

Maqbool Ahmad Awan*

Rise and Fall of the Unionist Party in the British Punjab (1923-47): A Theoretical Study**

Abstract

This research paper evaluates the rise and fall of the Unionist Party since its formation to eventual breakdown in the Punjab province. The power base of the Unionist Party largely vested in landlords, the pirs and sajjadah nashins who played a pivotal role in the ups and downs of the party. In addition to this, the tug of war between the Unionist Party and the Muslim League has closely been taken into consideration to strengthen the argument that how the soaring fame of the latter proved to be a death-knell for the existence of the former. This study further re-assesses the mercurial loyalties of the major stakeholders along with political developments laced with their repercussions in the Punjab politics. Moreover, it also reflects the traditional ways of the rural politics to be an interesting phenomenon in the Colonial Punjab. Theoretically, this paper presents the complete course of the Unionist Party in the light of Ibn-e-Khaldun's theory of 'Rise and Fall' that has been meticulously engaged to substantiate this research work. In fact, it provides a comprehensive account of the party's emergence, growth and ultimate collapse in the British Punjab.

Key words: British Punjab, Unionist Party, Muslim League, Ibn-e-Khaldun, Jinnah, Sikandar Hayat

Introduction

Theoretical Perspective

The theory of 'Rise and Fall' is one of the greatest debates. Many of the theorists hold that crisis of adept leadership is one of the main reasons behind the down fall of any political entity that also appeared in the later days of the Unionist Party in the British Punjab. The Unionist Party was a product of diversified culture and collectivism which became the main boosting factors for its unprecedented popularity and zenith. Yet when other political parties stood their grounds, the Unionist Party started to stagger on its faltering feet due to the rising popularity of the Muslim League. Ben Rogers¹ points out that the traditional politicians steer the direction of power politics in accordance with their political career to maintain status quo. It is almost impossible for any mass political party to rule the roost in

* Dr. Maqbool Ahmad Awan, Assistant Professor, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. E-mail: maqbool.awan@yahoo.com

** This paper is mainly taken from Ph. D Dissertation of Mr. Maqbool Ahmad Awan.

¹ Ben Rogers is a thinker and writer and founder of the Centre for London in 2011. See, <https://www.centreforlondon.org/person/ben-rogers/>

the presence of an imperialistic government. Political scientists opine that while there is no denying fact that political parties are necessary for the smooth running of political system but they also argue that imperialism is a major obstacle in the proper functioning of political parties for the attainment of their political rights. Apart from the barriers of imperialism, adept and resolute leadership along with democratic principles is a crucial factor in strengthening and weakening of parties. Furthermore, should it fulfill the needs of the new age, the age in which the participation is above the traditional party system then it guarantees the unparalleled height of power in comparison with other mass political parties. If any party is deprived of either efficient leadership or modern outlook, which is to say getting on well with modern trends, it is destined to be doomed.

A large number of theories have been put forward by political thinkers to comprehend the phenomenon of 'the rise and fall' of political entities. After taking into consideration the theoretical domain, it appears that the cyclic theory of Ibn-e-Khaldun is of utmost significance in this regard. Famous historian, sociologist and political scientist Ibn-e-Khaldun² (1332-1406) uses the term '*Asabiya*' that forms community among humans. According to him, the behavior of rulers and community delineates three different phases of rise and fall in any part of the world. Ibn-e-Khaldun says that the points that connect the cycle of rise and fall have always been there in every political institution of human history which can help us in discovering the important linkages of this cycle. In the known history of human learning, this mighty task was, above all else, embraced by Ibn-e-Khaldun in his magnum opus work prolegomena entitled, '*The Muqaddimah*'- *An Introduction to History*,³ about which Arnold Toynbee,⁴ the creator of the artful culmination *Philosophy of the History*,⁵ stated: 'A philosophy of history which is without a doubt the best work of its sort that has ever yet been made by any brain in any time or place.'⁶

Ibn-e-Khaldun proceeded to express that to comprehend the administering standards of rise and fall, one must adopt a style of 'see-the-realities' style of analysis else one will arrive into the universe of utopias and unrealistic reasoning, a conduct prompting unequivocal wantonness. For this reason, he asks us to get total data, track the recorded episodes and after that think profoundly into the occasions of the age, which should help the men of history in landing at reality.⁷ In this work, assistance has been procured from Ibn-e-Khaldun's theory of rise and fall so that a comprehensive analysis may be made by fixing the Unionist Party in

² Ibn-e-Khaldun (1332-1406) was a foremost Arab historian and philosopher. He is extensively considered as a forerunner of the modern disciplines of historiography, sociology and economics.

³ Ibn-e-Khaldun is well known for his book, prolegomena or the "*Muqaddimah*". For detail studies see, Ibn-e-Khaldun, *Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (New York: 1958).

⁴ Arnold Joseph Toynbee, (1889-1975) was a British historian who argued that the civilizations die from suicide, not by murder. He is of the view that twenty-two civilizations that have appeared in history, nineteen of them collapsed.

⁵ See, Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 2-vols, (London: Abridged edition by D. C. Somervell, 1947), 230-43.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For details see, Ibn-e-Khaldun, *Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (New York: 1958).

Khaldun's theoretical framework to study party's cycle of rise and fall in the Colonial Punjab. The Unionist Party, once an indispensable political might in Punjab politics, also went through the phase of rise and fall that has been displayed in this article.

Emergence of the Unionist Party

The Unionist Party emerged on the political scene in 1923 as the most prominent and dominant party of the British Punjab. Its main architects were Sir Fazl-i-Husain, Chaudhary Lal Chand and Sir Chhotu Ram.⁸ When the Punjab National Unionist Party was founded, it initially only aimed to protect the interests of the landed elite in the Punjab Province. However it also gave importance to the interests of the downtrodden people who were its power base in the rural society. This stunning move of public representation by the Unionist Party took it to the heights of popularity above all other political organizations in the Punjab politics.⁹ The emergence of the Unionist Party was the legacy of close ties between the British Government and the landed aristocracy of the Punjab province.¹⁰ Securing the support of the British Government, Sir Fazl-i-Husain strengthened his position, and followed a strategy chalked out by the British which they had perfected after years of experimentation.¹¹

By and large, the Unionist Party was an organization of influential landlords without direct roots in the masses but these landlords wielded great personal sway in their relevant constituencies due to the strong bonds of the *biradari* network. People with a little bit of political awareness called it 'Cooperative Society of Big Zamindars'.¹² Majority of the agrarian society belonged to the three main religious communities of the Punjab: the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs. Like an adopted child, the Unionist Party was patronized by the British rulers.¹³ As far as the aims and objectives of the Unionist Party were concerned, they were very well considered and even its creation was very well thought out. It was to act as a commanding force to dissipate and disintegrate energies and capabilities of the Muslims of Punjab and to restrain them from intermingling with mainstream politics. The party tried to keep up a non-communal nature, non-tribal and non-residential behavior.¹⁴ Another goal of the party was to nurture the class interests, though the party targets later on were transformed to uplift the rural and agrarian society of the Punjab Province. Evading the influences of color, cast and creed, it opened its doors to all without any discrimination for all the communities of the

⁸ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 82.

⁹ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 1988), 20.

¹⁰ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 83.

¹¹ Khalid Shamsul Hasan, *The Punjab Muslim League And the Unionists* (Karachi: Ushba Publishing International, 2005), 29.

¹² Muhammad Munawar, *Dimensions of Pakistan Movement* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1987), 221.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁴ Syed Nur Ahmad, *Mian Fazl-i-Husain: A Review of His Life and Work* (Lahore: the Punjab Educational Press, 1936), 115.

Punjab.¹⁵ The party not only just performed tasks delicately under the British umbrella but also proved itself as a formidable force till the partition of India.¹⁶ A well-known expert on Punjab Politics Ian Talbot writes, ‘From a rather uncertain beginning, the Unionist Party emerged as the predominant force in the regional politics’.¹⁷ The British administrative decisions created a favorable environment for the dominance of rural elite who were largely committed to the tribal politics.¹⁸ People who were loyal to the British Raj dominated the era of Provincial Autonomy.¹⁹

David Gilmartin states, “Though the politics of the Punjab reflected contradictions and tensions within the colonial order, the integrative ideology of imperial rule assisted to center provincial politics on the agricultural tribes and the Unionist Party”.²⁰ In the early 1930s’ provincial politics, the Unionist Party overshadowed the political activities of the Punjab Muslim League and rendered it impotent in disturbing the Unionist’s position in the Punjab Province. However, the Punjab Muslim League and the Unionist Party remained two important political rival forces in the regional politics of the Punjab as the latter took the former from its horns in the provincial elections of 1936-37. When the ‘Provincial Elections’ of 1936-37 were approaching, general feelings amongst the Muslims was that various Muslim groups should unite under the banner of All-India Muslim League which was their senior Muslim organization at All-India level. However such feelings were not materialized. Jinnah, carefully watching the situation, concluded that the Muslims would not be able to take any advantage even of the new constitution unless they stood together. Since the elections were going to be held on the principle of separate electorate, it was essential to bring the Muslim representatives from all other organizations to a single platform of the Muslim organization for a joint political venture in a disciplined way. Therefore, Jinnah was eager to unite all the Muslim groups from various parts of the province on a single platform and struggled to bring them under the League banner.²¹

On the other hand, the Unionist Party, being a non-communal organization, played an important role in creating rifts between the rural and urban Muslim ranks as well as in the whole province. In this regard, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, during his address at the annual session of Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam Lahore in 1935 said, “It is most regrettable that the rural-urban tussle going on in the Punjab has the support of Sir Fazl-i-Husain”.²² In the beginning, Fazl-i-Husain mustered up huge number of followers under his leadership not because he belonged to the rural area but because he was a leader of the Muslims. He deliberately stimulated the rural-

¹⁵ Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana: the Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India*, (Richmond Surrey, Curzon Press, 1996), 51.

¹⁶ Khalid Shamsul Hasan, *The Punjab Muslim League And the Unionists*, 29-30.

¹⁷ Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana*, 51.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰ David Gilmartin, 39.

²¹ S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture 1997), 252-254.

²² Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Iqbal Kay Akhiri Do Sal*, (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publishers, 1989), 287.

urban conflict, so that his position might be secured. Getting advantage of this conflict, he selected his colleagues from the landed elite as well as from the lower strata of the society.²³ As a result, this class who owed their glory to Fazl-i-Husain had begun to look upon him as a superior leader because of their own inferiority complex. The outcome of these fatal political recruitment policies resulted in extinguishing the chances of true Muslim leadership on public level except some exceedingly worthless fortune-hunters.²⁴

In an effort to avoid defeat at the hands of the Unionists, Jinnah made strenuous efforts to get cooperation of the leading Muslim leadership through the constitution of the 'Central Parliamentary Board' in the Punjab which was a key province and corner stone in the eyes of Jinnah.²⁵ In pursuance of this objective Jinnah reached Lahore in 1936 to constitute the 'Punjab Parliamentary Board' on the paramount need of the Muslim unity under the flag of the League.²⁶ Jinnah went as far as to offer Sir Fazl-i-Husain authority to formulate a joint strategy for the upcoming elections and proposed that Muslim candidates from the province should contest the upcoming elections as the League's members and not as Unionists.²⁷ In spite of his pleading, Fazl-i-Husain did not see any reason or boon in such Muslim Unity and categorically rejected Jinnah's proposal.²⁸ Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad remarks over this situation, "all the cogent reasoning and pleading of Jinnah fell on deaf ears".²⁹ In fact, Fazl-i-Husain did not want the Muslim League to interfere in the provincial politics of the Punjab. S.M. Ikram comments on it in these words, "Two iron wills were, now, in a head-long collision".³⁰ During his visit to Lahore Jinnah divulged his plan to Raja Narendranath, the leader of the National Progressive Party, "Fazl-i-Husain thinks he carries Punjab in his pocket, but I am going to smash him".³¹ On this, Raja Narendranath asked Jinnah to be enormously strong.³² Over and above, the Unionist Party proved to be a major obstacle in the way of uniting the Punjabi Muslims on the League's platform. Ashiq Husain Batalvi in his criticism of the Unionists adds another shade to the conflict, "Whenever there was any sign of political awakening among the people of the Punjab, the clashes between Fazl-i-Husain and Malcolm Hailey, the then Governor of the Punjab (1924-28), marred it".³³ However, Jinnah approached the Muslims and infused a sense of nationalism and a spirit of Muslim brotherhood which undoubtedly, affected the evolution of the Muslim community in the sub-

²³ Ibid., 260.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 87.

²⁶ Ibid., 87 and For details see, Provincial Reports, Vol., I, 1936-37, Linlithgow Collection, F 125/112 (NDC, M.U.ACC. No. 596). See, Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj: 1849-1947* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1988), 104.

²⁷ Iftikhar Haider Malik, *Sikandar Hayat Khan: A Political Biography* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1985), 37.

²⁸ S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, 240.

²⁹ Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, *Middle Phase of the Muslim Political Movement* (Lahore: United Ltd, 1969), 165.

³⁰ S. M. Ikram, 240.

³¹ Ibid., 240 Also see, Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain A political Biography*, 310.

³² S. M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, 240.

³³ Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Iqbal Kay Akhiri Do Sal*, 287.

continent. Before leaving Lahore, Jinnah, being frustrated by Sir Fazl-i-Husain's intransigence, also met Allama Iqbal with whose help Punjab Muslim League Parliamentary Board was formed in 1936.³⁴ Although the Punjab Muslim League was striving hard and had unconditional support of Malik Barkat Ali yet the League suffered terribly due to internal factionalism, lack of proper leadership in the province and hegemonic attitude of the party. After the reorganization of the League, Allama Iqbal was elected as President of the Punjab Muslim League with Khalifa Shuja-ud-Din and Malik Barkat Ali as Vice Presidents and Ghulam Rasul Khan as its Secretary respectively.³⁵ In 1936, these leaders published a pamphlet under the title of 'An Appeal to the Muslims of the Punjab' in which they appreciated and admired the role and services of Jinnah towards the settlement of Mosque Shahidganj issue.³⁶ Having their signatures on the pamphlet, Allama Iqbal, Raja Ghazanfar Ali, Khalifa Shuja-ud-Din, Malik Barkat Ali and some other prominent leaders appealed to the Muslim masses of the Punjab to vote for the Muslim League candidates in the upcoming elections.³⁷ However, the position of League was quite weak at the time of the provincial elections of 1936-37 and its propaganda committee faced multiple challenges and difficulties in garnering support in the Punjab. There was a little temptation in its policies for the rural population. On the other hand, the Unionist leadership was criticized and condemned for widening the rural and urban gulf in the province.³⁸ In the long run, the Unionist Party succeeded in winning an all-out support of the Punjab's landed elite, *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* who had a large number of blind followers readily obedient to their call. Majority of the *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* played a pivotal role as candidates and propagandists for the Unionist Party in their respective constituencies.³⁹ In addition, fifteen of the leading *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* of the Punjab issued an election appeal in the favour of the Unionist Party.⁴⁰ In the meanwhile, Sir Fazl-i-Husain died on July 9, 1936 and left the Unionist Party in tatters.⁴¹ Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan succeeded him as a leader of the Unionist

³⁴ In April 1936, All-India Muslim League session was held at Bombay, in which it was decided that the League to participate in the upcoming elections and to constitute a Central Parliamentary Board with its branches in the province. Jinnah was authorized by the Punjab League to constitute a Central Parliamentary Board. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Raja Ghazanfar Ali, Mian Abdul Aziz, Malik Barkat Ali, Afzal Haq, Sheikh Husain-ud-Din and Maulana Abdul Qadir Qasuri were the prominent Muslim members of the Parliamentary Board from the province. See, Iftikhar Haider Malik, *Sikandar Hayat Khan: A Political Biography*, 37.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rafique Afzal, ed., *Guftar-i-Iqbal* (Lahore: 1969), 202-206. Also See, I. H. Malik, 37.

³⁸ This was main concern of some big landlords of the Punjab Province. The greatest harm they did was to split the Muslims into rural and urban classes and stretch the division to such an extent that the two classes looked down upon one another as enemies. This was the authoritarian attitude of the Unionist leadership which allowed it happen for their vested and cherished interests. See, I. H. Malik, 37 and Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Iqbal Kay Akhiri Do Sal*, 287.

³⁹ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, 113.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ I. H. Malik, *Sikandar Hayat Khan: A Political Biography*, 40.

Party.⁴² Dispelling fears and uncertainties, Sir Sikandar sagaciously handled the situation and led the party towards its winning position in the provincial elections. Compared to the Unionists, the Punjab League was placed in an extremely difficult position in these elections. The Unionist Party not only gave a tough time to the Punjab League but smashed and routed all other political forces in the arena of the Punjab politics and established a stronghold in the province.⁴³ These initial years of struggle and gradual development of rural power base under Sir Faz-i-Husain marked the beginning of rise of the party, and it was this unbending and uncompromising struggle that the path through which it reached zenith of power was paved and cleared.

Zenith of Power of the Unionist Party

The Punjab politics went through a drastic transformation after the provincial elections of 1936-37. The Punjab Muslim League had to cut a sorry figure, winning only two Muslim seats: one of Raja Ghazanfar Ali and the other of Malik Barkat Ali in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.⁴⁴ Emerging as majority party, the Unionist Party won 99 out of 175 total seats, while the Congress got 18 seats and 57 seats were bagged by the others including the Hindus and the Sikhs.⁴⁵ The victory of the Unionists eclipsed all other political parties of Punjab, including the Congress and Muslim League who claimed to have national stature. Thus the party moved up the ladder and established supremacy with its prevailing influence in the Punjab politics.⁴⁶ Such an outstanding victory surprised many because the party, unlike other parties, neither unleashed any campaign for swelling its processions nor approached the masses directly. The Party just maintained and sought the support of the influential *jagirdars*, *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* and surged to new heights of popularity with the support of latter. In fact it was a central reason for their victory.⁴⁷ Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad states, “the Unionists employed every tactic—intimidation, official interference and religious influence that resultantly made them win the elections”.⁴⁸ However the clear victory of the Unionist Party in the elections created multiple problems for the Punjab League whose one winning candidate Raja Ghazanfar Ali also deserted the League and joined the Unionist party where he was elevated to the position of Parliamentary Secretary. The other member, Malik Barkat Ali, a seasoned lawyer and a daring leader, kept the flag of the League aloft all alone in the Punjab Assembly for a number of years with commitment and devotion.⁴⁹

⁴² Ibid., 42.

⁴³ During these crucial days Allama Iqbal played a dynamic. He remained in constant touch with Jinnah, communicating him his views and lending him his unflinching support. Iqbal, in one of his letters to Jinnah, wrote: “you are the only Muslim in India today to whom the community has a right to look up for safe guidance through the storm which is coming to North-West India and perhaps the whole of India”. See, Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Iqbal Kay Akhiri Do Sal*, 287. Also See, David Gilmartin, 114.

⁴⁴ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 89-90.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 87 and See, Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 112.

⁴⁶ Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana*, 62.

⁴⁷ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, 117.

⁴⁸ Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, *Middle Phase of the Muslim Political Movement*, 166.

⁴⁹ See, Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 123.

The Punjab Muslim League did not leave any stone unturned to overshadow the ever-increasing sway of the Unionists in the Punjab as they remained unsuccessful in piping down their party influence to the far off and remote areas of the villages of the Province.⁵⁰ The major factor behind the Unionists' unfaltering position in the Punjab was the strong backing of the landlords, *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* who did not let the Punjab League creep into the veins and arteries of the Punjab. This was a matter of deep concern for Jinnah that he found himself in sheer compulsion to acknowledge the captivating and magnetizing spell of the Unionist Party in the Punjab and this activated him to forge sharp strategies to dislodge the foundation of the bastion of the Unionists. The Unionists' triumph paved the way for Sikandar Hayat to become first elected Premier of the Punjab.⁵¹ Subsequently, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan took oath as a Premier of the Punjab on 1st April 1937.⁵² After the formation of his cabinet, Sikandar Hayat with his loyal, trustworthy and politically apt aces, i.e., Chaudhary Chhotu Ram (Minister of Development), Malik Khizr Hayat Tiwana (Minister of Public Works), Manohar Lal (Minister of Finance), Mian Abdul Hayee (Minister of Education), and Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia (Minister of Revenue) introduced many rural development programs including agrarian reforms, construction of schools with the improvement in the education system, strengthening of the Punjabi *punchaiyt* system, layout of roads, extension of irrigation system and elevation of local industry. He also introduced anti-corruption department for the social welfare of the downtrodden class of the Punjab.⁵³ Sir Sikandar Hayat was politically a sharp minded person who manipulated the loyalties of local *biradaries* for the unity of rural community by keeping them off from violent sectarian issues. The revenue wing of the Unionist Party played an important role by clamping down on the money-lenders and such crackdowns made big chunks of money available for the rural development of the Punjab Province.⁵⁴ In addition to this, the Unionist Ministry laid out a six-year plan for the uplift of the remote areas with main focus on provision of schools, medical health-care centers, model farms, advanced sanitation and drainage system.⁵⁵ Although in the initial days, Sir Fazl-i-Husain had set aside the job quotas for the Muslims for their betterment, but the Unionist Party under Sikandar's premiership, extended its welfare program in 1938 for the major communities of the Punjab by apportioning job according to the proportion of population: particularizing the ratio of 50% for Muslims, 30% for the Hindus and 20% for the Sikhs.⁵⁶ The Ministry also introduced 'the Punjab Alienation Land

⁵⁰ The League leadership seriously realized that in order to dislodge the Unionist Party and to win support of the masses of the Punjab, to derail the stronghold of the Unionists, they would have to extend their influence from towns to the countryside. In this regard, the League decided to penetrate into the rural areas to build a strong organizational base there. For these efforts See, *The Daily Civil and Military Gazette*, 15 July, 1937). Also See, S. M. Ikram, 226.

⁵¹ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 87-91 and David Gilmartin, 117 & 135.

⁵² Khalid Shamsul Hasan, *The Punjab Muslim League And the Unionists*, 93.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 117.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ See S. Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab: 1921-47* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1992), 204.

Amendment Act' and 'the Registration of Money-lenders Act' in a bid to curb the evil influence of corrupt money-lenders.⁵⁷ These strict legislative enactments restrained the undue influence of money-lenders by plugging the loopholes in the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900. Furthermore, the *Zamnidara* Conference which was attended by over 150,000 peasants at Lyallpur in September 1938 further boosted and consolidated Sikandar's Ministry.⁵⁸ Besides this, to eradicate the menace of poverty almost imminent on the innocent and fragile heads of people of South-Eastern Punjab, the Unionist also included 'Thal Irrigation' and 'Bhakra Dam' projects in its development plans.⁵⁹ The Unionist Party ameliorated the severe conditions of peasants of the Punjab by stabilizing the costs of wheat and other cash crops with quick and instant payments.⁶⁰ These effective legislative measures of Sikandar's Ministry justified and maintained the pinnacle of the Unionist Party.⁶¹ By and large, the Unionist Party remained a key player in the party politics during Sikandar's Ministry. The party, nonetheless, had played an important role in the political and constitutional developments as well as the protection of the rights of their representative communities. However, this was a period of climax for the Unionists' rule in the Punjab.

Reconciliation between the League and the Unionist Party

The League and the Unionists remained at daggers drawn till Raja Ghazanfar Ali made untiring efforts to bridge the differences between them. The Punjab's Premier Sikandar Hayat and Muhammad Ali Jinnah jointly attended the session of the All-India Muslim League at Lucknow. After developing a mutual understanding, Sikandar-Jinnah Pact was signed in October 1937 between the Muslim League and the Unionist Party.⁶² This pact converged the paths of both parties into one and stated that both will contest upcoming elections jointly. Sir Sikandar Hayat assured Jinnah, after reaching Lahore, that he would advise the Muslim members of the Unionist party to join the League. In fact, Sikandar-Jinnah Pact curtailed the freedom of the Unionist members in a sense that they were no longer free and at ease in developing relations with other parties. Further it provided an organized framework offering a close cooperation between both the political parties and their members as well.⁶³ Simultaneously, this pact allowed both the parties to retain their separate identities. This accord provided a pathway to Jinnah in the Punjab Province, and drew him close to the Unionist members but proved to be a matter of controversy, as different interpretations emerged, among members of the Unionist Party. Had this pact not been inked, possibilities were there that the Punjab could never have been divided for the pact had sown the seeds of slow and silent decline of the Unionist Party. Sikandar-Jinnah Pact, indeed, enhanced the Muslim League's prestige and strengthened its position at all

⁵⁷ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 118.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁹ For details see, *The Punjab Legislative Council Debates*, vol- xxiii, February to July 1933, 758-759.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Also see Raghuvendra Tanwar, *Politics of Sharing Power*, 63.

⁶¹ Khalid Shamsul Hasan, *The Punjab Muslim League And the Unionists*, 93.

⁶² Khalid Bin Saeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase: 1857-1948* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 97-98.

⁶³ Qalb-i-Abid and Massarrat Abid, *Punjab Politics: Dyarchy to Partition*, 245.

India level and particularly in the Punjab Province. This pact received a mixed reaction from various political leaders, and offered multiple pros and cons to the Unionist Party.⁶⁴ Ashiq Husain Batalvi lambasted Sir Sikandar for agreeing to the pact with the only motive of gobbling up the Punjab Muslim League.⁶⁵ M.A.H. Ispahani is of the view that Sikandar agreed to the pact just to strengthen his Premiership against the 'Mass-Contact Movement' which had been launched by the Congress to increase its vote bank at all India level in April 1937.⁶⁶

Chaudhry Khaliq-uz-Zaman says in appreciation of the pact that no one can refute that, without this accomplishment on the part of Sir Sikandar Hayat, the Muslim League's struggle would have been limited to only minority provinces alone. The Punjab Premier rescued Muslims of Punjab by joining the League session in Lucknow and by implanting a new vitality into the movement".⁶⁷ Further, he stated that Sikandar's affiliation with the Punjab League at this critical juncture was one of the most fortunate event for the Muslims of India.⁶⁸ One of the immediate impacts of the Pact was that it revitalized the League in All-Indian politics. Creating a new political landscape, it opened new avenues and directions not only for both parties but for their members as well in the Punjab Politics. Later on, in 1938, an organizing committee was formed during the All-India Muslim League Calcutta Session in which Sikandar Hayat Khan was appointed its chairman to establish a new League Organization within the Punjab Province. It marked the shining hour of Sir Sikandar's political career by which he established his authority with the joint headship of both political parties in the Punjab Province.⁶⁹ Sir Sikandar not only developed communal harmony among the major communities of the Punjab but also tried to maintain cordial relationship between all the political forces and stakeholders of the province. He remained very successful in his accommodative behavior owing to his reconciliatory policy. Despite the hue and cry of the League member Malik Barkat Ali, the Unionists remained in majority in the organizing committee.⁷⁰ In fact, Malik Barkat Ali and his supporters failed to comprehend as to why Jinnah allowed the Unionists to have a complete control over their –re-organizational work and why Jinnah depended upon Sikandar's support. However, Jinnah could not afford to displease Sikandar who had extended his useful support in dealing with the Congress and the British Government. Thus, the Unionist Party remained dominant in the provincial politics from its birth to till 1942. As a result of this rapprochement with the Unionists, the League's organizational activities in the Punjab initially came to a standstill till the breakout of the World War-II when Jinnah sagaciously turned the tide in his favour.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 89 and Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 123-124.

⁶⁶ Ispahani, *Quaid-i-Azam As I knew Him* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1976), 55. Also cited by Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 89.

⁶⁷ Khaliq-uz-Zaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore: Brothers Publishers, 1993), 290.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, 252.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 254-255

Unionists' Towards its Fall

The perilous journey to the decline of the Unionist Party had commenced right after the signing of the Sikandar-Jinnah Pact because the Hindu members turned hostile to Sir Sikandar on account of this agreement. The main pillar and one of the founding fathers of the Unionist Party Sir Chhotu Ram developed glaring differences and showed his serious reservation on the pact.⁷¹ S. M. Ikram writes, "new forces operating under the leadership of Jinnah shattered the Unionist Party into smithereens".⁷² During this period, the Punjab Muslim Students Federation⁷³ was the League's main scion of propaganda in the countryside. This body had been reorganized in 1937 by Abdus Sattar Khan Niazi, Hameed Nizami and Ibrahim Ali Chishti.⁷⁴ Majority of the members of this organization were the students of Islamia College Lahore. During the World War-II in 1939, the Indian politics underwent multiple drastic changes as the British had demanded soldiers and food in heavy amounts from the locals and especially from the Punjab and Bengal Provinces. Meanwhile, the Unionist Party faced a severe challenge of the shortage of food grains in the Punjab Province.⁷⁵ The deteriorating economic conditions of the province, roaring inflation since 1939, soaring prices of daily-use commodities coupled with the wartime policy of the Unionist Party were enough to undermine its popularity because Sikandar Hayat had extended full support to the British Government by furnishing them maximum supply of resources earning the hatred of the locals. The panic of food crisis was evident and gradually some *zamindars* began to feel the pinch, as cost of the scarce commodities such as cloth, sugar and kerosene began to pace up along with the dire lack of agricultural production.⁷⁶ It led some of the small *zamindars* from the Eastern districts of the province to defect to the Muslim League. Under such circumstances, the Unionists started losing its hegemony during the course of World War-II because they were considered as the notorious benefactors and supporters of the British Government. Dejected and despaired, the masses looked for another political entity to represent their interests as well as their challenges in those desperate times. The Unionist Party gained more and more power among the peasantry class of the Punjab who perceived them as self-centered masters of concentrated power. On the other side, the Punjab Muslim League, irrespective of its strength and status, worked extremely hard and turned the situation to their advantage.⁷⁷

Meanwhile, the revolutionary political changes had been taking place on the political horizon of the sub-continent for the past few years. During this period the

⁷¹ Ibid., 254.

⁷² S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, 240 and Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, *Middle Phase of the Muslim Political Movement*, 166.

⁷³ The Punjab Muslim Students Federation contributed a lot for the political revival of the Muslims in the Punjab. See, Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 91. For detailed study see, Sarfraz Husain Mirza, *The Punjab Muslim Students Federation: An Annotated Documentary Survey 1937-1947* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1978).

⁷⁴ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 91.

⁷⁵ Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana*, 89.

⁷⁶ Aysha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 140 and Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana*, 99.

⁷⁷ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 91.

All-India Muslim League emerged as the sole representative political entity of the Muslims of the sub-continent. The League's political position under the leadership of Jinnah climaxed even higher as the idea of Pakistan continued to entice Muslim population. The Punjab had the honor to host the 27th Annual Session of All-India Muslim League on March 21-23, 1940 at Minto Park, now Iqbal Greater Park, Lahore.⁷⁸ During this session the epoch-making Lahore Resolution was passed and direct demand for a separate piece of land was vocally pronounced. The Lahore Resolution stirred the souls of the Muslims and virtually accelerated the pace of struggle for a separate homeland.⁷⁹ It activated the Punjabi Muslims, especially, those who played a dynamic role in the achievement of Pakistan. The Muslim League's influence and importance had started growing rapidly in All-Indian politics with the Viceroy's August Offer⁸⁰ of 1940 and later with the Cripps Mission's acceptance of the League's separatist demand in 1942. With increasing popularity of the League, the Unionists came under intense pressure. The League began to plinth and increased pressure on the Unionist Party. The Punjab Muslim Students Federation was a staunch supporter of the demand for Pakistan, and on March 2, 1941, it organized a Pakistan Conference in Lahore, which was presided over by Jinnah.⁸¹ Through a resolution, during the conference, a 'Pakistan Rural Sub-Committee' was established for carrying League's message to the masses in the countryside. This newly established committee made intensive tours to the western Punjab and particularly to those towns and districts where there was no branch of the Provincial League.⁸² The Muslim Leaguers pierced the strongholds of the Unionists and turned it on their sides. Jinnah was so pleased with the students for successfully organizing this conference and in his presidential address, he paid glorious tributes to the Punjab Muslim Students Federation⁸³ With every small success of the League, the Unionist Party drifted away from its zenith of power and eventually seemed cornered into a rapid downward spiral.

Rising Popularity of the Muslim League in the Punjab Politics

Eyeing meticulously on the political climate, Jinnah's crafty foresightedness and visionary approaches infused a new spirit into the League. In fact it was his charismatic leadership that the League attained fame for which the Unionists paid dearly. Ultimately, the League under the leadership of Jinnah was able to conquer the impregnable political fort of the Unionists in future. Undoubtedly, during

⁷⁸ For details see, Sikandar Hayat, *The Charismatic Leader Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Creation of Pakistan* (Karachi: OUP, 2008), 198.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The Viceroy's August Offer of 1940 increased the influence of the Muslim League in the national politics and later with the Cripps Mission's acceptance of separatist demands its attitude hardened towards the Unionist Party. For details see, Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics*, 96.

⁸¹ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, 184. Also See, Sarfraz Husain Mirza, *The Punjab Muslim Students Federation*, lxx-lxix.

⁸² For detailed study see, Sarfraz Husain Mirza, *The Punjab Muslim Students Federation: An Annotated Documentary Survey 1937-1947* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1978). lxxv.

⁸³ See, Sarfraz Husain Mirza, *The Punjab Muslim Students Federation*, lxxv-lxiv & 229 and Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 161 and Muhammad Munawar, *Dimensions of Pakistan Movement* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1987), 221-229.

Sikander's period the Unionist party established its stronghold, and the party's hegemony was considered a dominating force in the sphere of the Punjab Politics that was considered an unrivaled force in the province. Another blow that proved to be untenable and irreparable was the sudden demise of Sir Sikandar in 1942 depriving the party of its worth leadership.⁸⁴ After Sikandar's death, Malik Khizr Hayat Tiwana took charge of the party and the province in 1943. Unlike his predecessors, Khizr could not understand the varying and complex pattern of the Punjab Politics. Khizr had not the ability to tread on the political path of his predecessors; Sir Fazl-i-Husain and Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan who both rendered great services and made a wonderful contribution to establish the power of the Unionist Party. Khizr proved to be incompetent politically and eventually led the party to its decay.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, his incompetence was not altogether personal rather owed much to the political landscape that surrounded him. The British demands of war services, rivalry within the party, pressure of the League and the demand of Pakistan made his responsibilities enormously onerous. By the beginning of 1943, the popularity of the Unionist Party started waning, whereas the All-India Muslim League was politically ascending.⁸⁶ In this difficult political situation, Jinnah held talks with Khizr in 1944 and aimed at the consolidation of the League-Unionist relationship. Jinnah wanted the Muslim members of the Unionists to become fully-fledged members of the Muslim League and Khizr Ministry would be acknowledged as 'League Coalition Ministry'.⁸⁷ Applying delaying tactics for the attainment of some time, Khizr Hayat Tiwana tried to eschew any such settlement. Resultantly, the talks failed as Khizr did not concede to Jinnah's demands. Khizr declared that the new Coalition Ministry would remain the League-Unionist Coalition Ministry.⁸⁸ Jinnah began to pressurize Khizr to reinvigorate the League organization in the province and dispel all ambiguity in the Unionist support for Pakistan. When Khizr could not meet his expectations, Jinnah reacted strongly and ordered the expulsion of Khizr from the ranks of League.⁸⁹ Jinnah was not alone in this opinion rather had the support of numerous rural leaders. As a result, Khizr was expelled from the League which proved to be a heavy loss because the ball had moved out of Khizr's court and Jinnah was quite in a strong position.⁹⁰ After the failure of Khizr-Jinnah talks, the League launched its propaganda campaign in the countryside which restricted the reach of the Unionist Party. Thus, the Punjab politics entered into a new phase where Jinnah and his ideological mission were in a strong position.⁹¹

In effort to pacify splinter group of the party, Khizr appointed Sikandar's son, Shaukat Hayat Khan, to his own former position as the second rural Muslim minister of Public Works. The transition of power from Sikandar to Khizr was

⁸⁴ S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, 269.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ David Gilmartin, 186-188.

⁸⁷ See Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Wavell and Muslim Politics in Punjab—Expulsion of Khizr Hayat Tiwana from the Muslim League 1944" *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, vol-46, No-1, 5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, 187.

outwardly smooth but thinly concealed the strong factional rivalries within the party. These rivalries were further intensified over the dubious stance of the party leadership.⁹² However, the demand for Pakistan proved to be a hot potato for the Unionist Party after the Lahore Resolution of 1940.⁹³ Using the ideological concept of Pakistan from the platform of the Muslim League, the old supporters of the Unionist Party began to castigate Khizr for the failure of Khizr-Jinnah talks. Despite the fact that conditions were immensely different, Khizr tried to continue Sikandar's position of nominal support for Pakistan but he could not withstand the whirlpool of political challenges stirred by Jinnah. Like Jinnah, Shaukat Hayat Khan strongly assailed Khizr's failure to take an effective stand in support of Pakistan. The attention-demanding point here is that if Khizr Hayat Tiwana had changed his stance by apprehending the varying pattern of the League politics, he could have secured a safer side, not only for himself, but also for the Party. It soon became clear that Shaukat's criticism had full support of Mumtaz Daultana, Ahmad Yar Khan Daultana, Malik Firoz Khan Noon and Mir Maqbool Mahmud (Shaukat's father-in-law). Shaukat Hayat could not claim the support of young Nawab Iftikhar Husain Khan Mamdot, who succeeded his late father as a president of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League.⁹⁴ Mamdot declared that Sikandar-Jinnah Pact had lapsed with the death of Sir Sikandar by which the allegiance of Punjab's Muslims to Jinnah and the Muslim League was completely unfettered.⁹⁵ As a result of this conflict, in 1944, Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan was banished from the Khizr's cabinet and soon Raja Ghaznafar Ali Khan and Sufi Abdul Hamid also left the Unionist Party, and entered the fold of Muslim League. Sardar Shaukat Hayat, Mian Mumtaz Daultana, Raja Ghaznafar Ali Khan and Nawab Iftikhar Husain Mamdot were the star speakers in favour of the Muslim League.⁹⁶ The League gained strong momentum with the defection of the mainstream Unionists to the Muslim League. Under the guidance of Mian Mumtaz Muhammad Daultana and his colleagues, the League adopted a progressive program aimed at securing civil liberties, assuring transparent elections without official interference.⁹⁷

According to the David Gilmartin, during that time period, it is worth mentioning here, that "the expulsion of Khizr from the League did not bring the expected crumbling of the Unionist Party in May 1944. In spite of Khizr's expulsion from the League, the great majority of the rural Muslim assembly members remained loyal to the Unionist Party, for they continued to see the Unionist government as the best protector of their local interests even in the days of weakening popularity of the Unionist Party".⁹⁸ Ian Talbot states, "The big *zamindars* obstructed League

⁹² Ibid., 186.

⁹³ Jinnah resisted pressure from urban Punjabi Muslim League supporters to abandon his alliance with Unionists in the year after Sikandar's death; he refused in early 1943 to sanction the Muslim League workers board in Lahore to separate from the Unionist-dominated provincial League. See, *The Eastern Times* (Lahore: 12 February, 1943).

⁹⁴ See, David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, 187.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 160.

⁹⁷ Ibid., and see, David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, 187.

⁹⁸ See, David Gilmartin, 187. For details see, Sarfraz Husain Mirza, *The Punjab Muslim Students Federation*, lxxv-lxix.

activities that they saw as disruptive to their lucrative connection with the British Government”.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the structure of the colonial system remained intact and powerful in the agenda of political parties of British India for the support of the British authority.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Unionist Party became target of severe criticism for aggravating problems in the province. However, despite the dynamic struggle of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation and the campaign of League leaders, the Unionist Party was still in a commanding position in the countryside. Throughout 1944, it continued to win the District Board and Provincial Assembly by-elections because the organizational advance of the League in rural areas was still slow. *The Eastern Times* of 25 May, 1945 reported that till May 1945 the numbers of its members in the province were 150,000.¹⁰¹ The reasons for its tardy progress were not obscure as local factional rivalries were still at large; the rural population was still in a tight grip of the Unionist landlords. The Unionist Party, having felt completely bamboozled, issued strict orders to the district administration throughout the Punjab for crushing the League with heavy hands. The cities of Lahore, Amritsar, Jalandhar and Gurgaon were put under section 144 and public meetings were banned throughout the province.¹⁰² The League’s activities were kept under watch; Muslim Leaguers were occasionally persecuted and anti-League elements were stimulated in the province but such actions failed to contain the League’s popularity. Gradually, the Muslim League’s rising popularity started eclipsing the Unionists. These immediate factors reduced the influence of the Unionist Party, ultimately leading to its downfall.

The Leadership Crises

The vacuum of effective leadership was another crucial cause for the downfall of the Unionist Party. In fact, after the departure of Fazl-i-Husain and Sikandar Hayat, not even a single leader could fill in the leadership vacuum in the Unionist Party. Especially, after the death of Sikandar, Khizr Hayat Tiwana was unable to tackle the shifting scenario of the Punjab Politics amicably. Unlike his predecessors, he did not possess political experience and standing that were integral to keep up the status quo. Penderel Moon writes, “Khizr did not possess diplomatic approach and charm of manner in the degree that his forerunners possessed”.¹⁰³ Another blow came with the demise of Sir Chhotu Ram in January 1945. He was considered as the stalwart pillar of the Unionist Party in his individual capacity. Being an influential politician, he had telling influence within the party as well.¹⁰⁴ Sir Chhotu Ram was a great advocate and veracious spokesperson of the peasant class in the province. His death proved an enormous loss as a large scale defection triggered from the Unionists to the Muslim League. All the three main political leaders Sir Fazl, Sir Sikandar and Sir Chhotu Ram departed eternally within a short period of just nine years, and such sudden and unfortunate deaths left the party orphaned. The leadership crisis was certain but

⁹⁹ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, 188.

¹⁰¹ See, *The Eastern Times* (Lahore: 25 May, 1945). Cited by, Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 95 and Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 161-162.

¹⁰² Sikandar Hayat, *The Charismatic Leader*, 244.

¹⁰³ Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

what made it worst was the internal factional rivalries which undermined the party position. Under such a setting, the decline of the party was foreseeable as not only influential individual electable defected but leaders from the prominent landed families were also tilted towards the Muslim League. Ibn-e-Khaldun says that solidarity breaks down in the wake of internal rifts and quarrels that leads to the eventual downfall and we see that the Unionist Party was treading upon this path and ultimately fell into the pit of death. However, Khizr was in favor of the inter-communal cooperation and harmony and his political approach was regionalized in compliance with the prevailing norms of Indian politics. Thus, the Unionist Party, in order to reshape itself relatively from the privileged class to a marginalized class, pushed towards its bases, but unfortunately the party could not transform itself successfully on account of its weakened ideological grounds, weak organizational structure, lack of cooperation among the pioneer communities and incompetent leadership. On the other hand, the League opened its branches, widened its influence at tehsil and district levels and tried to evolve itself effectively. Although the Unionist Party was a reflection of multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic composition, but with the seeds of communal conflict and partition sown, it was impossible for the Unionists to maintain its collectivist structure. The Unionist leadership under Khizr also mishandled war efforts and continued to support the British while public saw it as treachery.¹⁰⁵ In addition to this, the economic deficits both in rural and urban areas greatly demeaned the party position in the province among the masses along with the inept management and defective structure of the party.

Transformation of Loyalties into Disloyalties

The failure of Simla Conference in July 1945 greatly disappointed the Unionist members and made it clear that future distribution of high offices would depend on collaboration with the Muslim League rather than with the British Government.¹⁰⁶ Assessing a dark future of the Unionist Party, landlords who were always interested in safeguarding their own vested interests bade good-bye to the Unionist Party. Hence, when Simla Conference failed, there occurred a remarkable and significant change in the Punjab Politics. The Punjabi rural elite felt disgruntled and lacked faith in the Unionists. They stood firmly convinced after doing the hard political calculations that the Unionist roots and shadow would be nothing more than a dead debt in future.¹⁰⁷ By 1945, Khizr's hold over the ninety-six assembly members continuously grew tenuous. With the waning moon of the Unionist Party's popularity, the rural leaders started reassessing their loyalty to it.¹⁰⁸ It was the time when the Unionists' sun was setting down and the League's sun was going to rise with high flames simultaneously. Now, all the communities and their leadership began pondering over their personal interests because all of them were reminded by Simla Conference that they would have to develop ties with the

¹⁰⁵ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 164-167.

¹⁰⁶ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 97-98.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

League at the centre.¹⁰⁹ This transforming scenario of shifting loyalties into disloyalties paved the way for the League to expand its influence and programs in the British Punjab. Owing to this, the Punjab Muslim League and the Unionist Party entwined their horns in the upcoming elections of 1945-46 for the materialization of their political dreams.

Rise of the Muslim League and Fall of the Unionist Party

Though the tides appeared favorable for the League, still it faced challenges in the elections of 1945-46. It confronted several hostile elements, the Congress with tremendous propaganda machinery and plenty of funds, the numerous Quisling Muslim groups and, last but not least, the Unionists in the Punjab. These powerful feudal lords were backed and patronized by the British Government since their arrival in the sub-continent. Apparently it seemed that the League had meager resources for election but her main asset was sincere and dedicated workers and students who had imbibed the missionary spirit to fight for the national cause. The bulk of selfless workers and volunteers were men of humble background or students of colleges and universities, particularly from Aligarh, Lahore, Calcutta and Dacca.¹¹⁰ According to Ian Talbot, “although this showed only a little drop in the ocean but it was a useful dress rehearsal for the students’ propaganda movements in the villages during 1946 elections”.¹¹¹ Thus, the League was in an increasingly stronger position to contest the provincial elections of 1946. In this countrywide election, the most decisive election battle was going to be fought in the Punjab because it was considered a corner-stone for the creation of Pakistan.¹¹² Backed by the British, a strong alliance of big *zamindars*, Hindu *jats* and militant Akali Sikhs adopted every possible strategy, graft, bullying and coercion to compel the Muslims to vote for the Unionists against their will. However the rising national spirit of the Punjabi Muslims frustrated all their nefarious designs. The obnoxious devices employed by the Unionists in the election campaign backfired and turned out to be a final death-blow to the Unionist Party in the Punjab Province. Contrary to the exhausted Unionists, the Punjab Muslim League was revived and reinvigorated when many prominent leaders of the former joined the Muslim League. Further, the League also succeeded in winning the support of *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* of the province right before the elections.¹¹³ These *pirs* gave an all-out support to the League and issued *fatwas* (religious directives) in its favor.¹¹⁴ When thousands of *murids* saw their *pirs* supporting the League, they too fervently and swiftly followed the party. In Jhelum, Pir Fazl Shah of Jalalpur Sharif supported the League while his brother the Pir of Golra Sharif backed the party in the Rawalpindi. In Sargodha, the *pirs* of Sial Sharif were also tilted

¹⁰⁹ The Muslim League came forward to exploit and air the resentment in the rural areas against rationing, the requisition of food grains and an alleged communal bias in its distribution. See, Aysha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 143.

¹¹⁰ Sikandar Hayat, *The Charismatic Leader*, 238-239. For detailed study see, Sarfraz Husain Mirza, *The Punjab Muslim Students Federation*.

¹¹¹ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 92.

¹¹² Jamil-ud-Diin Ahmad, *The Final Phase of the Struggle for Pakistan* (Lahore: United Ltd., 1977), 25.

¹¹³ Sikandar Hayat, *The Charismatic Leader*, 240-241.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

towards the League along with their strong supporters. The Gilanis and Quraishies of Multan became a great source of strength for the League. Similarly, the Shah Jiwana, Bokhari Syed of Jhang, Pir of Manki Sharif Mohammad Aminul Hasanat (1923-1960), and famous ulema Allama Shabbir Ahamad Usmani and Pir Jammt Ali Shah also pledged their support in favor of the League.¹¹⁵ Among all, the most spectacular successes achieved by the leading *pirs*, *sajjadah nashins* and landed elite were in the districts of Multan, Jhelum, Jhang and Karnal.¹¹⁶ About the magnificent impact of this new development along with the entry of the *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* into the League, Ian Talbot states: “They furnished the channel in accordance with tradition with the League’s approach to the rustic voters who were unable to read or write”.¹¹⁷ Subsequently, the thumping victory of the Muslim League justified Jinnah’s claim of being the sole spokesperson of the Muslims of India. In the elections of 1945-46 the League emerged as the leading party with 75 seats out of 86 Muslim seats in the Punjab Province. The League won all 11 of the urban seats and 64 out of 75 rural constituencies in the elections.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, the Congress was the second largest party bagging 51 seats and the Unionist Party achieved only 20 seats. The Akali Sikhs acquired 22 seats and 7 seats were attained by the independent candidates. The ruling Unionist Party, in spite of the Congress and the Sikh support had been reduced to an insignificant group of 20 of whom 4 more members defected to the Muslim League which raised the League’s strength to 79. Further 6 members out of remaining 16 Unionist members also left the party, leaving it only with 10 members.¹¹⁹

The League was entitled to receive the first directive for forming the government under the established norms and conventions of parliamentary system. On the other hand, the several anti-League forces including the Congress, the Akali Sikhs and the Unionists were determined to deprive the Muslim League of the fruit of her well-deserved victory. Khizr lobbied to form the government with the help of some independent and non-Muslim members. Against the parliamentary traditions, Glancy, the Governor of the Punjab, gave enough time to the minority groups to unite for achieving a nominal overall majority in the Assembly. In fact, the British reckoned Malik Khizr Hayat Tiwana, a willing instrument to further their designs in the future Indian politics but the latter did not have enough time to restructure and reinvigorate the party and soon the party succumbed to its internal rivalries and defections.¹²⁰ The Governor Glancy called on Khizr to form a ‘Unionist Coalition Ministry’ with the help of Akali Sikhs and the Congress. It would be appropriate to mention that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad also played a significant role to keep the League out of power and triumphantly announced the alliance

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 241.

¹¹⁶ Aysha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 148.

¹¹⁷ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 97-98.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 100 and Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 218.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. See, V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Princeton University Press: 1957), 230. Also see, I. H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Karachi: Elite Publishers, 1988), 205.

¹²⁰ Jamil-ud-Diin Ahmad, *The Final Phase of the Struggle for Pakistan*, 27.

between the Congress and the Unionists.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the Punjab League was deprived of the reward of its victory which outraged many of its leaders. The League which represented majority of the Muslims in the province was kept out intentionally. It was extremely difficult for the ministry brought into existence with sinister motives to stand the test of time and within a year, it so happened that the pressure of public resentment swept it out resultantly.¹²² With the tacit support and blessings of the British Governor, a rump of minority elements under the title of 'Unionist Coalition Ministry' started ruling the Muslim-majority province.

Eventual Breakdown of the Unionists

This new ministry of Khizr had several unbridgeable rifts and to crown all, the Coalition Ministry, which was formed by 51 Congress members, 22 Akali Sikhs and 10 Unionists, was headed by Sir Khizr Hayat Tiwana, whose own party had been swept into limbo in the elections.¹²³ Though, the British-Congress 'combined' succeeded in imposing upon the Punjab a ministry dominated by the Congress and Sikhs to be governed by a puppet Premier, but it was abhorrent for the Muslims. Having majority, the League staged protests and demonstrations which created political chaos in the Province. In order to suppress the voice of the Muslim majority, the Unionist Coalition Ministry decided to clamp on rigorous restrictions on civil liberties. Adding fuel to the fire, the banning of the Muslim National Guards, a disciplined organization of the League left many of the Punjabi Muslims distraught. On January 24, 1947 the police reached the office of the Punjab League in Lahore with the directives to carry out a search operation. It was an arbitrary and unjust step taken by the government authorities only to pester and intimidate the League workers. Within no time the prominent League leaders, Nawab Iftikhar Husain Mamdot, Mian Mumtaz Daultana, Malik Firoz Khan Noon and Syed Amir Husain Shah also arrived at the scene, showed their resentment, defied the order and offered themselves for arrest. This incident sparked a huge Civil Disobedience Movement which was peaceful and disciplined in nature.¹²⁴ Every dawn saw a large group of Muslims led by their prominent leaders defying the orders under section 144 and courting arrest. Mian Bashir Ahmad, member of the All-India Muslim League Working Committee, Malik Lal Khan, Nawab Jamal Khan Leghari, Sufi Abdul Hamid, Umar Hayat Malik and Allama Ala-ud-Din Siddiqui were among these leaders. Soon there was a huge protest all over the Punjab and all sections of the society poured out against the governmental oppressive actions in the form of tear gas, baton-charge and frequent firing. Feeling gravity of the situation, even the *burka*-clad ladies also came out of their houses and participated in the protest demonstrations and subsequently offering themselves to be incarcerated.¹²⁵ The mass women demonstrations were led by prominent ladies like Begum Shah Nawaz, Begum Bashir Ahmad, Begum

¹²¹ Ibid., 25. Also see, I. H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, 205. See Civil and Military Gazette, 7 and 21 March, 1946.

¹²² Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 100.

¹²³ Ibid., 101. See, V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 230. Also see, I. H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, 205.

¹²⁴ Jamil-ud-Diin Ahmad, *The Final Phase of the Struggle for Pakistan*, 27 and Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 101.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 96.

Tasadduq Husain, Fatima Begum and Miss Mumtaz Shah Nawaz.¹²⁶ Begum Husain Malik and Noor-us-Saba Begum came all the way from Delhi while lady Hidayatullah arrived from Sindh and led the women demonstrations in Lahore.¹²⁷ Toward the end of February 1947, some vibrant and political activists Muslim women, succeeded in removing the 'Union Jack' from the Punjab Civil Secretariat Lahore and hoisting the Muslim League flag in the place. This proved to be a turning point in the fortunes of the Unionist Ministry, which now found it impossible to govern.¹²⁸

Though backed by the imperial power itself, the Unionists Coalition Ministry could not withstand the unprecedented popular protests and fell to its knees. The civil liberties were restored, ban on the Muslim National Guards, public meetings and processions was uplifted on February 25, 1947. Khizr Hayat Tiwana, the Punjab Premier, also bowed before the surging-tide of popular resentment and resigned on March 2, 1947.¹²⁹ Therefore, the Punjabi Muslims brought down a Hindu-Congress dominated tyrannical regime and frustrated its nefarious designs paving the way for Pakistan. Nawab Iftikhar Husain Mamdot, leader of the Muslim League party, was invited to form a new Ministry and he accepted the invitation. Before he could step up to form government, the Hindus and the Sikhs, in order to prevent the formation of League Ministry, resorted to violent demonstrations which involved bloodshed of Muslims on a large scale. According to Penderel Moon, "Master Tara Singh, the Sikh leader, raised the slogan *Pakistan Murdabad*, (Pakistan die forever) and waved a sword as a threat to Pakistan slogan and yelled, '*Raj karega Khalsa baqi rahay na koi*' (no one will survive, only Sikhs will rule).¹³⁰ Sir Evans Jenkins, the then Governor of the Punjab (1946-47), did not pursue the invitation he had initially given to the League party leader. Quite contrarily, he used the disturbances ignited by the Hindus and Sikhs as a pretext to suspend the constitutional government and imposed Governor's rule in the province. Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad writes, "This is yet another evidence of the British Government's antipathy towards the Muslim League at that time".¹³¹ Come what may, people of the Punjab had given a clear and conspicuous verdict in the favor of Pakistan and the Muslim League. According to Ian Talbot, "Pakistan could never come into being without the assistance of the Muslims of the Punjab who strongly demanded the idea of a separate homeland".¹³²

The close collaboration which existed in the Punjab between the landed aristocracy and the British Government ultimately ended and so did the power of the Unionist Party forever. It was the animated spirit of Jinnah who single-handedly defeated all the opposition forces and encountered the challenges

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ See Nur-us-Saba Begum, *Tahrik-i-Pakistan our Khawateen* (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1970), 308. Also see, Sikandar Hayat, *The Charismatic Leader*, 243.

¹²⁸ Jamil-ud-Diin Ahmad, *The Final Phase of the Struggle for Pakistan*, 96. Also see, Sikandar Haayat, *The Charismatic Leader*, 243.

¹²⁹ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 101.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 101-102. Jamil-ud-Diin Ahmad, *The Final Phase of the Struggle for Pakistan*, 97 and Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*, 77.

¹³¹ Jamil-ud-Diin Ahmad, *The Final Phase of the Struggle for Pakistan*, 97.

¹³² Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 80.

sagaciously. Jinnah was a mature politician to be skillful in the game of politics and his calculations were very accurate. He played his part in a tactical way by forging a pact with the Unionist Party to safeguard his political entry in the Punjab and then broke with them only when he had secured the direct support of rural magnates by getting them defected to the Muslim League. In many ways, it was him who weakened the consolidated position of the Unionist Party as he had created a widening crack in its stronghold in 1937 at the time of Sikandar-Jinnah Pact.¹³³ Although it is difficult to measure political pros and cons inflicted upon the Unionists by Jinnah, yet his political presence was commanding and a source of vexations for the Unionist members. He knew that he had to compromise the symbolic urban “communalism” to keep his power-base intact in the rural Punjab. By and large, Jinnah played a crucial role in staging the decline of the Unionist Party. The partition of India in August 1947 almost closed the chapter of the Unionist Party and the British Government along with their collaborative legacy saying good-bye to British Punjab as well as to India. The British endeavored to the end in employing every political device to bridle the Punjabi community through controlled and patronized political parties.

To recapitulate, it can be said that Sir Fazl-i-Husain who was the real architect of the Unionist Party entrusted the rein of the party to Sikandar Hayat who reaped the fruit with his reconciliatory political strategy but Khizr— his immediate successor could not handle the situation due to the changing pattern of the time. Ultimately, the once ruling party in the British Punjab eventually collapsed into pieces with a sorry state in which its loyal members jumped to the Muslim League, and their defection became the final nail in the coffin of the party. In the light of Ibn-e-Khaldun’s theory, it appears that Sir Fazl-i-Husain not only founded the Unionist Party but also placed it on the path of success and fame, Sir Sikandar Hayat pushed it towards its height of glory but Khizr’s could not compete the challenges because he was heading a contrived minority government. S. M. Ikram opines, “Fazl-i-Husain had done all the necessary spadework for giving Unionist Party a good start under the new constitution, but he died and the fruits of his labors were reaped by Sikandar Hayat, but during Khizr’s premiership all the working arrangement of the Unionists completely broke down”.¹³⁴ However, the phenomenon of the party politics remained an interesting aspect of the Colonial Punjab. So this research paper projects the entire life-span of the Unionist Party and its cyclic spell by keeping in view the theory of rise and fall under the leadership of Fazl, Sikandar and Khizr.

Conclusion

To pen off, it can be stated that rise and fall of the Unionist party in many ways was swift and mesmerizing. The sagacity of Fazl-i-Husain put it on the track of popularity with the assistance of Sir Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand. Despite the noticeable presence of the Congress and the League at both provincial and national scenes, the Unionists made speedy advancement not only in building their power bases but also in overcoming the initial impediments present in the form of communal rifts and political squabbling among the communities of Punjab.

¹³³ Ibid., 88.

¹³⁴ S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, 247.

Further, the party came into power in the province which was regarded to be pivotal not only to the British hold but also to the demand for Pakistan. It sounds quite logical that the dream of Pakistan would not have been materialized without the contribution of Punjab, Punjabi communities and the political parties. Representing the class interests, including *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins* and peasantry the Unionist Party dominated the political scene of the Punjab Province for almost three decades. Apart from this, it was a symbol of cross-communal organization, which all of its leaders including Khizr endeavored to preserve till they ceased to be. The party played a dynamic role during the 1930s and 1940s in the Punjab Politics. It would not be wrong to say that the downfall of the party co-incided with the rise of Muslim nationalism and demand for Pakistan.

In fact, when the idea of Pakistan became mature after the Lahore Resolution and the demand for Pakistan was more powerfully pronounced, the political loyalties in the province got transformed and redesigned on religious grounds. Leaving the ruling Unionists in tatters, the Punjabi society including the landlords, *pirs* and *sajjadah nashins*, promptly came under the banner of the Muslim League. When the graph of Unionists' popularity nosedived, the popularity graph of Jinnah and the League soared to greater heights and ultimately the latter replaced the former in political landscape. Unfortunately, it was under the leadership of Khizr who was unable to contain the charismas of Jinnah, that the party licked the dust despite having the support of the Congress and Akali Dal. The downfall of the Unionists was not without the heavy losses for Punjab as the party was a non-communal string that bound together all communities, and its disbandment meant the end of communal balance and harmony across the Punjab. The communal relationships among the major communities of the Punjab were disturbed, and a chain of communal violence got triggered in the province. The end of the Unionist Party also brought an end to mutual amity, and the worthy ideas of communalism, unionism, inter-communal harmony and pan-provincial organization extinguished from the scene.

In the light of Ibn-e-Khaldun's theory of the rise and fall, the three phases in the case of the Unionist Party mark the periods of three main linchpins of the Unionist Party to be Fazl-i-Husain (r.1923-1936), Sikandar Hayat (r.1937-1942) and Khizr Hayat Tiwana (r.1943-1947) respectively. Furthermore, Khaldun's theory also elucidates that how Agrarian *Asabiya* got replaced by the Communal *Asabiya* of the Muslim League that paved the way towards the downfall of the party during its last phase. Having made an extensive and theoretical study under the application of Ibn-e-Khaldun's theory, it reveals that the Unionist Party experienced all the essentials of ups and downs from 1923 to 1947 that have been expounded by Khaldun in his theoretic work. Peeping with deep political insight, it surfaces that had the Unionist Party taken this predicament direly, the party would never have met its crumbling and mortifying defeat at the hands of the Muslim League. The Muslim League took the Unionist Party by its horns and decimated it entirely. The present theoretical study is a detailed analysis of the rise and fall in which the Unionist Party covered the journey of its eminence and decadence accordingly.