

## Factors Leading to the Punjab Provincial Muslim League's Success in 1946 Provincial Elections



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**Abstract:** *In the 1937 provincial elections, the Punjab Provincial Muslim League had a mere seven candidates for the eighty-six Muslim seats, only two of whom succeeded against the landlord Unionist Party. Less than a decade later, the Punjab Provincial Muslim League captured seventy-five out of eighty-six Muslim seats in the 1946 elections. The victory in the 1946 elections was a culmination of diverse tactics and strategic maneuvers. Initially, the inception of the League addressed the pressing issue of Muslim under-representation, igniting a wave of political activism. Within the Muslim League, internal divisions between the Old and Young Parties mirrored the evolving political terrain, adding complexity to the landscape. By leveraging deep-seated kinship bonds and religious affiliations, the League secured vital backing from the influential landed aristocracy, pivotal figures in Punjab's political dynamics. Strategic outreach efforts targeted peasants and students, expanding the League's support base. Concurrently, organizational reforms and enthusiastic advocacy for separate electorates fortified its position. The collapse of the Unionist Party, marked by notable defections to the League, cemented its ascendancy. Through adept navigation of religious, social, and economic networks, alongside organizational flexibility, the League emerged triumphant in 1946. This victory laid the cornerstone for the establishment of Pakistan, marking a pivotal moment in history.*

**Keywords:** *Punjab Provincial Muslim League, political mobilization, landed aristocracy, organizational restructuring, Unionist Party collapse.*

### Introduction

British Punjab was the most important of all the Muslim population centers for its strategic geographical position, its large Muslim majority and its agricultural wealth. Besides it, if the Punjab Muslims had not supported the League's separatist demands, Pakistan could never have come into existence. In the 1937 provincial elections, the Punjab Provincial Muslims League could get only two seats against the landlord Unionist Party. It soon lost one when Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan defected to the Unionist party.<sup>i</sup> In the 1946 provincial elections, the League captured 75 out of 86 Muslim seats. The Unionists won 21 out of 99, the Congress

51, the Akali 23, and Independents 11 out of the total 175 seats. The League emerged as the largest single party in the assembly.<sup>ii</sup> By then, it had become clear to the League leaders that a different approach had to be followed to win over the Punjab support for the Pakistan scheme.<sup>iii</sup> Following are some of the factors, that contributed to the success of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League in winning over 1946 provincial elections.

### The Punjab Provincial Muslim League

In the Punjab, Muslim political activity had split into the 'local Aligarh Party' and the pro-Congress with the emergence of the Aligarh movement and the Indian National Congress.

The Aligarh party enjoyed the mass support of the Muslims compared to the Congress party due to religious and political differences between the two parties.<sup>iv</sup> However, both the anti and pro-Congress Muslims of the Punjab welcomed the formation of the All-India Muslim League in 1906.<sup>v</sup> Then, the political situation of the time in the Punjab precipitated the formation of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League. Mohammad Shafi underlined that the cause of under-representation of the Muslims in the Punjab in public services despite being in the majority was that they have no proper political organization, which could represent their interest to the government.<sup>vi</sup> Thus towards the close of 1907, the Punjab Provincial Muslim League, a new Muslim representative political organization was founded.<sup>vii</sup> Shah Din and Muhammad Shafi were elected President and General Secretary of the League respectively.<sup>viii</sup> The important activity of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League was to draw the attention of the government to the vital importance of adequate representation of the Muslims as a distinct community in the provincial and imperial Legislative councils and municipal and district boards.<sup>ix</sup> It intensified its activities when the Minto-Morley Reforms did not grant communal representation to the Muslims in the Punjab Legislative Council, while the same had been granted to Muslims in other provinces. In 1916, the Congress recognized this right of the Muslims in the Lucknow Pact and the 1919 Act [Montague Chelmsford Reforms] granted the right of separate communal representation to the Muslims in the Provincial Legislative Council.<sup>x</sup>

Before 1909, the landlords had controlled the politics in the Punjab. After 1909, middle-class Muslims entered into politics, which posed a threat to the established loyalty to the British government. The Punjab Muslims were divided into two groups; the Old Party<sup>xi</sup> which was ready to defend Muslim interests but by remaining loyal to the British, and the New Party, which did not subscribe to this viewpoint and wanted to keep good relations with other communities. The young party was drawn from the lower middle classes, while almost all the old party leaders related to well-known landed families of

the Punjab.<sup>xii</sup> The Old Party under Mohammad Shafi had dominated the Punjab Provincial Muslim League. After its failure to free the Punjab Provincial Muslim League from the clutches of Mohammad Shafi, the Young Party (under the leadership of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain) in a meeting at Lahore on 30 January 1916 announced the establishment of a new League to assert themselves in Muslim public. Abdul Rahman Khan, Nabi Bakhsh, and Taj-ud-Din were appointed the president, the vice president, and the general secretary, respectively.<sup>xiii</sup> Thus, at the beginning of 1916, two provincial Muslim Leagues emerged out of the Punjab Muslim camp.<sup>xiv</sup> With the formation of new Punjab Provincial Muslim League, public opinion turned against the Old Punjab Provincial Muslim League. Ultimately in the Lucknow session of the All-India Muslim League in December 1916, the Old Party Provincial Muslim League was disaffiliated and the Young Punjab Provincial Muslim League Party affiliated. The Lucknow Pact<sup>xv</sup> became the climax of struggle between the Old and Young party and between the former and the All India Muslim League.<sup>xvi</sup> At the Lucknow session, Fazl-i-Hussain emerged as an actual leader.<sup>xvii</sup> Efforts to rejuvenate the Punjab Muslim League continued all along and in 1924, the All India Muslim League held the second part of the fifteenth session at Lahore with Muslim Unionists participating in it. However, the parting of ways lay ahead. A final split came about in 1928 on the issue of the Simon Commission. The Muslim League under the leadership of M.A. Jinnah decided to join the Congress in boycotting the Commission whereas political leaders of the Punjab including both Mohammad Shafi and Fazl-i-Hussain decided to cooperate with the Commission. Malik Barkat Ali,<sup>xviii</sup> a famous Muslim Leaguer and a sole representative of the Muslim League in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1937, Ahmad Yar Daultana,<sup>xix</sup> father of Mumtaz Daultana,<sup>xx</sup> and some other Muslim Leaguers from the Punjab became critical of Jinnah who officially disaffiliated Muslim League led by these rebels. Fazl-i-Hussain then tried to gather these Leaguers and others together into the Punjab branch of the All-India Muslim

Conference.<sup>xxi</sup> In early April 1936, Jinnah decided to participate in the election, and a Central Parliamentary Board was constituted. In pursuance of this resolution, Jinnah came to Lahore to constitute the Punjab Parliamentary Board, where he contacted Fazl-i-Hussain and suggested that Muslim candidates from the province should contest the election as Leaguers not as Unionists.<sup>xxii</sup> Fazl-i-Hussain denied the suggestion on the ground that provinces like Punjab might like to work with non-communal organizations in which case a central Muslim Parliamentary Board would hamper their efforts by creating communal harmony.<sup>xxiii</sup> Following the failure of these talks, on 29 April 1936, Jinnah reorganized the Punjab Muslim League in Lahore with Allama Iqbal as its President, Malik Barkat Ali and Khalifa Shuja-ud-Din, [grandson of Khalifa Hamid-ud-Din and president of *Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam* for several years and speaker of the Punjab Legislative Assembly before he died in 1957] as Vice President, Ghulam Rasul Khan as the Secretary and Mian Abdul Majid and Ashiq Husain Batalvi as Joint Secretary. Like other provinces, a parliamentary Board was set up in the Punjab, which made worse the frictions between the Unionists and the Leaguers.<sup>xxiv</sup> It is worth mentioning that since its inception, the Punjab Provincial Muslim League suffered from factionalism within its own ranks, disadvantages of the Unionist Party monopoly over political affairs, as well as poor leadership.<sup>xxv</sup> As a result, the League won only two seats of Malik Barkat Ali and Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, maternal uncle of Pir Fazl Shah, who was elected to the Central Assembly in 1923 and one of the two representatives of the Muslim League in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in the 1937 elections. The Unionist Party secured 88 out of 175 seats while the Congress managed 18 against 36 bagged by non-Congress Hindus and Sikhs.<sup>xxvi</sup> In addition, since May 1936, the relations between the central body and the Punjab Provincial League were also strained due to some differences. This was a critical stage for the Provincial League because of the animosity of the ruling Unionists, while Raja Ghazanfar Ali, the only other Leaguer in the Punjab Legislative Assembly also joined the

Unionists.<sup>xxvii</sup> The League's continuous failure disheartened Iqbal initially, however, four months later he remarked optimistically: "the enthusiasm for the League is rapidly increasing in the Punjab and I have no doubt that the holding of the session in Lahore will be a turning point in the history of the League and an important step towards mass contact."<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **The Punjab Provincial Muslim League During 1937-47**

On Jinnah's request, Sikander Hayat, then Premier of the British Punjab and head of the Unionist Party, attended the 25<sup>th</sup> session of the Muslim League at Lucknow in October 1937 with several other Muslim Unionists which became the basis of an agreement between the Unionist and the Muslim League. The agreement generally called the Sikander-Jinnah Pact was in fact the acknowledgement of the supremacy of the League in the province. Sikander pledged to call the Unionist Muslims of the province who were not members of the League to join it. The Pact laid down a framework for close cooperation between the two political entities that were allowed to retain their separate identities. Sikander Hayat had thus realized that the Muslim League now express the will of the Subcontinent's Muslims, to accept its leadership for the Muslims of the province as well.<sup>xxix</sup> Sikander Hayat along with his Muslim Unionist followers joined hands with the League not out of deep conviction but as a matter of necessity. He knew that the Unionist ministry by itself could not withstand the tide of Congress totalitarianism unless he secured the support of a Muslim organization functioning on the All-India level. Ahmad Yar Khan Daultana for instance had in May 1937 announced that all Punjabi Muslims irrespective of their party allegiance were strongly in favour of Jinnah's policies. The only hindrance to the development of a cooperative relationship between the two parties had been the Unionist reluctance to give up the non-communal stance. Thus, the Sikander-Jinnah Pact was not the result of abrupt development but the result of a series of parleys [discussions, meetings] and efforts initiated long before the provincial elections took place.<sup>xxx</sup> It was a major achievement for the League in the

face of the Congress threat to its very existence in other Indian provinces, though it disappointed the non-Muslim Unionists and non-Muslims of the Punjab.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In the meeting of the Organizing Committee held on 10 January 1940, the Punjab Provincial Muslim League was founded. Nawab Shah Nawaz Khan Mamdot, the president of the (Unionist-controlled) Punjab Muslim League and a big landlord of Ferozpur district, was elected the President, Mian Ramzan Ali as the Secretary, and Mian Amir-ud-Din and Mohammad Ali Jaffri as Financial Secretary and Organizing Secretary respectively of the Punjab League.<sup>xxxix</sup> The Punjab Muslim League, which had been disaffiliated by the Central Muslim League, was granted affiliation on 16 March 1940.<sup>xxxix</sup> In the first week of November 1944, the Muslim League issued its manifesto and elected its office bearer on 2 December 1944. Iftikhar Hussain Khan of Mamdot, son of Shah Nawaz Khan Mamdot, was elected its leader, Sardar Shaukat Hayat, son of Sikander Hayat Khan deputy leader, Mian Allah Yar chief whip, Mian Nurullah the Secretary and Rana Nasrullah Assistant whip.<sup>xxxix</sup> On 19 March 1943, Quaid-i-Azam went to Punjab and discussed matters related to the Muslim League Party with Malik Khizr Hayat, Sikander's successor [head of the Unionist Party and then Premier of the Punjab] and members of the Punjab Muslim League.<sup>xxxix</sup> Jinnah attempted to co-opt with the Unionist Party to secure a Muslim-majority area as a base for the demand of Pakistan. The Unionist Party's disagreement with the view that the "religious community was the primary source of political identity" and looking instead to "accommodation and cross communal cooperation" posed a problem to Jinnah. Thus, Jinnah-Khizr conciliation efforts failed.<sup>xxxix</sup> The matter was referred to the Committee of Action, which resolved to remove Khizr from the membership of the Muslim League because of the breach of party discipline and contravention of the rules, principles, and policies of the Muslim League.<sup>xxxix</sup> A further blow to the Unionists was struck at the 1945 Shimla Conference where Jinnah was successful in gaining recognition for his view "that the

Muslim League was the sole representative of Muslim opinion." As a result, many MLAs of the Unionist Party moved to the Muslim League.<sup>xxxix</sup> In the 1946 elections, the League gave a crushing blow to the Unionist supremacy in the province. From two seats in the provincial election of 1937, the League moved to securing 75 out of 85 Muslim seats in the 1946 elections.<sup>xxxix</sup> As the Muslim League in the Punjab had fundamental differences with other parties due to its decision to campaign for the Pakistan demand.<sup>xl</sup> Resultantly, the League's request for a coalition [after elections] with both the Congress and the Akalis was denied. The Akali's demand for the coalition was either to drop the idea of Pakistan or to concede Sikhistan in Central Punjab. The Punjab League leaders offered safeguards to the Sikhs, which the Akali leaders found inadequate. Thus, they were rapidly enticed away by the Congress.<sup>xli</sup> The Unionists, Congress and Akali parties alliance resulted in the formation of the Unionist coalition ministry in the Punjab after the elections in 1946.<sup>xlii</sup> However, the ministry had to resign in March 1947 because of the League civil disobedience movement, which proved that any ministry in the Punjab had to have the cooperation of the Muslim League.<sup>xliii</sup>

### **Support of the Landed Aristocracy**

The kinship group, the *sufi* religious network, and the relationship between the landlord patron and his tenant clients formed the three traditional channels for mobilizing political support in the Punjab countryside. The kinship group (*biradari*) was the most important unit in the Muslim social structure.<sup>xliii</sup> The League's growth in the Punjab was in terms of mass support for Pakistan. Most of the landed aristocracy in the Punjab remained loyal to united India.<sup>xliii</sup> They had reservation about Pakistan. The term was vague but after 1940 resolution, it became synonymous in the popular mind with 'Muslim Raj' a state where Muslims would be supreme. The politicians, civil servants and some professional men perceived that under a Muslim Raj, with the crippling if not elimination of Hindu competition, they could rise to positions of power unattainable in a single mixed Hindu-Muslim state. Thus, the cry for Pakistan excited

powerful appetite and individual hopes.<sup>xlvi</sup> Shahid Javed Burki, has declared that 'these provinces [Punjab, Sind, and N.W.F.P] became Pakistan because the politically powerful landed aristocracy gave Jinnah's movement overwhelming support. The rural elite's support was crucial to its success. The landlords and *Pirs'* command of the rural population's votes were far more important in mobilizing support for the League than the popularity of its demand for Pakistan.<sup>xlvii</sup> Thus, by 1946, the Muslim League had the support of a large section of the rural elite and was thus able to beat the Unionists by their own electioneering game. *Pirs* issued *fatwas*, while the landlords used their economic influence and their leading position in the kinship networks.<sup>xlviii</sup> Consequently, many of the League winners in the 1946 elections were the former Unionists. The Hayats, the Noons, and the Daultanas from whom the Unionist Party had traditionally drawn leadership were families, which later gave crushing blow to the party.<sup>xlix</sup> Thus, the support of the landlords enabled the League to secure an overwhelming victory in the British Punjab.<sup>1</sup>

### Feudal System

Landed aristocracy was one of the legacies of the Sikh rule, which continued to wield enormous influence in the socio-political affairs in the Punjab in the years to come. The British patronized the bureaucracy and the local chieftains to get them to serve their interest in the Subcontinent.<sup>li</sup> In fact, the political settlement of imperialism was stabilized in Punjab by effectively checking the organizational formation of the bourgeois classes through three different mechanisms, viz., canal colonization, Land Alienation Act 1900, and recruitment in the bureaucracy and military. Through the first mechanism, the administration was able to absorb such dislocations in the older settled districts, which were caused by a long process of land fragmentation. Moreover, the bureaucracy and the newly created middlemen the *lumbardars* for whom loyalty to the British was an article of faith also provided a large chunk of lands in the canal colonies. The second mechanism prevented the urban moneylenders from acquiring lands in place of non-payment of

loans and thus disrupted the possibility of an urban-rural nexus. Because of these two agrarian measures, a more complacent class emerged which whole-heartedly believed in support of imperialism. The recruitment to military and bureaucracy, besides absorbing the disruption in the society, increased the number and strength of the class, which was faithful to the rulers and thus entrenched British influence further.<sup>lii</sup> The British made the landlords and *lumbardars* more powerful than ever before. In pursuance, some powerful chiefs were given Jagirs, and later on were invested with magisterial powers in their respective estates; and so by a diplomatic stroke of policy they were made friends.<sup>liii</sup> While in the rest of India, due to agrarian stagnation, lack of industrial investment and some other reasons, the middle classes, whether urban or rural were mobilized to oppose imperialism, in the Punjab on the contrary these classes remained contended and hence loyal to the British. Therefore, 'in the throes of nationalist movement' the Punjab continued to be 'ruled by a cross-communal alliance of landed aristocracy.'<sup>liv</sup> Thus, the Punjab's Chiefs and landlords became powerful pressure groups in the politics and administration while the masses did not have any say in the administrative or political affairs due to lack of education and crippling economic dependence on the landlords which hindered the evolution of political awareness among them. Resultantly, everything remained localized and the Punjab did not make any mark in the political affairs of the Subcontinent for a long time.<sup>lv</sup> In turn, the Punjab landlords helped the British in suppressing the uprising against the British Government, which strengthened the British links with the landlords. The Hindu moneylenders helped the British in recapturing the lost grounds.<sup>lvi</sup> Leigh, a historian remarks that it is a surprising reality that "in the Mutiny the Victors' staunchest comrades in arms were those who fought against them in the Sikh wars."<sup>lvii</sup> He further observed, "we have already noted that in less than ten years from the end of the second Sikh War, the British and the Punjabis together saved India from the Mutineers."<sup>lviii</sup> The British climbed to power on the back of the Bengali Hindus but preserved it

by organizing the Punjabis to defend the North West Frontier of India. The ancestors of the Nawab of Mamdot, Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana and Nawab Muzaffar Ali Khan Qizilbash (Minster in the Punjab 1943-47) had all served the British during the turmoil of 1857 and other wars.<sup>lix</sup> Besides, the chieftains and other influential members of the landed aristocracy had their organization called the Punjab Chief's Association, which met annually and reiterated its pledge of loyalty to the British Government. They remained aloof from the nationalist movements. Therefore, it was the responsibility of the intelligentsia and masses to mobilize actions for the welfare of the community at large.<sup>lx</sup>

### Support of the Pir and Ulema

The League's success in the British Punjab can be attributed to the ability of the latter to link Islamic appeal with existing social and economic grievances as well as the use of their existing *biradari* system and their employment of the *Pirs*.<sup>lxi</sup> In keeping with the significant role of the *Pirs*, the Muslim League enlisted the support of religious leaders in Sind, Punjab, and Frontier during the provincial election campaign of 1945-46. A *Masha'ikh* Committee of eminent *Pirs* and *Masha'ikh* namely *Pir Sahib* of Manki Sharif<sup>1</sup>, *Pir* Jamat Ali Shah, Khwaja Nazimuddin of Taunsa Sharif, Makhdum Raza Shah of Multan etc. was formed in 1946 who campaigned with the slogan that a vote for the League and Pakistan, was a vote for Islam.<sup>lxii</sup> The use of religious appeal by the leading *Pirs* in the traditional channel of mobilization through *biradari* system was decisive, communicating the message of Pakistan to villages and forcing the landlords to change their political affiliation.<sup>lxiii</sup> There were some political leaders with dubious pretension to piety. Iftikhar Hussain Khan of Mamdot was described as *Pir* Mamdot Sharif, Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan as *Sajjada Nashin* of Wah Sharif, Malik Feroz Khan Noon of Darbar Sargodha Sharif and Nawab Muhammad Hayat Qureshi as *Sajjada*

*Nashin* of Sargodha Sharif.<sup>lxiv</sup> In addition to the *Pirs*, the *Ulema* also rendered great services to the League in the provincial elections of Sind, Punjab and the Frontier.<sup>lxv</sup> From August 1945, the *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam* also served as a platform for the League.<sup>lxvi</sup>

### The Role of Pirs in the Punjab Society

For a long, large number of people visit the shrines of the leading *Pirs* to seek spiritual and material blessings. Over the years, the shrines became associated with miraculous power and the leading shrines acquired vast lands as state grants in addition to *waqf* endowment, which they received from individuals. The descendants of Baba Farid, the Punjab Sufi saint, possessed by the twentieth century a tenth of all the land in the Pakpattan tehsil in which the shrine was situated, some 43,000 acres in all part of which had come to them as state gifts during the period of Sikh rule.<sup>lxvii</sup> With the transformation of Punjabi *Pir* into landowning class, the *Piri-Mureedi* relationship also went a change, which was to have important political consequences. The *Murid* was to take an oath of obedience to a *Pir*, after which he would enter into *Piri-Mureedi* relationship. The *Pir* was to act as spiritual guide of his disciple; mediate between him and his God and bring about some of his material desires through the exercise of his magnetism. It created a focus of loyalty capable of transcending which reinforced kinship ties. During the early period of Sufism, the political potential of *Piri-Mureedi* relationship was unfulfilled because it was not widespread. The earlier Sufis in the Punjab had few saints who lived with them in their '*Khanqah*' and undertook spiritual studies. Almost every Muslim in the Punjab had by this time a *Pir*. Indeed, to be without a *Pir* was a cause of reproach.<sup>lxviii</sup> With the increased communication, the *Pir* could visit his disciples in distant areas and could command support from members of rival kinship groups. With the spread of the network of disciples in the length and breadth of the Punjab, the *Pirs* played a

*Ulema* including Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Osmani and Maulana Abdul Sattar Khan Naizi.

<sup>1</sup> The Muslim League could not have won the referendum in NWFP without the intervention of the *Pir* of Manki Sharif and the help accorded to it by the

crucial role in vote gathering when the franchise was extended and politics became provincialized.<sup>lxi</sup> Malcolm Darling who had spent nearly all his working life in intimate contact with the peasants of the Punjab once wrote:

The peasantry, almost to a man, confess themselves as the servants of the one true God and of Muhammad his Prophet, but in actual fact they are the servants of landlord, money lender, and *Pir*. All the way down the Indus from far Hazara in the north to Sind in the south these three dominate men's fortunes; and though they are found in greater or less degree all over the province, nowhere are they so powerful.<sup>lxx</sup>

### **Support of the Peasants**

The belief that peasants were more loyal to their landlords or to their kinship group than Islam lay at the heart of the Punjab Muslim League political strategy throughout the period from 1937-45.<sup>lxxi</sup> During 1937-44, the Punjab Muslim League attempted to appeal directly to the peasants, by passing the Unionist rural elite, which made little progress. Firstly, because until large number of Unionist Party's traditional support deserted it late in 1944 and 1945, the League's prospects of winning power in the province were remote.<sup>lxxii</sup> Secondly, because it were being made through wrong channel and, thirdly, that even when they were made through the right ones, peasants were not moved by such appeals alone, until accompanied by efforts to solve their immediate social and economic problems in order to overcome their suspicion of outsiders. The League was able to achieve its breakthrough only when it had won over the support of the rural elite which controlled the traditional networks for mobilizing political support and when it had addressed itself to the peasants' wartime grievances. At first, it attempted to win support merely by unfurling the green flag of Islam.<sup>lxxiii</sup> So in addition to the support of the local landlords, the need of an appeal to the peasant's economic interest was also felt, if they were to take the risk of opposing the dominant Unionist Party.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Thus, linking the Pakistan scheme with the solution of the villager's wartime economic difficulties was important. The League's policy succeeded in

getting the rural voters who held a key position in the success of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League.<sup>lxxv</sup>

### **Support of the Students**

The Punjab Provincial Muslim League was very successful in its attempt to involve college and university-level students.<sup>lxxvi</sup> It relied on the fervor of young students many of whom were attracted by the socialist program put forward by the Punjab Provincial Muslim League in 1944.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The students were keen not only on mobilizing support for the League amongst the pro-Pakistan Muslims but also to the powerful opponents of the Pakistan idea, particularly the provincial leaders.<sup>lxxviii</sup> This was demonstrated most convincingly in the Punjab where the Punjab Muslim Students Federation led by Mian Bashir Ahmad, Hameed Nizami, Zahoor Alam, and others not only bore "the brunt of the entire opposition" to the Pakistan idea but also launched a civil disobedience movement against Khizr Hayat Khan's ministry, the most powerful organized opposition to the League in the province.<sup>lxxix</sup>

### **The Punjab Muslim Students' Federation**

The Punjab Muslim Student's Federation was founded by Abdul Salam Khurshid and Abdul Sattar Khan Niazi in 1937. It carried propaganda in favour of Pakistan in Punjab before the Provincial Muslim League became active in the field.<sup>lxxx</sup> In 1942, they campaigned against some of the prominent Unionist party members for having cooperated with British war efforts by joining the National Defense Council in defiance of the League policy.<sup>lxxxi</sup> The Punjab Provincial Muslim League started a struggle against the Unionists after its reorganization in 1944 and in turn received powerful support from the Punjab Muslim Students Federation.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Their contribution to the general elections in 1945-46 was no less valuable. They did electioneer work in the Punjab, and kept Jinnah informed of the developments in the election campaign.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The federation also provided Jinnah with a platform of young enthusiastic workers who held meetings, conferences and demonstrations, issued pamphlets and journals and spread the message of the League and

### **Organizational Changes**

From 1944 to 1946, the League concentrated on spreading its branches, recruiting members and popularizing the ‘Pakistan’s’ demand. Five organizing secretaries were appointed one for each division of the Punjab, while Rs. 60,000 was sanctioned for salaries of workers to carry out rural propaganda.<sup>lxxxv</sup> The prospect of elections in the winter of 1945-1946 added a further stimulus to the League’s organizational expansion in the Punjab. Election campaigns were conducted at different places in Punjab and funds were collected. Failed efforts were also made during 1945 to reconcile the League and the Unionists.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> During these years, the League leaders also tried to build a rural organization for the League based on the rejection of localized “tribal” loyalties and mediatory hierarchy. However, their power mostly depended on the mediatory structure that had long served the Unionists. With the spread of the League in rural Punjab, it came to depend largely on the rural influence like those underlying the Unionists.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

### **Muslims Demand for Separate Electorate**

In the Punjab, the Muslims though in numerical majority were in minority in voting registers, public services, local self-government, educational institutions, and economic fields etc. Consequently, they demanded separate electorate to get seats proportionate to their numerical strength and adequate concession for their community. The campaign for the Muslim demand for separate electorates in British India and the Punjab (1927-30) was the key to the success of the Muslim League in postwar elections of 1946, which in turn led to the creation of an independent Pakistan. The Punjab Muslim leaders succeeded in convincing the British government that separate electorates were essential, and the concept was incorporated in the Indian constitution and remained in it up to the time of partition.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

### **Collapse of the Unionist Party**

For the Punjab League, the Unionist and not the Congress was the main opponent in their contest

for the Muslim seats.<sup>lxxxix</sup> The Punjab Provincial League was strengthened at that time when some prominent Unionist feudals like Shaukat Hayat Khan, son of Sikander Hayat Khan, Nawab Iftikhar Hussain Khan son of Shah Nawaz Mamdot [who became president of the Punjab Provincial League in 1943, after the death of his father in March 1942] and Mumtaz Daultana son of Nawab Ahmad Yar Khan Daultana left the Unionist and joined the Punjab Provincial Muslim League. The entry of these three active young scions of leading Unionist families in politics marked the beginning of a new era for the Muslim League.<sup>xc</sup> The Punjab Muslim League leadership was consolidated in the hands of dissidents from the Unionists fold. Iftikhar Mamdot became President of the Punjab Muslim League, Mumtaz Daultana the General Secretary and Shaukat Hayat the leader of the Muslim League Assembly Party.<sup>xcii</sup> Its membership had also reached to 150, 000. After its reorganization, the League propagated its own ‘anti-imperialist’ image in a big way against the Unionist ministry under Khizr Hayat, supported by the Punjab Governor Sir Bertrand Glancy and his bureaucracy. It also attacked the policies of the Unionists and strengthened itself in the rural areas during the war years.<sup>xciii</sup> That’s how the Punjab Provincial Muslim League succeeded in getting the majority seats in the 1946 provincial elections.

### **Conclusion**

The triumph of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League in the pivotal 1946 elections resonates as a saga of resilience, strategic acumen, and societal cohesion. Against a backdrop of factional divides and external pressures, the League's journey epitomized the indomitable spirit of its leaders and supporters. From its nascent stages, the League grappled with internal dissent and external challenges, yet remained steadfast in its pursuit of Muslim representation and empowerment. Through painstaking efforts and unwavering resolve, it galvanized support across diverse social strata, uniting the landed aristocracy, peasants, students, and religious figures under a common vision. The seismic collapse of the Unionist Party heralded a new era, where defections to the

League underscored its burgeoning influence and ascendancy in Punjab's political arena. Through meticulous organizational reforms, advocacy for separate electorates, and grassroots mobilization, the League not only secured electoral victory but also paved the path for the birth of Pakistan. Beyond mere political triumph, the League's saga embodies the aspirations and struggles of a people yearning

for self-determination and representation. It is a testament to the human spirit's capacity to overcome adversity and shape the course of history, heralding a new dawn for the Indian subcontinent.

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- <sup>iv</sup> *Sada-i-Hind* (Lahore), 12 November 1901.
- <sup>v</sup> Rakkar, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab*, p. 77.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Paisa Akhbar*, 2 and 3 October 1907; Malik, *A Book of Reading on the History of the Punjab*, p. 226.
- <sup>vii</sup> It is worth mentioning that earlier Fazl-i-Hussain of the pro Congress Muslims had established the Indian Muslim League in a public meeting of the Lahore held on 30 March 1906, with the aim to develop political insight and a true spirit of loyalty to the British government among the Muslims. Initially, Fazl-i-Hussain resented the rise of the new Muslim League in the Punjab, however, withdrew his claim later and merged the two provincial Leagues into one with Shah Din as President, Muhammad Shafi as General Secretary and Fazl-i-Hussain Joint Secretary.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Civil & Military Gazette*, 5 December 1907; *Paisa Akhbar* 6 December 1907; Malik, *A Book of Reading on the History of the Punjab*, pp. 270-272, 267.
- <sup>ix</sup> Rakkar, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab*, pp. 95-96.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- <sup>xi</sup> They were also termed progressive and liberal, the first being represented by the loyal and moderate who were the 'conservative Muslim opinion' and the second the 'young Muslim opinion.' The former was also termed as 'young Mohammedan' the young English-educated Mohammedan' the young literate, the extreme party, the pan Islamist party, and the other the old men, men of the moderate party.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Civil & Military Gazette*, 8 March, 29 June 1916.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Observer*, 19 February 1916; *Panjabi*, 3 February 1916.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Civil & Military Gazette*, 19 February 1916.
- <sup>xv</sup> The All-India Muslim League in collaboration with the Young Party concluded the Lucknow Pact, which conceded separate electorates, and fifty percent of elected India seats on the Provincial Legislative Council to the Punjab Muslims. The Old Party condemned the Pact on the grounds that it did not grant representation to the Punjab Muslims in proportion to their population.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan*, p. 25; Rakkar, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab*, p. 251.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xviii</sup> [1885-1946]; member Punjab Assembly 1937, Vice President of the Punjab League 1936; a patron of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation.
- <sup>xix</sup> Member Punjab Legislative Council 1921; member Legislative Assembly 1937-45; General Secretary of the Unionist Party; Chief parliamentary Secretary 1937-42.
- <sup>xx</sup> (1916-) Joined the League in 1942; Played a leading role against Khizr Hayat.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan*, p. 25.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37; Sayeed, *Pakistan the Formative Phase*, p. 295.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain* (Bombay: Longmans, 1946), p. 309.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Hamari Qaumi Jidd-o-Juhd, 1939* (Urdu) (Lahore: Pakistan Times Press,

- 1968), p. 116; Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan*, pp. 37, 75.
- xxv Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan*, p. 37.
- xxvi *Civil & Military Gazette*, 11 & 19 January, 16 February, 4 April 1937; The election result of 1937 were as follows: Congress, 18, Muslim League 2, Other Muslims 4, Non Congress Hindus and Sikhs 36, Unionists 88, No Party 27, total 175. Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan*, pp. 48-49; Sayeed, *Pakistan the Formative Phase*, p. 177.
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- xxix David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam, Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co., 1988), pp. 174-175.
- xxx *Civil & Military Gazette*, Lahore, May 7, 1937; Ikram, *Modern Muslim India*, p. 252; Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan*, p. 77.
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