

Akhtar Hussain Sandhu
Amna Mahmood

CRIPPS MISSION PROPOSALS AND MUSLIM-SIKH RELATIONS IN THE BRITISH PUNJAB

Abstract

The decade of the 1940s proved unremittingly hard for the British. Their grip over the colonies was tremendously crippled and the mighty imperial power had to come to a compromise with Asian nationalism. The early years of the 1940s convinced them to seek cooperation of the Indian communities on the war issue. This resulted in the dispatch of the Cripps Mission to the Subcontinent. Historians like R. J. Moore see this move as a response to US pressure in the context of rapid Japanese advances in the Asian war theatre. The reality was more complex than this. Cripps found that his efforts in 1942 were hampered by the tension in the Muslim-Sikh relationship in the Punjab. This province was central to the imperial war efforts because of the recruitment to the Indian Army. This article looks into the circumstances and working as well as the impacts of the Cripps Proposals on the Muslim-Sikh relations in the British Punjab.

The All-India Muslim League¹ and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)² emerged as the most powerful and popular political

magnets of the Muslims and Sikhs respectively. The League on 23rd March 1940 had announced its future plan for the Muslims by demanding Pakistan while the SAD and other Sikh parties were in a fix regarding futuristic political agenda to cope with the Pakistan scheme and structuring any definite alternative scheme for their community. The SAD was traditionally following the ideology of the Indian National Congress³ but the Congress had not reciprocated respect Sikh feelings. The Indian political parties had been victim of the semi-democratic procedures as introduced by the British who were ruling over different regions with different strategies including 'limited democracy,' local political allies like Unionists, and dictatorial ways with absolute powers of the Viceroy and provincial Governors. Similarly, the Indian political parties demonstrated varied character by adopting defiant and supportive policies towards the British government. Sikhs had been behaving in a similar manner in the political arena but odds like scattered and negligible numerical strength, internal friction, religious fanaticism and weak and divided leadership undermined their position. The League and Congress were clear about their destinations while Sikhs remained confused as to what should be done in the rapidly changing political panorama of Indian affairs.

The Central Akali Dal (CAD) under Baba Kharak Singh, Khalsa National Party⁴ and even the Punjab Unionist Party lost their influence among the masses and the SAD under Master Tara Singh remained a popular party with a sound mass support therefore it played a decisive role in the political affairs of the Punjab. This party not only secured confidence of the majority of the Sikh *Panth* but also interfered in the politics of the Princely States. At Fatehgarh Sahib (Sirhind) in the Patiala State, the Sikhs gathered to commemorate the murder of the two young sons of Guru Gobind Singh by the Mughal governor of Sirhind where Giani Kartar Singh and S. Kartar Singh⁵ expressed strong support for raising the Sikh living standard in the Patiala State. Later on all the points mentioned by the speakers were published in a pamphlet to emphasise the demands. The Sikh leaders expressed their hope that His Highness Maharaja of Patiala would win the Sikh hearts by appointing a Sikh as his Prime

Minister. They demanded 60 per cent share in the State services, changes in the management of the Gurdwaras and Sikh shrines with their properties under the jurisdiction of the Gurdwara Act. Voice was raised for Gurmukhi to be declared as official language and a compulsory subject for the Sikh youth. They asked for a Legislative Assembly in which the Sikhs should constitute a majority. These demands were unanimously passed by the Sikh Dewan at the Annual Shahidi Dewan held on 26 December 1941 and were endorsed by the Amritsar meeting of the Akali Dal held on 19 and 20 January 1942.⁶ Through such demands, the Akalis tried to interfere in the Princely State's affairs. No doubt, protection of the Sikh rights was the Sikh leaders' duty but at this crucial time they should have avoided opening more fronts which would deflect efforts with respect to their core issues.

The Police report of 31 January 1942 about the period from October to December 1941 confirmed the SAD as the most popular party at that time among the Sikhs.⁷ The appointment of Jogindar Singh as the Chief Minister of Patiala strengthened the Akalis who were gratified with a strong hold on the affairs of Patiala and other Sikh states.⁸ Unlike the Akalis, the League's ideological and constitutional performance gained profound support of the masses who seemed fully prepared to play their due role in the political activities. According to the Intelligence Report, the Punjabi Muslims had full devotion to the League for its constitutional attitude while they disliked the Congress.⁹ The Punjab Students' League held the Pakistan Conference at Batala on 27 February 1942 in which Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, MLA (Central), Sheikh Chiragh Din and Professor Dildar Khan appreciated the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and pledged to support the Pakistan movement.¹⁰ The League declared that the 23rd March should be celebrated as the Pakistan Day with full zeal. The Intelligence Reports revealed the rising graph of Jinnah's popularity among the Punjabi Muslims. His political opponents, the leaders in the Ahrar Working Committee meeting at Lahore expressed the opinion that Jinnah was working for the Muslim interests and the Ahrar leaders could not attract the Muslim public if they "denounced

Mr. Jinnah and the *Pakistan* scheme.”¹¹ The leadership of Jinnah and the Pakistan demand impacted the Unionist Party and its Prime Minister Sir Sikandar Hayat the most who expressed his views in a public gathering that he had never been against the Lahore Resolution of 1940. He shared that such a scheme could ensure a peaceful life for the Hindus and Sikhs in the Muslim majority region. Raja Ghazanfar Ali said that the Premier could never part with the League.¹² The Pakistan scheme of the Muslims and the anti-Pakistan or anti-Muslim outbursts of the Akai Dal popularized the two parties in their respective communities. The political and religious organizations, hierarchy and the ministers could feel this fundamental change in the political domain. The Unionist Muslims sometimes sided openly with the Pakistan scheme which caused uncertainty in the minds of their Sikh and Hindu allies in the Assembly.

Sikh Politics

L. V. Deane¹³ filed a report on Sikh politics on 13 January 1942 observing that the Sikh political parties were working on the traditional lines. The pro-Unionist Khalsa National Party was not still organized at the grassroots level. It had very little hold on the Sikh masses. The Central Sikh League which associated itself with the All-India Sikh League too had no reliable workers. Giani Sher Singh had deserted only to seek refuge under the SAD just ‘to save himself from prosecution for embezzlement.’ The CAD aimed to damage the position of the SAD. Though it demanded inclusion of a non-Akali member in the Viceroy’s Executive Council but as a matter of fact it had ‘no constructive programme’ for the Sikh community. When the Kirti Kisan Party was banned, the Punjab Kisan Committee emerged and tried to work on the communist lines but it enjoyed no popular support and was confined to the specific areas of the province. The Sikhs were represented in the Punjab Communist Party but like other Kisan organizations the government action made them unimportant. The Sikh element in the Congress also had little importance for the Sikh masses. The SAD was a well entrenched party and had firm control over the Gurdwara funds but had no agreed programme for the Sikhs. The Akalis opposed

the non-violence principle of Gandhi but even then they could not sever their uneasy association with the Congress and at the same time they favoured the Sikh recruitment in the British army. The Akalis had been raising their voice against the Unionist ministry on the points of the Pakistan scheme, pro-agriculturists policy, *jhatka*, Muslim favouritism in the appointments, Sikh seat in the Executive Council and ban on Hindi and Gurmukhi in the primary schools. The report further said that the Akalis had no solid programme to pursue.¹⁴

The Akali party faced dissension between Giani Kartar Singh and Udham Singh Nagoke regarding its presidential nomination in 1942. Seeing this friction, Master Tara Singh ended this fight by forwarding his own name as the president of the SAD. In his brief speech, he said that although the SAD was not allowed to join the Khalsa Defence of India League but even then they would favour the Sikh recruitment policy. He also declared that the Sikhs would support the Congress policy of complete independence.¹⁵

The Congress had many friends in England¹⁶ who always paved the way for the Congress's popularity through effective propaganda. The press generally supported whatever the Hindu leadership stood for. The *New Statesman* in 1942 favoured Gandhi's campaign and condemned the government's decision to exempt the Muslims from the fines. Lord Huntingdon wrote in his book titled *Common Sense About India* (1942) that the British should withdraw from India and surrender the political powers to the Congress. Professor Laski through the *Manchester Guardian* pressed on the Viceroy to accommodate Gandhi through dialogue. The wife of Lord Pethick-Lawrence in August 1942 appreciated Gandhian campaign of civil disobedience through a letter to *The Times*.¹⁷ All these fronts were facilitating the Hindu struggle. Even Sir Stafford Cripps, a friend of Nehru, extended greetings on the success of the Congress in the elections 1937 and the latter had been continuously in contact with him before he was sent to India in 1942.¹⁸ So the environment within and outside India seemed conducive but the Britain's weak position in the war induced the

Congress to secure more and more favours from the ruling community.

Cripps Mission

By the beginning of 1942, the British position in the war in Asia was very weak and the Japanese seemed close to invading India. Churchill, the Prime Minister, sent Sir Stafford Cripps, a war cabinet member, to India with a political package as a solution to the constitutional problem. The major objective was to secure the cooperation of the Indian communities in the war and to release the American pressure as R. J. Moore writes:

Against his long and fiercely held imperialist prejudices, Churchill was forced by the pressure of Cripps, his Labour colleagues, and the Americans to acquiesce in the offer of post-war Indian Independence and wartime association of the Indian parties with the central government.¹⁹

The British were well aware of the background of the Muslim-Sikh problem. On 8 March 1942, Leo Amery, the Secretary of State for India circulated comments made by Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency,²⁰ to the Committee on India of the War Cabinet in which he contended that the Sikhs lacked leadership at the all-India level and clear vision:

The Sikh position is more complex. There is always an extreme element which hates the Muslims on historical grounds as the successors of Moguls who persecuted Sikhs and the Gurus and hates the British because they brought Sikh rule to an end in the Punjab. They cherish vague ideas that general disturbance is not a bad thing because it may give birth to opportunities for the restoration of the Sikh Rule in the Punjab. There has never been a Sikh of real importance on the All-India political stage or one prominent as a leader in Congress circles.²¹

Cripps arrived in India in March 1942 and had discussions with the local leaders. The Viceroy referred Cripps to Sir Sikandar for first hand information but Cripps was reluctant to meet the Punjab Premier in the beginning however the meeting was arranged later. In this meeting, the Premier appreciated the draft proposals of Cripps as far as the Punjab was concerned. Nevertheless, the Punjab Governor, in the perspective of his past erratic behaviour, informed Cripps not to rely on Sikandar's opinion.²² The Sikhs and the Muslims were important to Cripps who believed that the British had no problem in the Punjab if the Muslims and Sikhs came to an understanding. Although, Master Tara Singh had demanded the government not to entertain Sardar Kirpal Singh Majithia because of his non-representative position among the Sikhs but Sardar Majithia was given the opportunity to meet the delegation. He after the meeting of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in Amritsar placed demands before Cripps. The demands included those for a national government, joint electorates with reserved seats, no right for secession of province, and due share of the Sikhs in all national and provincial domains.²³

In a meeting of the Working Committee of the Sikh All Parties Conference on 16 March, Sardar Baldev Singh, Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh, Santokh Singh, Joginder Singh and Sardar Ujjal Singh expressed a cordial welcome to Stafford Cripps with favourable expectations regarding their due share in the national government and communal compromise in the Punjab. They also appointed a sub-committee which was given the task to draft the Sikh demands. The committee included Sardar Baldev Singh MLA, Santokh Singh MLA, Giani Kartar Singh MLA, Master Tara Singh and Sant Singh, MLA.²⁴ The Congress was stuck with the Cripps Mission on the issue of immediate transfer of power in general and defence department at that moment in particular.²⁵ Master Tara Singh took Baldev Singh, Ujjal Singh and Jogindra Singh with him and met Cripps on 27 March. They went through the proposals and asked Cripps for the measures for Sikh protection. Cripps clarified that they had only a few options available to cope with the Sikh question. He told the Sikh leaders point-blank that they had a weak position with no sound grounds to back up their demands

therefore they must adopt a 'give and take' policy with other stakeholders. They should persuade the Congress on the basis of their important position to include maximum clauses for Sikh rights. The Congress would accommodate them because the Congress definitely needed their help at the centre. And if they were dissatisfied with the Hindus, they could bargain with the League because the Sikhs were an important minority in the Punjab and the League could not condone the Sikh support in the plebiscite to materialize the dream of Pakistan. Through this bargaining process, they could lever the required concessions. The main agenda could be a semi-autonomous Sikh district on the Soviet model or partition of the Punjab into parts:

If, when the constitution was finally settled, the Moslems decided that they had not got sufficient concessions to enable them to remain within the Indian Union, then it would be necessary for them to obtain a vote of non-accession by plebiscite in the Punjab. ..The probability would be that they would try to get the Sikh vote to support their action and in order to do so would offer minority protection clauses....²⁶

In fact, the British viewed the Sikh position better in the Muslim bloc than other options.²⁷

Some Congressite Sikhs led by Sardar Dasaundha Singh, negotiated with Cripps and demanded further partition of the areas on the caste basis if a Sikh state would be conceded. They clearly opposed the Sikh state and damaged the *panth*. The Sikh leaders busied themselves to fight for insignificant official benefits. Sir B. Glancy²⁸ conveyed the same to Linlithgow as under:

The obvious course for the Sikhs to pursue is to seek a satisfactory basis for combining with the major community in the province. The Sikhs are still clamouring for what they profess to regard as their due

representation on the Governor-General's Executive Council and in the Punjab Cabinet.²⁹

To Sangat Singh, Cripps gave the Sikh leaders many hints as guidelines on which they could chalk-out a plan for their better future but unluckily, they could not understand the propositions Cripps had offered to them. He wanted them to pursue a well-worked out course of action. India was moving rapidly towards the process of decolonization and the main parties had set tangible goals before them.³⁰ Therefore, in this situation, the Sikhs should have selected clear objectives but they failed to present any cohesive and agreed demands before Cripps.³¹

The Cripps Proposals produced nothing concrete in favour of the Sikhs. On 31 March 1942, the SGPC³² presented a memorandum to Cripps in which, as usual, they asked for the re-demarcation of the Punjab boundaries from the river Ravi to Delhi. The language and points of the memorandum were mostly the same as those presented in the RTC by the Sikh representatives. The memorandum evaluated their services towards the British Empire and their past political status in the Punjab. They also expressed their resentment on the points of Cripps Proposals which undermined Indian integrity and the Sikh position. In the memorandum, they presented facts and figures about the communal proportion in different areas of the Punjab. They maintained that originally Jhang and Multan districts and trans-Jhelum areas were not a part of the proper Punjab. They demanded not to include these areas into the Punjab. They gave figures up to the Ravi highlighting the non-Muslim majority concealing their own percentage:

Muslims	4,505,000
Sikhs and other Non-Muslims	7,646,000
With population of Multan and Jhang districts:	
Muslims	8,288,000

Sikhs and other Non-Muslims	9,348,000
-----------------------------	-----------

Source: Kirpal Singh, *The Partition of the Punjab*, 15-16.

They contended that the Sikh population in the states was 2,600,000 which could further reduce the Muslim ratio.³³ In the memorandum, they slipped from the demands to threats and expressed their anger that the British were not justly considering these. They included the Sikh claims as under:

- From 25 to 33 per cent share in the Punjab cabinet and the Sikh representation mandatory in the cabinet,
- There should always be a coalition government in the Punjab,
- The Punjab be re-demarcated into two parts from the Ravi to Delhi consisting of Ambala and Jullundur Divisions and the districts of Lahore, Amritsar and Gurdaspur,
- The Sikhs be given the same weightage as the Muslims enjoyed in different provinces as a minority,
- Five per cent representation in the centre,
- One Sikh minister in the central cabinet,
- Defence Advisory Committee be created with one Sikh seat in it,
- The Sikh status be maintained in the Indian defence forces,
- Sikh share in Indian and provincial services be maintained on existing lines or as the Muslims had in other minority provinces,
- Only the Sikh members be allowed to legislate in the Sikh religious matters,
- The State would not interfere with the religious matters of the Sikhs,
- The Gurmukhi script would be introduced where necessary.³⁴

The lengthy Sikh memorandum repeated long held arguments and demands. It did not acknowledge the rapidly changing situation in India and set realistic objectives in the light of

prevailing situation. The British tried to guide them but it could not mould them. Cripps, as enunciated by Joginder Singh Shant, advised the Sikhs sarcastically “to baptise one member from each Hindu family as a Sikh”³⁵ to increase number of their population. This was a clear indication for the Sikhs to assess their situation judiciously.

The Sikh Memorandum carried an Annexure of the Muslim population in the Punjab districts according to 1931 census report. According to this Annexure, the Muslims had a clear majority in the western districts from Lahore to DG Khan while they had a slight majority (50.8%) in the Gurdaspur district. They also made reasonable percentage in rest of the eastern districts:

District	Muslim Population
Amritsar	47.0%
Ferozepore	44.6
Jullundur	44.5
Hoshiarpur	31.8
Ludhiana	35.1

Source: Kirpal Singh, Partition of the Punjab, 21-22.

Interestingly, the Sikhs did not give the Sikh percentage in the same districts because without the Hindus their claim to be a majority in the eastern districts had no credence. According to the *Eastern Times*, the Sikhs were in a smaller proportion than the Muslim population in the eastern districts except Ludhiana:

District	Sikhs
Amritsar	35%
Ferozepore	33
Jullundur	26
Ludhiana	46

Source: The Eastern Times, 2 December 1942.

The British administration showed concern over the possible Sikh reaction to the rejection of their demands. In a letter to the Viceroy, the Punjab Governor wrote that Master Tara Singh’s

task had become easy “to stir up communal feeling at the alleged danger of the Sikhs being subjected to Muhammadan rule.” He further wrote that the “practical objections to “Khalistan” are even greater than those which lie in the path of Pakistan.”³⁶

Cripps tried to accommodate all the communities in his proposals. The Congress on 2 April 1942 signalled its opposition to the Cripps Proposals. The Congress and Sikhs rejected these proposals due to the possibility of the India’s partition with the provision that provinces could opt out of a future Indian Constituent Assembly while the League rejected it finding no clear-cut acceptance of Pakistan.³⁷ Quaid-i-Azam expressed his dismay at the refusal to recognise the right of Muslim self-determination while addressing the annual session of the All India Muslim League at Allahabad:

...the Musalmans feel deeply disappointed that the entity and integrity of the Muslim nation has not been expressly recognised...Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the right of national self-determination is unequivocally recognised. It must be realised that India was never a country or a nation....It has roused our deepest anxieties and grave apprehensions, especially with reference to the Pakistan scheme, which is a matter of life and death for Muslim India...³⁸

Once again the Sikhs were with the Congress following their ideology and action. The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution that it could not compel any people of any unit “to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will” and all the units would have full autonomy under the strong centre.³⁹ Nevertheless, the Congress consented to join the interim government but Cripps did not accept and went back on 12 April 1942 with a dream of Hindu-Muslim unity.

The Working Committee of the CAD was organized in Amritsar on 2 April 1942 in which the party reversed the core policy and issued a statement in favour of Partition. Baba Kharak

Singh rejecting Cripps proposals said that India was going to be partitioned in the near future and the Sikhs had a right to demand a separate Sikh state extending from the River Jhelum to the River Sutlej if the division was inevitable.⁴⁰ The report said that the Sikh leaders were uncertain about how to block the Pakistan scheme. They also doubted, whether Khalistan would be the best alternative for the Sikhs or not. On the other hand, the Khalsa Youth League was propagating for Khalistan.⁴¹ On 2 May 1942, at Amritsar, Master Ajit Singh declared that Khalistan would be achieved with the help of the sword. In the Working Committee meeting of the CAD at Lahore, Bakhshish Singh, editor of *Khalsa*, called for the launching of a movement to attain Khalistan.⁴² The police report said that Master Tara Singh also discussed the issue of Partition and the Sikh rule in the non-Muslim minority areas with Vir Savarkar, the Mahasabha leader.⁴³

Interestingly the US government tried to pressurise Churchill to redouble Cripps' efforts to come to terms with the Indian political parties.⁴⁴ It was a direct pressure by the US for handing over power to the majority community but the British Foreign Office wrote to Washington on 5 March 1942 that an important community like the Muslims could not be ignored:

We are earnestly considering whether a declaration of Dominion status after the war carrying with it if desired the right to secede should be made at this critical juncture. We must not on any account break with the Moslems who represent a hundred million people and the main army elements on which we must rely for the immediate fighting. We have also to consider our duty towards thirty or forty million untouchables and our treaties with the princes states of India, perhaps eighty millions. Naturally we do not want to throw India into chaos on the eve of invasion.⁴⁵

The US continued pressure on the British by calling the British colonial policy "equivalent to the private estate of a landlord."⁴⁶

In response to this stress, the British got infuriated and wrote to Viscount Lord Halifax, British ambassador to Washington, that “We should certainly not tolerate any interference by foreign countries.”⁴⁷ But even then they had to be accommodating towards the criticism by the US writers and government particularly the public opinion.⁴⁸ The British tried to placate the US to “secure their general goodwill”⁴⁹ to continue getting their military support in the on-going war.

The Intelligence report ridiculed the Sikh leadership that even after the withdrawal of the Cripps offer, the Sikh leadership kept on propagating against the Cripps Proposals in the public conferences.⁵⁰ The Punjab Governor’s report concluded that as repercussion of the Cripps Mission no communal incident of any importance occurred but it badly affected the communal relations. The Rashtriya Swyam Sewak Sangh (RSSS),⁵¹ the military offshoot of the Hindu Mahasabha gave a call for membership. The report said:

The activities of this body, which are prosecuted as unostentatiously as possible, keep within the letter of the law, but its communal proclivities and the fact that its leaders might not be averse to enlisting Japanese aid to attain their object makes it necessary to regard them with considerable suspicion. Meanwhile, *Akalis* continue their efforts to organise the Sikh community in a semi-military footing, and Congressmen persist in proclaiming that the people should not look to the Government agencies for protection in times of emergency, but should instead band themselves into volunteer brigades under Congress direction.⁵²

The uncompromising Congress leadership again had to turn to the League and started showing greater flexibility towards the demand for Pakistan. The day after Cripps moved back to England, Gandhi expressed his emotions through an article in *Harijan* that the demand of the Muslims as a nation could not be challenged. They as a nation had a right to ask for the partition of India, but at the same time the Hindus had a right to resist such a

partition. Moreover, C. Rajagopalachari along with some Congress leaders resolved and accepted the Pakistan demand to win the Muslim support in the freedom struggle. This change in response gravely alarmed the Sikh leaders. Despite the stormy criticism by Sikhs, Nehru said that the “Muslims had the right to secede from India.”⁵³ The Akali leaders arranged several meetings in which they attacked the British for ignoring the Sikh interests, rejected Rajagopalachari on his pro-League role, and snubbed the Unionist ministry. They alleged that the Muslim Unionists had been favouring the Muslims in the appointments at the cost of the Sikh rights.⁵⁴ The common Muslims appreciated Rajagopalachari’s farsightedness but the Hindus and Sikhs criticized both the pro-Pakistani Madrasi Congress group under his leadership and the Punjabi Congress leadership under Mian Iftikharuddin. Kirpal Singh called a meeting of the Sikhs in Amritsar in which Master Tara Singh said that Pakistan was being imposed on the Sikhs but they were fully prepared to fight with the Muslims.⁵⁵ The Akalis pledged in a conference at Amritsar to make the Pakistan scheme a mere dream.⁵⁶ The Akalis actually should not have been so furious because Master Tara Singh had also been invited as the Sikh representative to the talks with Jinnah at Delhi⁵⁷ but they showed a lot of anger on the accommodating attitude of the Congress towards the League, which merely displayed their hatred towards the Muslims.

Observing the popularity of the Pakistan scheme among the Muslims, the Hindu leaders tried to convince the League to postpone it till the end of the war but the Muslim leadership was well aware of the expected betrayal of the Congress. Therefore, Jinnah always responded to every move with sagacity stressing on what the League had demanded. The Sikhs should have struggled for their own rights with one voice but at this very sensitive moment the Sikh leaders of all the parties were following separate agendas. Sardar Kharak Singh, President CAD, said on 1 April 1942, that the Cripps’ proposals were entirely anti-national. The Cripps Mission paved the way for separation as enunciated by the Muslims on the religious basis then “not to speak of one Pakistan, as many Pakistans may be established.”⁵⁸ On 5 April 1942, a meeting of the moderate Sikhs

was held at Amritsar in which 150 Sikhs including the leaders such as Sardar Jodh Singh and Sardar Buta Singh participated and after four hours' discussion they issued a statement that the Defence Department be transferred to the Indians. The secession of the provinces should not be accommodated and joint electorates be introduced with reservation of the minority seats including the Sikhs.⁵⁹ The resolutions passed by the moderate Sikhs with the same language and demands adopted by the Congress. Jinnah had already explained his position regarding the Defence portfolio in late 1940. In an interview with the Viceroy on 25 September, Jinnah demanded the Defence portfolio for himself or for his nominee, otherwise it must not go to any Indian political party.⁶⁰

After the Cripps Proposals, a letter by a Sikh was sent to Jinnah suggesting a solution to the Sikh question. The writer explained that the Sikhs had been nobody in their own homeland before 1920s but they got prestige not on numerical basis but only on the military strength in the form of the SAD. The solution of the Muslim-Sikh problem was that a new state be created for Sikhs where all the communities should have balanced population. Otherwise, Pakistan was a matter of life and death for the Sikh community. He went on to say that the idea of Pakistan was conceived from the point of view of the Muslim theocracy where according to the Lahore Resolution the Muslims would live and develop their culture, social and religious values independently.⁶¹ The Islamic idealism would ruin their military status:

Jinnah desires Muslim States and at the same time he also like [likes] the Sikhs to be a part of this Pakistan....Sikhs will form an inalienable part of Pakistan, where there is going to be perhaps no democracy, and without democracy, there are, no minority rights but forceful suppression, persecution, conversion or elimination...Sikhs constitute not merely a nation but are a cent per cent military organization and have a born right to rule by virtue of their creed...We refuse to form ourselves into a slave

community under fanatical Mohammedan tyranny. That we, in no case, would be under Pakistan...Unlike Hindus we will not have any neighbouring co-religious state to back and sanction the promised minority safeguards.⁶²

The writer also suggested that Khalistan as a buffer state could be created with the consent of the Muslims and Hindus.⁶³

Commenting on the Sikhs and Cripps' proposals, *Nawa-i-Waqt* (a pro-Muslim League paper) wrote that the Sikh question was merely a regional matter but the Hindu press had highlighted it as a big issue. Cripps had made it clear to the Sikh leaders that their issue was of a trivial nature which could be resolved through bargaining with the League. He also suggested that Master Tara Singh should contact M. A. Jinnah and clear his mind relating to the Muslim-Sikh problems.⁶⁴ According to Khushwant Singh, it was not astonishing if Cripps conceded the Muslim state because many states were already there in the Subcontinent but the Muslim demand to be separate from the Indian union was really a success of the League. While on 29 March 1942 during a press conference, Cripps had refused that the Mission had accepted the Pakistan scheme.⁶⁵ The clause of 'non-accession' and Gandhi's overture seem a tactical ruse to secure the League support in the war and struggle for Independence efforts respectively.

Conclusion

The political tussle between the major parties created a culture of conflict instead of dialogical rationale particularly in the Punjab. The Muslim-Sikh relations could have been settled within a general atmosphere of cooperation and the British provided several opportunities to the Indian leaders to arrive at some agreed constitutional settlement but they failed to benefit from these offers. In 1942, on the failure of the Cripps Mission, Lord Wavell expressed similar remarks when he said that the "failure was hardly surprising since Indian leaders were not in agreement among themselves."⁶⁶ Disagreement was to provoke

clashes between the communities which seemed inevitable because nothing was initiated neither on the part of the government nor the political parties to create a friendly environment and the culture of co-existence. Muslims expressed insecurity in India while Sikhs projected the same in the Punjab. The Cripps Mission suggested 'bargaining' to the Sikhs to settle the Punjab question but a new turn in the Sikh strategy could hardly find any space which aggravated the situation regarding Muslim-Sikh relations. The failure of the Cripps Mission paved the way for the Sikandar-Baldev Singh Pact and the Congress tilt towards the League but both of the overtures could not end the political deadlock in the communal domain. By signing this pact with the Unionist Party, the Akalis lost the moral stand of being independent from external influence because they had followed the dictation of the British and the Congress. Overall the Cripps Mission futilely raised expectations because its proposals could not be deemed reasonable and satisfactory by all the stakeholders. The American pressure to solve the Indian problem as soon as possible projects the US interference in the international affairs in the name of the American people's will. The US importance in the world affairs started during the World War I and seemed touching its pinnacle during the World War II but the recent overtures as a 'policeman of the world' have tremendously increased the US influence in the world affairs.

The Punjabi communities' role in the crisis-packed situation remained poor and apathetic as they performed a negligible role in the British offers and the Punjabi leadership did not move too many options which could affect the course of the Indian or even provincial politics. The Cripps Mission gave hints towards the Sikh state but they showed no enthusiasm to take up this suggestion as the sole agenda on any modality. At the same time, not a single new alternative was floated by the Sikhs and nothing new to embrace the minorities was presented by the Unionist Muslims and the Leaguers. This style of politics can be witnessed in the forthcoming period when none stepped forward to facilitate their Punjabi brothers and all continued following the footsteps of the respective central commands. The trivial communal skirmishes weakened the traditional forces

which were working to maintain peace and co-existence in the region but the political parties became active to confront each other because the Punjabi brethren had become 'rivals' now. In such an environment, the destructive politics started replacing the peaceful arrangements in the rural areas which furthered communalism, chaos, clashes and riots in the region. The aftermath of the Cripps Mission should have alarmed the Sikhs and Muslims and some new options for settlement could be explored but all such rapprochements were concluded between Sikhs and the Unionist Party by ignoring the League. Regional peace could be achieved by the peace between the regional protagonists and ignoring one portion of the society was to sabotage the expectation for peace in future. Therefore, the Punjabi leadership did not secure any benefit from the British delegation and the Mission resulted in a new chapter of conflict in the Punjab as it had conceded the League's claim to have a Muslim state in the Punjab which the Sikhs claimed to be theirs by all historical and political evidences. Resultantly the Mission increased apprehensions among the communities rather than normalized the communal tension in the region.

Notes and References

- 1 All-India Muslim League, a political party in British India was founded in 1906 to protect the Muslim rights. Later on it achieved a separate country, Pakistan in 1947 under the sagacious leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.
- 2 SAD, Founded on 14 December 1920 but with the name of Gurdwara Sewak Dal. It was named Akali Dal on 23 January 1921 but on 29 March 1922, it was renamed as Shiromani Akali Dal. Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, <http://www.dilgeer.com/sadal.htm>, 31-12-2003.
- 3 Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 by a British, A. O. Hume but later on led by the Hindu leadership mainly. Like other parties, it was also a pro-British political party with the right to protest for demands. It claimed to be a secular party but most of the Muslims joined All-India Muslim League and considered the Congress purely a Hindu party.
- 4 Chief Khalsa Diwan changed its name before the elections of 1936 as Khalsa National Party under Sir Sundar Singh Majithia. The main bulk of the party belonged to the Sikh feudality.
- 5 Sardar Kartar Singh MA, LLB, Advocate High Court Patiala was the Chairman of the Reception Committee.
- 6 G. Kartar Singh MLA, Lyallpuri, *Patiala Administration and the Position of the Sikhs* (Pamphlet) (n.d.) R/1/1/384 File No. 353-P(S)/42. Political Department.
- 7 Sangat Singh, *Sikhs in the History* 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Uncommon Books, 1996), 211.
- 8 Secret Police Abstract of Intelligence, Punjab, File no. S-410, para 139.
- 9 Ibid., para 112.

-
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., para 130-31.
- 12 Ibid., para 140.
- 13 Assistant to the DIG of Police, Criminal Investigation Department, Punjab.
- 14 Supplement to the Punjab Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence, Lahore, 10 January 1942, no. 2, S-410.
- 15 Ibid., para. 21, 32, 36.
- 16 K. K. Aziz, *Britain and Pakistan: A Study of British Attitude towards the East Pakistan Crisis of 1971* (Islamabad: University of Islamabad Press, 1974), 30.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 4-9.
- 19 Ibid., v.
- 20 Sir Geoffrey Fitzhervey de Montmorency, Governor of the Punjab during 9 August 1928 to 19 July 1932 and then from 19 October 1932 to 12 April 1933.
- 21 *Parliamentary Debates*, (Central) L/PO/6/106b (ii) ff 1212-265.
- 22 Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab, 1921-47* (Lahore: Vanguard Books Pvt. Ltd., 1992), 248-49.
- 23 Punjab Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence, S-410, para. 162.
- 24 Ibid., para. 129.
- 25 The Congress wanted the Defence Department to be handed over to the Indians which was opposed by the British and Jinnah. FO/954/12A.
- 26 Henry Hayes, ed., *The Sikh Question in India* (London: Helms Publishing, n.d.), 7-9.

-
- 27 Telegram from Secretary of State for India to Viceroy on 1 March, 1942, L/ PO/6/106b (iii) ff 266-559.
- 28 Sir Bertrand James Glancy remained Governor of the Punjab from 7 April 1941 to 8 April 1946.
- 29 Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7*, vol. II (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1971), 7; also see Gurmit Singh, *Failures of Akali Leadership* (Sirsa: Usha Institute of Religious Studies, 1981), 46.
- 30 Sangat Singh, *Sikhs in History*, 213-214.
- 31 Harjindar Singh Dilgir, *Shiromani Akali Dal: Ik Ittehas* (Gurmukhi) (Jullundur: Punjabi Book Co. 1986), 35.
- 32 Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was a religious platform which was patronizing the SAD.
- 33 Kirpal Singh, *Partition of the Punjab* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972), 15-16.
- 34 Sikh Memorandum presented by SGPC to Sir Cripps on 31 March 1942 in Kirpal Singh, *The Partition of the Punjab* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972), 15-21.
- 35 Secret Police Abstract of Intelligence, file no. S-410, para. 174.
- 36 Letter of Governor Punjab Glancy to Viceroy Linlithgow in Henry Hayes, *The Sikh Question in India*, 11.
- 37 Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab*, 250; see also B. K. Mishra, *The Cripps Mission: A Reappraisal* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1982), 125 and passim.
- 38 Presidential Address of Mr. M. A. Jinnah to 29th Session of All-India Muslim League, Allahabad, April 3-6, 1942 in Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, ed., *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947* vol. II (Karachi: National Publishing House Ltd., 1970), 384-390.

-
- 39 Ram Narayan Kumar and Georg Sieberer, *The Sikh Struggle: Origin, Evolution and Present Phase* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1991), 131-132.
- 40 Punjab Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence,, file no. S-410, para 162.
- 41 Ibid., para 183.
- 42 Ibid., para 206.
- 43 Ibid., para 295.
- 44 Message from US President for the British Prime Minister on 12 April 1942, FO/954/12A. Lord Linlithgow in the beginning had opposed such a mission to India and threatened to resign but later on, he agreed. The British government was of the view that such a mission was necessary to project the British sincerity to the world and to gain time for further workout. Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947*, 188.
- 45 Private Office Papers of Sir Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, FO/954/12A/0/427.
- 46 Letter from Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, on 13 December 1942, FO/954/12A.
- 47 Letter from Prime Minister to Lord Halifax, on 19 September 1942, PREM/46/4b.
- 48 Letter from Washington to Foreign Office on 16 September 1942, Ibid.
- 49 Letter from Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, on 13 December 1942, FO/954/12A.
- 50 Secret Police Abstract of Intelligence, S-410, Para. 174.
- 51 RSSS was initiated in 1925 by Keshav Rao Bali Ram Hedgewar, a doctor from Nagpur.
- 52 Governor's Fortnightly Report, Punjab, April 1942, L/PJ/5/245.

-
- 53 Ram Narayan Kumar, *The Sikh Struggle*, 131-133.
- 54 FR, April 1942, L/PJ/5/245.
- 55 Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab*, 251.
- 56 CMG, 15 April 1942.
- 57 Jaspreet Walia, "Master Tara Singh and Sikh Politics, 1920-47" (Ph.D. diss., Guru Nanak Dev University, 2005), 147.
- 58 H. N. Mitra, ed., *The Indian Annual Register, 1919-1947* vol. I, 1942 (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990), 344.
- 59 Ibid., 256-57.
- 60 M. A. Jinnah, Interview with the Viceroy on 25 September 1940, PREM 4/45/1, National Archives, London.
- 61 "The Sikh Problem," file no. 930, Quaid-i-Azam Papers, National Archives of Pakistan, Islamabad.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Lahore) 11 April 1942.
- 65 Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs: 1839-1964*, Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 250n.
- 66 John Connell, *Wavell, Supreme Commander, 1941-43* (London: Collins, 1969), 218.