stood behind him, and in response, the whole gathering followed suit and stood behind them to pray.

Thanawi's growing alignment with the ML was also underlined by the *fatwas* he issued on the controversial issues of Urdu, *Bande Mataram* and the tricolour.<sup>138</sup> On the question of Urdu, Thanawi declared that the defence of Urdu was tantamount to the defence of the faith. If indeed Urdu were to die, the combined treasures of Indian Muslims would be lost since their religious books translated from Arabic and Persian, which provided religious education to ordinary Muslims, would no longer be available. Responding to an *istifta* (query) from a correspondent from Farrukhabad district on *Bande Mataram*, Thanawi wrote that singing this song and saluting the tricolour at the end of its recitation were impermissible under the *Shariah*. Castigating the Congress for imposing these activities on the Muslims, he acidly commented that the English were more careful over matters concerning the religious sensibilities of people since they had been the rulers over India for a while and had thus developed some farsightedness. The Congress, on the other hand, was new to the business of ruling, and intoxicated with power, acted without care or foresight.

### *Thanawi's Critique of the JUH Ulama and Madani's Theory of Muttahida Qaumiyat*

Even as his engagement with the ML deepened, Thanawi's ties with the *ulama* supporting the Congress grew increasingly strained. He declined an invitation to participate in the JUH's 1939 Delhi session and even refused to send a message to the convention citing the delay in sending him the official invitation.<sup>139</sup> He, instead, publicly reasserted that if the *ulama* joined the Congress it would prove ruinous for the Muslims. It was, therefore, imperative for them to publicly announce Muslim disaffection (*bezari*) with the Congress. In a later opinion, Thanawi laid out a more elaborate explanation to back this position. Here he categorically declared that the question of Muslims joining the Congress could

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 34–36.

<sup>139</sup> *Ifadat-i-Ashrafiya*, 88.

not even be a matter for discussion. Such an act was plainly impermissible since the evils associated with joining the Congress were clearly evident. Thanawi defended this reasoning in the light of the *Shariah* which clearly laid out main principles or roots (*asl*), and secondary principles or branches (*furoo*) derived from these main principles, that provided guidance on questions of permissibility and impermissibility. Thus, under the *Shariah*, a thing in itself (such as joining the Congress) could be permissible but it became impermissible on account of the associated evils that necessarily came with such a move. But in this context, Thanawi made it clear that joining the Congress was impermissible at the level of main principles itself, for it did not fulfill conditions (*quyood*) that were necessary to allow Muslims to join it. As he explained, the main condition that needed to be fulfilled before Muslims could join any organization was that the rule of Islam had to be dominant within it. A second necessary condition was that non-Muslims had to be in a position of subservience in that organization. Thanawi concluded that since these conditions were never going to be fulfilled in the case of the Congress, it was therefore impermissible for Muslims to join the organization.

Thanawi went on to demolish all other justifications for Muslims joining the Congress that had been put forth, especially by the nationalist *ulama*. Here he specifically targeted Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani's theory of *Muttahida Qaumiyyat* that posited a composite nationalism of all Indians in which Hindus and Muslims could be equal participants.<sup>140</sup> Thanawi admonished the nationalist *ulama* for trying to buttress this theory by turning to some reports in the Hadith, having failed to find evidence to support their position in the books of *Fiqh*. This move, he argued, was new from the Shari'i point of view for three reasons. To begin with, the *ulama* needed to possess certain qualities to perform such *ijtihad*, and as he sardonically noted, these qualities (*ausaf-i-ijtihad*) were certainly not possessed by the nationalist *ulama*. Thanawi was on solid ground here for it is one of the fundamental Deobandi beliefs that there are no *mujtahids* in this day and age. Indeed, no Deobandi would dare to claim that he was performing *ijtihad*, and could at best affirm adherence to

<sup>140</sup> The theory espoused a composite nationalism for all Indians and insisted that Muslims shared a common nationality with the Hindus, and on that basis, exhorted Muslims to join the Congress. Madani argued that there was a famous precedent for such a Hindu-Muslim compact in the form of a pact between the Prophet and the Jews in Medina that he claimed had been recorded in the Hadith. For an analysis of Madani's thought see Barbara Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani: The Jihad for Islam and India's Freedom* (Oxford, 2009).

*taqlid*. Secondly, Thanawi pointed out that even in the Hadith, there were two kinds of narrations (*rawayat*); those which were authenticated and thus reliable, and those that were unauthenticated and hence suspect. The narrations being utilized by the nationalist *ulama*, Thanawi insisted, fell into the latter category. Furthermore, the nationalist *ulama* had not taken the pains to ascertain the reliability of these reports. And here Thanawi placed the burden of proof on the nationalist *ulama* for finding the necessary authentication for the Hadith that they were relying on in order to substantiate their argument of *Muttahida Qaumiyat*.

Next, Thanawi went on to make a case against the nationalist *ulama*'s very interpretation of even the unauthenticated Hadith that they had been invoking. Even if these reports of the Hadith could finally be authenticated, Thanawi argued that there were conditions in these Hadith that barred deductions of the sort that the nationalist *ulama* were making. In this context, he declared that he had re-read the *Seerat Ibn-i-Hisham*, the text from which narrations of the Hadith referring to the covenant between the Prophet and the Jews had been cited by the nationalist *ulama*. He acknowledged that in the covenant, the term used to describe Muslims and those who fought alongside them was 'one people' (*ummah wahida*) in order to distinguish them from other people. However, Thanawi clarified that the covenant was also very explicit about the position of the Muslims and the Jews in their mutual relationship. The primary condition that it insisted upon was that Muslims had to be the leaders of this *ummah wahida* while the Jews could only be in the position of followers. And in case of any dispute between the two, the covenant explicitly declared that Allah and his Prophet would sit in judgment to resolve the dispute. Thanawi further emphasized that the condition that the Prophet would be the judge in such cases had been explicitly agreed upon by both the parties. Given this condition in the covenant and the absence of such a condition governing a possible covenant between the Congress and the Muslims, Thanawi asserted that Muslim participation in the Congress was clearly impermissible.

Extending his analysis of this covenant between the Muslims and the Jews, Thanawi further reasoned that it was neither extraordinary nor in a class of its own; and more importantly, it could not be construed as a precedent for the sorts of compromises that the nationalist *ulama* were advocating between the Muslims and the Congress. He argued that the Medinian covenant between Muslims and Jews was very similar to ones that later took place between the Muslims and the Dhimmis. The apparent difference between the two was only due to the misleading wording of the former, which Thanawi attributed

to the conditions prevailing during the time of the Prophet. As he observed, the Prophet wrote the covenant before *Jizya* was imposed and Islam was not in a position of dominance. Thus, the earlier covenant gave the Jews a portion of the spoils of war, giving the impression that this was a covenant between equals, which, Thanawi insisted, was most certainly not the case.

In a stinging riposte ridiculing the clumsy attempts by the nationalist *ulama* at substantiating the theory of *Muttahida Qaumiyat*, Thanawi quoted the didactic tale of the grocer and the parrot from the *Masnavi-i-Ma'navi* written by the Persian mystic poet Rumi.<sup>141</sup>

A grocer kept a parrot in his stall,  
The bird was green and talked, amusing all,

Perched on a bench it watched the passers-by,  
Sharing a word with those who caught its eye,

It knew how to pronounce all human words,  
Spoke fluently with men as well as birds.

The parrot hopped down from the bench one day,  
Spilling a flask of rose oil on its way;

And when the grocer came back to his store,  
When he sat down he stained the clothes he wore.

On seeing the spilt oil a rage took hold—  
He struck the parrot's head and left it bald!

The next few days the bird refused to speak,  
The grocer grieved, repentant now and meek,

He tugged his beard, 'Alas!' he cried aloud  
'My sun of bounty's hidden by a cloud!

Would that my hand had broken then instead  
Of striking my most precious parrot's head!

He then gave gifts to all the needy men,  
Hoping to hear the parrot speak again.

<sup>141</sup> The following translation is from *Rumi, The Masnavi: Book One*, translated by Jawid Mojaddedi (Oxford, 2004).

After three nights, perplexed and desperate  
He sat down on the bench, disconsolate,

Then showed the parrot wondrous tricks galore  
To coax it into talking back once more;

A monk then strolled by on his daily route,  
In woollen garb and balder than a coot

This made the parrot talk again at last.  
It shouted at the monk as he walked past:

'How did you end up such a slaphead, friend?  
Did you like me a flask of oil upend?'

At this assumption everybody laughed,  
It thought the monk its equal—it was daft!

The simple yet devastating point that Thanawi was making by quoting this tale was that the nationalist *ulama* were like the foolish parrot attempting to perform *ijtihad* as if they had the same qualities (*ausaf-i-ijtihad*) to take such liberty as was possessed by their illustrious medieval forebears, represented here by the monk. What is also significant is that Thanawi deliberately omitted couplets 2, 3, 10, 11 and 12, all of which present the parrot in a complimentary light or present the grocer's affection for his parrot. This was to subtly underscore his larger framing point about people who seemingly look alike but actually are quite unlike in nature.<sup>142</sup>

### *Thanawi on the Role of Ulama in Politics*

Thanawi amplified his criticism of the politically active nationalist *ulama*, and specifically Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, by specifically addressing the issue of the *ulama's* participation in politics. His observations on the matter, in the light of his interpretation of the *Shariah*, were critical since Madani and his fellow *ulama*, as the putative 'heirs of the Prophet', were making claims for leadership over the Indian Muslim community. Thanawi's exposition came in the form of reply to a query by a correspondent who wondered as to why the *ulama*, who were experts in the *Shariah*, were not assuming a leadership role in politics. As the questioner

<sup>142</sup> I am indebted to Prashant Keshavmurthy for bringing this point to my attention besides sending me Jawid Mojaddedi's luminous translation of Rumi.

noted, expertise in *Shariah* was tantamount to expertise in politics for the latter was a part of the former. And since the *ulama* were the 'heirs of the Prophets', they were therefore expected to fulfill their bounden duty in this regard. Thanawi in his long, detailed, and masterful exposition on this subject declared that this was a mistaken view. Instead, he made a case for their mutual dependence since their separate fields of expertise could often overlap, while making it amply clear that the *ulama* should not aspire to assume political leadership.<sup>143</sup>

Thanawi began by noting that the sphere of politics was made up of two parts. The first pertained to Shari'i rulings, which were relevant to politics. No *alim* was unfamiliar with this part of *Shariah* for every book of *Fiqh* that the *ulama* were trained to read, had a chapter on politics. The second area of politics, however, pertained to experience gained in politics which, naturally, was subject to change over time. This part had nothing to do with the *Shariah* and, Thanawi added that it was therefore not necessary for the *ulama* to be experts in this field. If any *alim* was indeed an expert in this field, then his expertise would have been acquired by some other means and not due to his knowledge of the *Shariah*. But such an exposition could always be interpreted in such a manner as to severely circumscribe the role of the *Shariah* in non-religious aspects of life. Thanawi, therefore, hastened to add that while this part of politics was not a part of the *Shariah*, it was not *independent* of it either. He, therefore, declared that there was indeed no matter (*vaqiya*), no practice (*amal*), no proposal, plan or scheme (*tajviz*), no opinion, view or advice (*rai*), about whose permissibility the *ulama* could not be consulted.

In order to clarify this point, Thanawi came up with an illustration. The science of medicine dealt with the constitution of the body (*siyasat-i-badaniya*), its ailments and their rectification to help restore health to the body. Nobody expected the *ulama* to be experts in the field of medicine and not being so could certainly not be assumed to be a deficiency on their part. Yet, at the same time, Thanawi asserted that it was necessary for physicians to consult the *ulama* in order to ascertain whether or not any medical procedure was ethically permissible. Physicians and *ulama* were separate groups, experts in their own fields, but they needed to consult each other and hence were mutually dependent. Thanawi, therefore, contended that politicians and *ulama* could similarly be divided into two separate groups who were dependent on each other. From politicians one learnt about how to run a city or a country (*siyasat-i-madaniya*), while from the *ulama* one could gain rulings on the

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<sup>143</sup> *Ifadat-i-Ashrafiya*, 89–93.

permissibility of any policy, law or procedure. In order to substantiate his position, Thanawi cited a rare past precedent that was revealed in the *Quran*. When Samuel was the Prophet of the Jews, he was asked by his people to appoint a King who could rule over them and lead them in battle. In response, Samuel appointed Talut (Saul) to lead them in their fight against Goliath. Thanawi asserted that the indication in the *Quran* on this matter was very clear. The *Banu Israel* even when they had a Prophet in Samuel had asked for a King and did not ask the Prophet himself to lead them. As Thanawi asked, if the Prophet Samuel was sufficient to the task, why would his people ask him for a King? Furthermore, why would Samuel then appoint someone other than himself for this task? Additionally, if the *Banu Israel* had made a mistake in making this demand, why did the Prophet not reprimand them? Could it thus be inferred that the Prophet Samuel had made a mistake? This last question had to be dismissed straight away since Prophets were infallible, and also because Allah would never allow a Prophet to make a mistake and would indeed send a revelation to correct any such mistake.

But Thanawi still had to explain the apparent contradiction between the example of Samuel and Talut that he cited with the case of the Prophet of Islam combining the roles of secular and religious authority in his own person. Additionally there existed other prominent examples of Prophets like David and his son who also similarly combined roles of the Prophet and the King. Finally, there was also another obscure opinion that claimed that Talut had not just been a King but also a Prophet. How could Thanawi, therefore, justify the division of roles between the *ulama*, the 'heirs of the Prophet' and politicians by invoking the example of Samuel and Talut? To get around this problem, Thanawi relied on a medieval text, the *Tafsir-al Mazhari*, written by the great Indian Hanafi scholar Qazi Sanaullah Panipati to substantiate his claim that even a Prophet need not be an expert in politics. Following its cue, Thanawi ingeniously argued that while deficiency could never be admitted in the case of a Prophet (Samuel from the above example), a case could certainly be made for different degrees of perfection attained by different Prophets. To substantiate his point, he noted that while earlier prophets had been sent by God to particular races, the Prophet of Islam had been sent by God to all of mankind. Hence, while the coming of a Prophet like Muhammad to all mankind was indeed a *kamaal* (miracle), it did not signify that other Prophets were deficient, for indeed, the very thought that a Prophet was less than perfect was impermissible in Islam. Thus, while some Prophets like Muhammad also had political expertise, others did not have to have that same capacity. Besides, as Thanawi pointed



out, even the Prophet of Islam who possessed the highest level of perfection often asked for advice from others. He famously sought advice from Salman the Persian when it came to the Battle of the Trench. Similarly, the Hadith *Al Bukhari* revealed that the Prophet had once asked his people to sow seeds in a manner that was different from their usual practice. When the following crop yield was lower than usual, the Prophet acknowledged that farmers knew more about these affairs than he did.

Thanawi also tackled the obscure opinion that Talut had not just been a King but was also a Prophet, which had the potential of undermining his argument over separation of roles and/or expertise between Prophets and Kings. In this regard, he argued that whether Talut was a Prophet or not, was beside the point, for what mattered was that Samuel was the Prophet *at the time* and he chose Talut to be the King of the *Banu Israel*. The implication here was that Talut may have become a Prophet later, but he certainly was not so at the time of Samuel. To conclude his point, Thanawi contended that for the *ulama* as the heirs of the Prophet, or even a Prophet himself, lacking expertise in politics was not tantamount to their suffering from any deficiency. And since the *ulama* were not experts in politics it was best for them to work in partnership with politicians without aspiring to assume a leadership role.

Thanawi argued that active participation in politics by the *ulama* was also dangerous since it would lead them into blunders, which would harm the Muslim community. In this context, he deplored the *ulama* taking on politically active roles particularly on the side of the Congress thus placing itself in an adversarial position to the Muslim community, the ML which was their representative organization, and finally the *ulama* supporting the latter. Thanawi added that if the nationalist *ulama* had instead confined themselves to their own duties, they would not have lost the respect of the community. Such was their lamentable state today that even laymen were opposing these *ulama* leading to a loss in their dignity. Thanawi also used this opportunity to express his displeasure at Congress politics making an entry into the Darul Uloom, especially under the aegis of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, the institution's Principal. Madani had famously declared that participation in Congress' anti-colonial politics was equivalent to participating in a *jihad*, and thus a rightful duty for all Muslims. In response to such propaganda at Deoband, Thanawi tersely reiterated his position. The Congress was dominated by Hindus, its flag was Hindu, and Muslims would forever remain subordinated in that organization. The question of becoming a part of an Islamic *jihad* by participating in the activities of the Congress therefore simply did not arise.

Concluding his overall argument regarding the role of *ulama* in politics, Thanawi asserted that the while *ulama* were not barred from participating in politics in principle, the prevailing circumstances made it necessary that they should stay out of politics and confine themselves to giving advice to political leaders in order to prevent them from doing anything that went against the commands of the *Shariah*. He argued that this was the best possible path for the *ulama* to take since their lack of knowledge of English law or constitutional politics did not give them the necessary expertise to play an active role in politics. Thanawi, however, acknowledged that politicians did not always ask the *ulama* for advice in these times. Nonetheless, he asserted that even if they were not approached by the politicians, it was the communal obligation (*farz-i-kifaya*) of the *ulama* to still go to them and offer them guidance. This also applied to the *ulama's* interactions with experts in other aspects of life be they economists, doctors etc. Thanawi's own efforts to offer guidance to the ML in the task of reforming their organization and making it more 'Islamic' was an example of his performing his *farz-i-kifaya*. In this regard, he claimed that when negotiations between the Congress and the ML were underway, he wrote to Jinnah asking him not to give his opinion or commit himself over any religious issues. Jinnah in his reply reportedly promised the Maulana that he would take no such step before consulting the *ulama* on such matters.

Finally, Thanawi was also opposed to political activity at Deoband since it disrupted scholarly pursuits. He was especially critical about how the Arabic department had been especially affected as a result of their political activities. Thanawi's reservations regarding Madani's active participation in politics alongside Congress soon led to his resignation from his position as *Sarparast* at Deoband. As he wrote to his *murid* (pupil), Abdul Majid Daryabadi, 'I know Maulana Husain Ahmad declares that joining the Congress is a *farz*. In this context, I do not know if he likes those who keep more obscure practices.' Mufti Mohammad Shafi, the chief *mufti* at Deoband, who migrated to Pakistan after the Partition, recounted that Thanawi resigned primarily because he did not appreciate the idea of its students participating in Congress politics, which he saw as pro-Hindu. The final straw came when he learnt that a Hindu Congress leader had been given a welcome reception at the Deoband railway station by students and staff of the Darul Uloom. In response, Thanawi swiftly sent in his resignation as the *sarparast*. When it was not accepted by Madani, Thanawi had it posted on the gates of the institution.

### The Congress Closure of the Muslim Mass Contact Programme

The Congress party's stock among the U.P. Muslims hit an all-time low as a series of bloody Hindu–Muslim riots ravaged the province. The U.P. Governor did not lay much store in the ML charge that the Congress government had abetted Hindu atrocities on Muslims. Yet, as the historian Mukul Kesavan has shown, Congressmen in various districts in U.P. were well-known Hindu leaders, who if not implicated in the rioting themselves openly organized legal defenses of Hindus arrested in the rioting.<sup>144</sup> The Congress was widely seen by Muslims by now as a Hindu organization. The ML would go on to produce another report on Hindu atrocities in the 'minority provinces'.<sup>145</sup>

The Congress lost another by-election for the Badayun seat in September 1938 in which the ML's Iqtidaruddin Hasan trounced the Congress candidate Muhammad Sulaiman garnering 75 per cent of all the votes polled. The MMCP by now had ground to a halt by the middle of 1938. K. M. Ashraf wrote to Nehru that Muslim Contact work, and the Economic and Political Department had been formally abolished by Kripalani. He was mainly doing routine office work, which made him feel like a parasite. He had already sent his wife and children to his ancestral village and wanted to leave the office himself as soon as Nehru returned to Allahabad.<sup>146</sup> The ML's mobilization drive had already dwarfed the Congress programme by the beginning of 1938 as the ML claimed to have 300,000 members on its rolls as compared to the Congress 100,000.<sup>147</sup> The Congress now began to explore possibilities of opening negotiations with the ML leadership. Nehru's attempts to draw Jinnah into a dialogue were rudely rebuffed. The negotiations that ultimately began between Jinnah and Subhas Bose did not get off ground as the Congress could not accept Jinnah's conditions that the ML be recognized as the sole representative organization of the Indian Muslims. The Congress now turned to explore other options. Rajendra Prasad approached the Punjab Premier Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan while K. M. Ashraf

<sup>144</sup> See Mukul Kesavan, '1937 as a Landmark in the Course of Communal Politics in U.P.', *Occasional Paper, Second Series, No. XI*, NMML; 'Congress and the Muslims of U.P. and Bihar: 1937 to 1939', *Occasional Paper, Second Series, No. XXVII*, NMML; 'Communal Violence and its Impact on the Politics of North India', *Occasional Paper, Second Series, No. XXIII*, NMML.

<sup>145</sup> See Qazi Mohammad Isa, *It Shall Never Happen Again* (Delhi, 1946).

<sup>146</sup> K. M. Ashraf to Nehru, 2 September 1938 in Basudev Chatterji, *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for the Independence in India, 1938*, Part 1 (Delhi, 1999), 87.

<sup>147</sup> *Madina*, 21 January 1938.

approached the veteran Khilafatist, Maulana Shaukat Ali, but both these attempts proved infructuous. The protagonists of the MMCP were now anxious to make peace with the ML. Sajjad Zaheer, Mian Iftikharuddin and Dr Hussain Zaheer met Liaquat Ali Khan to plead for a Congress-ML settlement. They even went as far as to declare that the left wing was willing to force the Congress High Command to accept the ML as *the* representative organization of the Muslims if the ML would give them a face saver. They further assured Liaquat that the Hindus in the left wing were with them in this regard.<sup>148</sup>

The ML kept up the pressure on the Congress government with its Pirpur Report that levelled charges against the Congress government for highhandedness and 'atrocities' on Muslims.<sup>149</sup> Muslim deputations from the Muslim majority provinces now began touring the U.P. to make further enquiries regarding atrocities committed on the Muslims by the Congress government. Thus a deputation consisting of Agha Shabbir Ahmad, *Vakil* of Ludhiana, Sajjad Ahmad Khan of Hazara, Maulvi Shariful Rahman of Panipat, and Khalil-ur-Rahman, *Vakil* of Ludhiana visited Aligarh, Bulandshahr, Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur. A different delegation consisting of Mohammad Ismail Ghaznavi, of NWFP, Professor Dildar Khan of MAO College, Amritsar, Agha Bashir Mohammad and Fateh Mohammad Khan of Baluchistan visited Bijnor and Barielly districts.<sup>150</sup> A large public meeting was held by the ML in Lucknow on 2 December to thank another Muslim delegation from the Muslim majority provinces for its concern for the predicament of the U.P. Muslims. 'This delegation later split into two halves and continued their tour of the province touring Allahabad, Bahraich, Ballia, Benares, Etah, Gonda, Gorakhpur, Hardoi, Jaunpur and Sultanpur.'<sup>151</sup>

But even as the ML appeared to be sitting pretty, the solidity of the party's support base was seriously called into question in the ensuing *Madhe Sababa* agitation.<sup>152</sup> The issue had become troublesome in the autumn of 1938 but assumed ominous proportions by the summer of 1939 that led to riots between Shias and Sunnis in different parts of U.P. and especially the capital city of

<sup>148</sup> Liaquat Ali Khan to Jinnah, 16 June 1939, in Muhammad Reza Qasimi (ed.), *Liaquat-Jinnah Correspondence*, (Karachi, 2003).

<sup>149</sup> AIML, *Report of the Inquiry Committee Appointed by the Council of the All India Muslim League to Inquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces* (Delhi, 1939).

<sup>150</sup> *PAI for the week ending 25 November 1939*.

<sup>151</sup> *PAI for the week ending 9 December 1939*.

<sup>152</sup> See Venkat Dhulipala, 'Rallying the Qaum: The Muslim League in the United Provinces, 1937-1939', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (2010), 603-40.

Lucknow. These disturbances threatened to snowball into a wider all-India conflict as partisans from both sides poured into Lucknow from different parts of India and clashed with each other. As these tensions rose, the ML stood aside helplessly, unable to exert its authority to bring about peace between these two warring sects of Islam. The ML's lack of initiative attracted competition from other Muslim groups keen to garner the prestige that resolving this fratricidal conflict would bring them, and consequently enable their emergence as serious political players at the U.P. and all-India level. The most prominent were the Khaksars of Punjab whose spirited intervention saw them trying to forcibly compose Shia-Sunni differences.

However, the ML received a fresh lease of life as a result of a series of changes in the political circumstances in the country. To begin with the forceful repression of the Khaksars by the U.P. government, which imprisoned their eccentric leader Allama Mashriqi, along with inconsistent efforts by the Khaksars opened the door for the ML to reassert itself in U.P. Muslim politics. But what really gave a fresh lease of life to the ML in these circumstances was the resignation of Congress ministries in November 1939, protesting against India being dragged into the War without the consent of Indians themselves. The crisis came as a tremendous blessing for the ML and could not have come at a more appropriate time. The Congress high command now sought unity between different political groups in India in order to present a joint Indian response to the British Government. Keen to get the Muslims on board, the Congress again turned to Jinnah. The Khaksar issue in U.P. was a major point of discussion during the meetings between Nehru and Jinnah. Jinnah demanded and was supplied with relevant documents related to the Khaksars by Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, the Home Minister in the U.P. Government. Nehru was optimistic after his round of talks with Jinnah, which had been most cordial, but he was in for a shock for even as the talks were progressing, the *Qaid* gave his call to the Muslims of the Muslim minority provinces to celebrate a Day of Deliverance on 22 December 1939. The day was meant for Muslims throughout India to celebrate the resignation of Congress ministries and the consequent deliverance of the Muslims from their bondage. Jinnah was enthusiastically supported by his lieutenants in U.P. and other provinces on this masterstroke. Writing to Jinnah, Liaquat informed him that it also had the support of other ML leaders such as Mahmudabad and Fazlul Haq who were present at the recent Darbhanga district ML conference. Liaquat however had some advice for his leader after his consultations with the *ulama* on this move. As he wrote:

You should ask Mussalmans to go en masse to the mosques, and after the Juma prayers, everyone should offer prayer in thanks for deliverance from this tyrannical regime and that it may never return in the same form. According to the religion, the thanksgiving prayers will have to be offered individually as it cannot be done by a gathering all together like the juma or other prayers. I have consulted some ulema on this point and this is their opinion. You should also ask the Mussalmans to observe humility and not do anything that is likely to give offence to anyone. I suggest this be done all over India and not be confined to the Provinces where Congress ministries were functioning.<sup>153</sup>

The Day of Deliverance met 'mixed reception in the U.P.' as was evident from the contradictory reports regarding its success.<sup>154</sup> On the one hand, Mahmudabad writing to Jinnah effusively reported that 'Deliverance Day was such a success that it was celebrated even in those quarters where the League is looked upon as a vile disease. Even the most anti-League elements joined it.'<sup>155</sup> Its real significance, he declared, was that it had laid 'the foundation of self-respecting Nationhood for the Muslims. It was indeed 'the first concrete step that shows without ambiguity that there are not one but several nations in India.'<sup>156</sup> And yet, not all ML notables in U.P. were happy with Jinnah's call. Hasrat Mohani disapproved of Jinnah's suggestion that Muslims seek redress for their grievances from the Governors. He, therefore, asked Muslims to stay neutral in the present struggle if they could not favour the Congress against the British Government.<sup>157</sup> Karim-ur-Raza Khan, the ML MLA from Shahjahanpur, bluntly declined to observe the Day of Deliverance.<sup>158</sup> The Bengal Muslim leader Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, criticizing Jinnah's directive, went so far as to declare that the *Qaid* was suffering from 'senile decay'.<sup>159</sup>

Nehru, on the other hand, wrote to Gandhi that 'Deliverance Day was a failure in U.P. Many of the meetings started off in a very small way, but then

<sup>153</sup> Liaquat Ali Khan to Jinnah, 27 November 1939, in Muhammad Reza Qasimi (ed.), *Jinnah-Liaquat Correspondence* (Karachi, 2003).

<sup>154</sup> *PAI for the week ending 16 December 1939*.

<sup>155</sup> Mahmudabad to Jinnah, 29 November 1939, *Shamsul Hasan Collection* (hereafter SHC) Foreign Correspondence.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *The Leader*, 21 December 1939.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961), 232.

curious sightseers, chiefly Hindus joined them find out what was happening. Some meetings were also held on that day in mosques and outside condemning the Muslim League proposal.<sup>160</sup> The new Governor of U.P., Sir Maurice Hallett, concurred with this judgment. As he wrote to the Viceroy, 'I do not think that Deliverance Day, of which many reasonable Muslims disapproved, was as great a success as would appear from newspaper accounts. Some collectors report little enthusiasm and in most districts, meetings were smaller than expected.'<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, the resignation of the Congress ministries, placed the ML under pressure to come up with a positive vision of the future that went beyond criticism of the Congress, the British Government and the federal scheme envisaged under the GOI Act of 1935. This became especially urgent in the context of further political reforms envisaged by the British Government at the Centre as it came under renewed pressure from the Congress in the context of the war. The Lahore Resolution held precisely such a promise.

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<sup>160</sup> Nehru to Gandhi, 25 December 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 10, 417.

<sup>161</sup> Hallett to Linlithgow, 1 January 1940, *Hallett Papers*.