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# Elitism, Factionalism and Separatism: Politics in the United Provinces, 1885–1920

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## Abstract

The article deals with the diverse facets of politics in the United Provinces between 1885 and 1920, from the birth of the Indian National Congress to the commencement of the Non-cooperation Movement. Till the tumult in 1920, the public life in the Provinces was unmistakably elitist in character, and monopolized by the representatives of such dominant social categories as the official and educated middle classes, the landed magnates and landlords and the traders and bankers. Religion and language separated the UP elites into Hindus and Muslims, who carried on their factional fights over educational facilities, Government jobs and professional engagements. However, the spirit of reciprocal accommodation survived among the common people and influenced the behaviour of the Congress and the 'new' in the Muslim League (1906) leading to compromises over several issues faced during this phase of independence struggle. Dramatically in 1920, Gandhiji in the Congress could mobilise the Indian masses so as to sweep away elitism, factionalism and separatism from India and the Provinces.

## Keywords

Non-cooperation, Lucknow Pact, Jalianwala Bagh, elitism, separatism

## Introduction

Politics in colonial India seems invariably to have been elitist in character till the people—the common man and woman—were mobilised into the Non-cooperation Movement all over the country in 1920 (or, at the earliest into the Swadeshi Movement of Bengal in 1905). Elitism was abundantly clear from the manner the representatives of dominant social categories—the educated and high-caste middle classes, the landed magnates and landlords, and the traders and bankers (moneylenders)—had succeeded in influencing the public affairs, and the way

they had also managed to draw the government's attention. None of these dominant categories was placed, to begin with, in a position of prevailing contradiction with the British Raj; who bought over systematically the support of the landed magnates and landlords after the revolt of 1857, built on the English-educated Indians' admiration for the modern West and Westernisation, and relied upon the anxiety of the traders and bankers (moneylenders) for complying with any government order. It was not so much their antipathies against a common target, but their equations among themselves initially, their rivalries and alignments—under the variegated circumstances of society, culture and religion—that determined the ups and downs as much of the elite groups' own mutual relations as of those between them and the British Raj. The broad trends that affected public life in India between 1885 and 1920 had acted more or less similarly during the same period in the North Western Provinces (NWP) and Oudh (the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh from 1901).

In the scenario of geographic, economic and cultural diversities of the NWP and Oudh, their elitist categories were also diverse having more of the local and sectional identities rather than a common regional and provincial presence. Religion-wise they followed the major faiths of Hinduism and Islam, as well as the various sects of both, and linguistically, Hindus among them belonged to the Hindi-knowing and Muslims to the Urdu-knowing people. Since Urdu was being used at the grounds level—beneath English—for official purposes, many among the service and professional Hindus were knowledgeable in it. There were rural and urban elites in the NWP and Oudh who could be differentiated on the basis of class and caste, and the kind of power they possessed in their hands. The rural elite composed of the Hindu and Muslim landed magnates and landlords, as well as of rentiers of land. Because most of them owed their rehabilitation—following the revolt of 1857—to the British, the members of rural elite were loyalist to the core, and practically unanimous in their views on public matters. The only new elements among them were the rich town traders who invested some of their recently gotten wealth in procuring encumbered lands in certain areas. The rural elite should be characterised economically as a feudal class who lived on extracting rent and irregular levies, and who enjoyed social superiority on the basis of existing feudal relations in the countryside. Apart from their belonging to an extent to the Muslim aristocracy and administrative gentry, they also came from such castes as Thakurs, Rajputs, Bhumihars, Jats, Tyagis, etc.

In comparison with the one-dimensional existence of the rural elite, the multi-dimensional urban elite of Hindus and Muslims was so vastly more numerous, powerful and articulate that it virtually monopolised the entire gamut of non-official public activities in the province. Spearheaded by the English-educated modernistic members in the services and professions, the urban elite included the traders and bankers (moneylenders), the traditionally educated in the lower employment, a sprinkling of mill owners (of cotton mills in Kanpur and sugar mills in certain other places) and some absentee landlord settlers. Economically, from

a class point of view, the urban elite could be divided into the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, with the latter having in its ranks a good number of financial capitalists and some industrial capitalists. Beside the substantial Muslim and Bengali expatriate (high caste) salaried people, professionals and businessmen, the urban elite consisted caste-wise of representatives from the Brahmins, Kashmiri Brahmins, Kayasthas, Khatris, Agarwals, Jains, Kalwars, etc. Elites generally, and at the urban centres in particular, operated in the NWP and Oudh through the exercise of their powers, varying from one place to another, and depending upon the intricacies of local circumstances. Broadly speaking, the real base of their power was wealth—the amount of money they accumulated and made use of. With the growth of railways through the provinces in the days before and after the revolt of 1857, connecting Saharanpur with Kanpur and Allahabad, and opening up Shahjahanpur, Agra, Hathras, Khurja, etc., trade flourished along the rail routes and turned Kanpur into the great entrepot of the northern India and enabled the Western Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Doab (containing the divisions of Meerut, Agra, Rohilkhand and Allahabad)—with less than half the provinces' population—to absorb three-fourths of their trade.<sup>1</sup> The railways undermined in comparison the riverine trade marts in the Eastern UP and Oudh (containing the divisions of Benares, Gorakhpur, Lucknow and Fyzabad), and the large-scale commerce that once spread in the upper India through Benares from Mirzapur, Fyzabad, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, etc., steadily declined. Apart from the two new trade centres on the rail routes, namely, Lucknow and Gorakhpur, trading was no longer a major source of wealth in the Eastern UP and Oudh. This sharp change in the distribution of trade was reflected in the land market of the provinces where traders and bankers (moneylenders) were stepping emphatically into it, and purchasing land in the Western UP and Doab from the hard-pressed traditional landholding groups, including Pathans, Saiyids and Kayasthas. In the Eastern UP and Oudh, where the commercial interests did not seem to be doing too well, the landed magnates and landlords (who also acted as local *mahajans*) managed to retain their hold on the land transfers. Apparently, therefore, the wealth of traders and bankers (moneylenders) was playing decisive roles more in the urban and rural sectors of the Western UP and Doab than those in the Eastern UP and Oudh. But together with the landed magnates and landlords, especially in the countryside of the Eastern UP and Oudh, they epitomised money power all over the northern India.

As money power happened to determine social power, traders–bankers (moneylenders) and landed magnates–landlords, enjoyed clear predominance in the urban and rural societies, respectively. However, traders–bankers (moneylenders), along with few absentee landlords in cities and towns, had to share their dominance over the urban society with the numerically powerful group of those engaged in

<sup>1</sup> Francis Robinson, 'Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism in the United Provinces, 1883–1916', in *Locality Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870–1940*, ed. John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 81.

the services and professions. People in the services and professions constituted an exclusively urban category, whose money power—though not comparable to that of the financial capitalists and feudal elements—varied between affluence and solvency. Often they belonged to renowned families who produced high officials and successful lawyers, such as the Srivastavas and Kauls of Allahabad, the Mehdis of Lucknow, the Barha Sayyidis of Muzaffarnagar, the Bengali Banerjees of Agra and the Sahais of Fatehpur. Apart from these luminaries, there were innumerable minor service families, from whom emerged middle-ranking government servants, district bar lawyers, medical officers and practitioners, school and college teachers, journalists and publicists. A good number of them descended from the pre-British administrative services (of Kayastha and Muslim origin), and quite some—adept in British administrative ways—came from outside the provinces (mainly of Bengali origin). All government officials, high or low, exercised in proportion to their respective positions some jurisdictional power over a non-official civic population. But more importantly, all members of the services and professions—whether of the substantial means of a government pleader or a deputy collector, and the modest means of a teacher or a journalist—enjoyed the power of English education, and a certain advantage that went with the Western ideas. The English-educated petty bourgeoisie appears to have formed the most energetic and articulate section of the urban elite in the NWP and Oudh who could organise various platforms for its furtherance and give voice to its expectations and interests. The moot question that arises at this point is whether this elitist petty bourgeoisie voiced primarily the demands of the better-off financial-industrial capitalists and feudal notables, or registered their own specific grievances, hopes and aspirations, or spoke for both.

It has been shown that in the formative years of politicisation in the NWP and Oudh—about the time the newborn Indian National Congress started taking its first steps forward—the socially committed ones in the professions and services appeared to have developed close linkages with the financial capitalists and feudal notables. Those who were making their marks in public life at the urban centres apparently gained support from the resourcefully dominant categories, from the financial capitalists in the Western UP and Doab, and from the landed interests in the Eastern UP and Oudh, for example, while the Malavi Brahmins' (represented by such outstanding publicists like Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya) relations with the Khattris (represented by such rich bankers as Lala Ram Charan Das), Allahabad, typified the former,<sup>2</sup> the Kayastha lawyers' (represented by pleaders like Balak Ram's) relations with the feudal lords (represented by the Rajas of Jehangirabad and Pratabgarh) in Fyzabad, illustrated the latter.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, it appears that the Muslim professionals and service people at the urban centres generally enjoyed

<sup>2</sup> C.A. Bayly, 'Patrons and Politics in Northern India', in *Locality Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870–1940*, ed. John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 48–54.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, 'Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism', 86.

stronger connections with the Muslim aristocratic landlords and landholders in the Western UP and Doab—who were under the financial capitalists' pressure—than they did in the Eastern UP and Oudh. Over and above, Muslim tradesmen, 'a new generation of entrepreneurial wealth' (represented by such men like Abdul Baqi Khan of Allahabad), stood more or less behind them.<sup>4</sup>

Were these linkages between traders–bankers (moneylenders) and landed magnates–landlords, on the one hand, and servicing and professional categories, on the other, based on some sort of patron–client relationship? To an extent these were, especially for those at the lower petty bourgeois level who, in spite of their high caste, Western education and articulating ability, had inadequate financial backing to uphold public activity. Such lawyers, publicists, teachers and salaried people had to look for patronage, and get it at a price. If traders–bankers (moneylenders) were devoted Arya Samajis and Sanatan Dharmiks (which happened usually to be the case all over the NWP and Oudh), the price tag might include the clients' taking up the Hindu religious causes, among other issues of local, regional and countrywide importances. In case the clients themselves were as devout Hindus as the patrons, they were not likely to suffer from an uneasy conscience, despite the hostile reactions their utterances and deeds could have caused among Muslims. The Khattri and Tandon clientage of Madan Mohan Malviya, Shri Krishna Joshi and Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (of Hindu Samaj), Dr Lakshmi Narayan Vyasa (of the Bharat Bhavan Library) and the Bhalla clientage of Balmokund Bhatt (of the Hindu pressure group in the Allahabad municipality—the People's Association) in Allahabad, for example, suited admirably the financial capital-dominated and communally uproarious Western UP and Doab. Almost similarly fitted into the landlord-centred and inter-religiously quieter Eastern UP and Oudh were the feudal clientage in the municipal politics of Ram Garib in Gorakhpur, Balak Ram in Fyzabad and some distinguished Kayastha lawyers in other urban centres. The urban notables (*raises*) used their petty bourgeois clients to promote their interests locally for the *mohalla* populace, municipally for lowering imposts, cornering contracts and obtaining privileged services, and philanthropically for constructing *ghats* (flight of stairs leading to the river bank), setting up market places and encouraging Devnagri, just as the publicists from services and professions used their patrons for sponsoring them in public life in progression at the spheres of local self-government, provincial legislature and all-India politics. But at the upper petty bourgeois level, a good number of successful professionals and high government officials, operating through their family and caste networks, were in a strong position by themselves to offer patronage, and not seek it. As many of them (such as the Kauls and Kunzrus, Srivastavas and Prasads, Barha Sayyids and Jaunpuri Muftis) had their origin in the pre-colonial administrative system, they were familiar with the language, culture and the ways of the-then ruling circles, and in consequence, remained relatively free from religious biases.

<sup>4</sup> C.A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics, Allahabad 1880–1920* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 173–74.

Whether they distributed patronage or received clientage, those belonging to professional and services categories had a common access to the corridors of English educational power. This power, in the British colonial circumstances, placed them together in a position not only of infinite superiority over the manual-labouring masses, but of immense facility over the non-English knowing intelligentsia. Only the fortunate few were English educated in India of the time, and in the NWP and Oudh they seemed to be remarkably fewer. Table 1 should bring out how much less had been the number of reasonably English educated (from ‘entrance failed’ to ‘MA failed’) in the provinces for 1884–85 in comparison with their counterparts in Bengal, Bombay and Madras.

**Table 1.** Number of Educated (University, Entrance and Higher Education), By Province, 1884–85

Place	Entrance		First Arts		BA		MA	
	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed
Bengal	16,639	21,151	5,252	8,027	2,153	276	491	330
Bombay	7,196	15,209	1,568	2,803	933	1,030	79	59
Madras	18,390	36,356	4,480	6,850	1,633	1,648	49	34
NWP and Oudh	3,200	3,210	749	739	272	270	57	30

**Source:** Report of the Public Services Commission, India, 1886–87, Calcutta 1888, cited in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 18.

Even the total number of English literates (far more than the English educated), which seemed to have grown in the United Provinces over the years, was not impressive since it was substantially low in 1907 (40 in every 10,000 of its population) than that year’s all-India average (74 in every 10,000).<sup>5</sup> Clearly there was enormous scope for the furtherance of English education in the NWP and Oudh, and thereby for the cornering of its accompanying benefits by the petty bourgeoisie. The material, as well as the prime, of the accompanying benefits was either getting into the professions, or searching out some employment, especially the government employment since the government happened to be the largest employer. On English education and English-based career opportunities, the professionals and the salaried were single minded and uncompromising. The other urban elite groups, the *raises*, like traders–bankers (moneylenders) and the absentee landlords had no contradiction or clash of interests with the petty bourgeoisie on these issues, and therefore, had no difficulty in supporting their causes, tacitly or actively. Some of the landlords and traders were already diversifying the family roles by encouraging their wards to take to English education, legal and other professions, and even government employment, notably Agarwals of Allahabad and

<sup>5</sup> Robinson, ‘Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism’, 94.

Benares, the Gautam Bhumiars of Karchana in Benaras and the Khans of Meerut (Nawab Asadullah) and Azamgarh (Raja Salamat).

The government encouragement to education that germinated the category of the English educated under the Company Raj, who loyally stood by it at the time of the revolt of 1857, waned substantially thereafter on account of the cost for meeting the British security arrangements, and for paying for the British military adventures. The financial crunch in the 1860s and 1870s so dampened the authorities' educational enthusiasm that their setting up of the new government schools and providing grants-in-aid for the non-government schools showed a hesitant downward tendency throughout the country, including the NWP and Oudh. Despite the funding of great centres of higher education like the Canning College in Lucknow (1864), Muir Central College in Allahabad (1872), Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College in Aligarh (1881) and later on the Allahabad University (1887), the once renowned colleges, such as those in Agra and Bareilly, suffered neglect in the government hands, and they were left to fend for themselves. At the level of secondary education, the authorities were clearly seen to be leaving the educational matters to the care of non-official initiatives, either based marginally on the government grant, or entirely on the public fund. The outcome was the urban elites' frantic efforts for the establishment of schools for English education by organising these—in the circumstances of the time—in whatever collective manner they could manage, inclinationally through the secularist (such enlightened bodies as the Allahabad Literary Institute in 1868–69), regionalist (such institutions as the Anglo-Bengali School in Allahabad in 1872), casteist (such schools as the Kayastha Pathsala in Allahabad in 1873) and communalist (such places of learning as the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental School in Aligarh in 1875) affiliations. The staunch Hindu Raja Shiva Prasad of Benares, a loyalist Indian member of the Imperial Legislative Council, was as much devoted to the cause of English education among his North Indian co-religionists as a modernising Syed Ahmed Khan, the post-1857 loyalist bridge-builder between an alienated Muslim community and a suspicious British Raj, had done to spread English education among the followers of his faith. If Syed Ahmed Khan had launched the Mohammedan Educational Conference in 1886 for bringing Western knowledge to his community, and readying it for a race of advancement with other competitors, the Kayasthas did the same by forming the Kayastha Conference in precisely the same year, and preaching that the caste members' 'salvation lay in their applying themselves to the study of western arts and sciences...'.<sup>6</sup>

The petty bourgeoisie appeared on the whole to be as anxious for retaining and extending their hold over English education as for monopolising and safeguarding the government employment—their special preserve. The educated high caste Hindus, especially the exclusively literary caste of Kayasthas—who considered

<sup>6</sup> *A Short Account of the Aims, Objects, Achievements and Proceedings of the Kayastha Conference*, a pamphlet, Allahabad, 1893.



it below their dignity to follow any occupation unconnected with letters—and Muslims, with the governing tradition in legal and administrative matters, stole the limelight on the scene of government employment in the NWP and Oudh from the pre-colonial days. Since Urdu—the medium of Muslim education—persisted in remaining the administrative language down below English under the British, the Urdu-knowing service gentry (of Muslims and Hindus) seemed to have continued to maintain their numerical strength in the services even in the face of stiff—almost unequal—competition from the migrant English-educated Bengalis. Though the local Hindu and Muslim petty bourgeois categories tried their best from the 1850s to grab most of the government appointments in the NWP and Oudh, they lagged in English education-based job-hunting far behind their counterparts (largely Hindus) in coastal India, and consequently, when the more advanced in the race of English education in India left their homes in Bengal in search of greener pastures in northern India, its indigenous service and professional categories faced a serious threat to their socio-economic position.

The extent of the threat should be apparent if one takes into account a test case, say that of Allahabad (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Broad Regional or Communal Ascription of Persons Earning More than ₹10 per Month in Some Major Government Offices, Allahabad, 1876

S. No.	Offices	European			
		Eurasian	Bengali	Muslim	Local Hindu
1.	Collectorate	–	11	9	11
2.	Tehsil Establishment	–	1	24	35
3.	Commissioners' Establishment	2	2	1	5
4.	Board of Revenue and Accountant General's Office	39	67	3	63
	Total	41	81	37	114

**Source:** Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, 24.

The Bengali intrusion in the NWP and Oudh, with their settlements in Allahabad, Benares, Kanpur, Lucknow, Agra, Meerut, etc., had become so pronounced by the 1880s that the local urban elites not only resented its stride but also thought of emphatically counteracting it. The Bengali-phobia came to the fore with the formation of the Indian National Congress (having a powerful Bengali participation in it), and more specifically, with its demand for filling up all the covenanted and uncovenanted government posts on the basis of university degrees, and through simultaneous competitive examinations.<sup>7</sup> The leading Kashmiri Brahmin lawyer of Allahabad, Ajudhia Prasad, held before the Public Service Commission of the NWP and Oudh that the services should be organised

<sup>7</sup> The demand, taken up provincially, grew out of a resolution adopted in the First Session of the Indian National Congress, December 1885, Bombay; see A.M. Zaidi and Shahed Zaidi, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of Indian National Congress Vol. 1, 1885–1890* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co.), 48.

on a provincial basis, 'otherwise Bengalis would dominate'. The staunch Hindu Raja Shiva Prasad of Benares similarly opposed simultaneous examinations for recruitment as these would result in the supremacy of the Bengalis—'bred in chicanery', and 'naturally timid and slothful'. Theodore Beck, the Principal of MAO College, Aligarh, was also of the opinion that such examinations would give 'a very unjust advantage to Bengalis—unjust because the British Government has been educating Bengalis for much longer time'.<sup>8</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan in the same vein shuddered at the prospect of the entire North India's groaning 'under the yoke of Bengali rule', and its people licking 'the Bengali shoes'.<sup>9</sup> But not all had lost their cool over the issue of Bengali domination, and the powerful service elite group of the Hindu Kayasthas saw its future not so much in opposing the Bengali intruders but in reaching up to their level—in preparing itself educationally, and otherwise, to ensure that it was not 'beaten back in the competition of nations'.<sup>10</sup> The Kayasthas were also keen on gaining allies outside the NWP and Oudh, and saw in the formation of the Indian National Congress the creation of a precious pressure mechanism to uphold their interests, along with others'. That was perhaps the reason why the second Kayastha Conference, held in Allahabad in September 1888, was in favour of aligning itself with the Congress, and contributed richly to the success of the fourth Congress session that was scheduled in Allahabad later in the same year. If the Kayastha Sabha did not become anti-Bengalist for the sake of pro-Congressism, the Mohammedan Educational Conference turned anti-Congressist to be able to relegate the Bengali spectre.

Anti-Congressism of the Mohammedan Educational Conference stemmed primarily from the attitude of its helmsman, Syed Ahmed Khan. He was devoted primarily to the cause of his community of Indian Muslims, which, he felt—as did some of those in the government circles like W.W. Hunter in the 1870s—had fallen behind Hindus in matters of entrepreneurship, education and recruitment to the government services. Syed Ahmed's community devotion was in line with almost all other publicmen of his time who had been preoccupied with the uplift of their own castes, as it seemed to be the case with the Kayasthas, Brahmins, Rajputs, Khattris, Agarwals, etc., or with their community through such organisations as the Prayag Hindu Samaj, Madhya Hindu Samaj, Kashi Sajjan Sabha, People's Association, Gaurakshini Sabhas, Sanatan Hindu Sabhas, etc. That Syed Ahmed Khan had been a loyalist was also not out of tune with other English-educated publicists of his time who looked generally up to the British Raj as the harbinger of modernism and advancement. Syed Ahmed, however, lacked the confidence in any overarching of Indian pluralities, or in setting up an umbrella over the diversities of communities and castes that the Congress represented. In other words, he was unsure about the steady progress of Indian nationhood, doubtful

<sup>8</sup> *Proceedings of the Public Service Commission, N.W.P. and Oudh*, 1886, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1887.

<sup>9</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan's speech at the Second Muslim Educational Conference, 28 December 1887, Lucknow.

<sup>10</sup> *Kayastha*, quarterly organ of the Kayastha Clubs Association, Agra, issue 1, no. 1 (October 1895).

about the introduction of Western representative governance into the country and suspicious about the Congress' upsetting the balance that the British so deftly held among communities, castes and interests. He could vaguely visualise in the Congress movement a certain curtailment in future of the British authority, and felt—perhaps under the influence of friendly Britons like Auckland Colvin, Lieutenant Governor, the NWP and Oudh, and Theodore Beck, Principal, MAO College, Aligarh—that any relation with such an increasingly assertive Congress vis-à-vis the government would go wholly against the developmental interests of his own community. If that was likely to be the case, and if, in its upholding of a medley of interests, the Congress was not in a position to promote the 'special' interests of Muslims, then the Muslim community—in the opinion of Syed Ahmed Khan and compatriots of his ilk—should not have any track with the Congress, irrespective of what such doyens of nationalist liberals (who also happened to be Muslims) as Badruddin Tyabji might think or say.

The 'special' Muslim interests in government employment, for example, had not been helped by the Congress plea for recruitment simultaneously through competitive examinations. Although Muslims in the NWP and Oudh were markedly more urbane, and better placed, in proportion to their number in government employment (nearly 30 per cent in 1887) than their co-religionists could manage in other parts of the subcontinent, they were finding it difficult to retain their impressive share in the public services in the face of great Hindu efforts at expanding the position of their's. Table 3 does bear this out to an extent.

**Table 3.** Indians Holding Appointments at ₹75 per Month and Above in Government of the North Western Provinces and Oudh

Community	1867	1877	1887
Hindus	692	936	933
Muslims	333	354	293
Muslim Percentage	32.5	27.4	29.6

**Source:** Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, 305.

The employment opportunities of urbanite Muslims were further threatened, and rather seriously so, by the controversy over the replacement of Urdu by Hindi in Devnagri script in the NWP and Oudh for all official purposes. It may be recalled that many among the Persian-knowing Muslim intelligentsia, who had been concerned with the administration of law and justice, were forced out of employment when the authorities substituted, in 1837, English or one of the vernaculars in place of Persian as the language of the courts. That the vernacular which continued to operate in the courts, as well as in official dealings, was Urdu, had been proved since then to be the saving grace for the Muslim petty bourgeoisie in the NWP and Oudh. When, however, Fateh Chand started setting up public committees in Benares from 1867 to press for the claims of Hindi in Devanagri script as an official language in the provinces in place of Urdu, the Muslim urban

elite felt threatened career-wise, as well as culturally. Throughout the 1870s the controversy between the protagonists of Urdu (Muslims) and Hindi (Hindus) raged high, hardening the attitude of each towards the other. Consequently in 1873, Syed Ahmed moved forward to organise an elaborate Urdu Defence Association with a strong central council to counter the onslaught of Hindi enthusiasts. The situation aggravated further with the government decision in 1881 in favour of a change over to Hindi for official work in the neighbouring province of Bihar. Irrespective of the Congress evasion in expressing any categorical opinion on the language issue, the Hindu Congressites, and even the local Congress stalwarts, did not refrain themselves from championing the cause of Hindi, spearheaded notably by leaders like Madan Mohan Malviya, sponsored by members of rich trading families like Lala Ram Charan Das, patronised by the Congress-sympathising landed magnates like Rampal Singh, Raja of Kalakankar, and supported by the pro-Congress Kayastha Sabha. If Syed Ahmed and his fellow Aligarhians did neither share the national democratic ideology of the Congress, nor discovered in it the commitment for promoting the 'special' interests of the Muslim urban elite, nor find it not only to be unmindful of Urdu, but some of its following also to be going all-out for Hindi—they could think of their having no other alternative but to oppose the Congress tooth and nail, especially when the Congress decided to hold its fourth session of 1888 on their own provincial turf in Allahabad. In August 1888 Syed Ahmed Khan hurriedly organised the United Indian Patriotic Association in the NWP and Oudh to challenge the Congress position, and oppose the Congress claim for representation on behalf of all Indians, by rallying the Muslim urban elite and landholders, along with some Hindu *taluqdars* (holders of proprietary estates).

Not all the Muslims in the NWP and Oudh, however, were opposed to the Congress, or to the holding of its session in Allahabad in 1888. A large number of Shias in the provinces came closer to the Congress during a period of growing Shia–Sunni tension in the second half of the 1880s. The landholding and servicing delegates who took part in the Congress session of 1888 from small towns in the Doab also included a substantial number of Muslims, irrespective of their being Shias or Sunnis. The indebted Muslim landholders in the Western UP and the dispossessed aristocrats and dependants of the old royal family in Oudh seemed to have been looking up to the Congress. Some young professionals among Muslims who saw in the Congress the means for furthering their aspirations, and who were cross-culturally connected with their Kayastha and Kashmiri Brahmin counterparts, naturally gravitated towards it. Certain sections of orthodox Muslims, especially those belonging to the Deoband school, and led by Mahmud Al Hasan from 1887 to 1888, who aimed at fanning up a *jihad* against the alien rule, denounced the loyalism of Syed Ahmed Khan, and even issued *fatwa* against his organisations, had foreseen the Congress as the future opponent of the Raj, and therefore, had no hesitation in supporting it. Likewise, not all Hindus in the provinces were

favourable to the Congress, and such power-wielding personalities as Raja Shiva Prasad and the Maharaja of Benares, the banker-cum-property owner like Lala Jagat Narayan of Allahabad, the Lucknow *raias* like Newal Kishore Bhargava, apart from a large number of Hindu *taluqdars* and *zamindars* (landholders paying revenue directly to the government), did not fall in line with the Congress. The support for the Congress and the opposition to it, the advocacy for the inter-community welfare and the pleading for the single community interests, the urgency for spreading English education, particularly of the higher variety, and the rivalry for government employment, the pressurising of the authorities for rightful concessions and the humouring of them for advantageous gains, henceforth so completely absorbed the attention of the service and professional categories—the most advanced of the urban provincial societies—that the history of the NWP and Oudh for the succeeding thirty-two years (1888–1920) was dominated by the politics of their representative publicists and public figures. Simultaneously, it became apparent that all their concerns and anxieties could lead, sooner or later, to a serious schism among themselves, over obtaining a say in the administration, and moving a step into the corridors of power.

Rehearsals for stepping into the threshold of power were already being held in the arena of municipal government in the NWP and Oudh from 1884 when the principle of elective representation had first been introduced there. Although elected non-officials in municipalities were severely under check by the nominated non-officials, and by the government-appointed chairman, they still could exercise general control over the civic administration, municipal employees and municipal taxation, which was considerable—as much as one-eighth of overall provincial budget.<sup>11</sup> Since municipalities often undertook public works, the elected non-officials could obtain contracts for favouring their friends, utilise octrois for bringing pressures on rival trading groups, manipulate electoral ward areas and rolls for obstructing opponents and even impose bans or withdraw them (notably on cow slaughter), for defending respective communal religiosities. Above all, a municipal commissionership was an important means for rising in the public esteem—from local to provincial significance. As municipal voting right was based on property qualifications, and the qualification for a candidate was three times higher than that of the voter, one had to be well-to-do to do well in municipal politics, and also capable of getting support of various interest groups—traders—bankers, absentee landlords, petty business people, and of course, castes and communities. Municipal politics consequently betrayed a tendency to become faction-ridden and interest-centred in spite of the emergence of an overarching brand of Congress nationalism from 1885. Factions could be working in the municipalities for the rival groups of either traders—bankers (moneylenders) or landlords—property owners of orthodox Hindus and populist Muslims, and yet

<sup>11</sup> In 1895–96 the provincial income was ₹32,587,000 and the total municipal income amounted to ₹5,292,780; *Report on the Administration of N.W.P. and Oudh, 1895–96*, 67, 148.

be an integral part of the Congress movement, without compromising on their basic interests. The factionalism between Lala Ram Charan Das's group and Lala Jagat Narayan's following in Allahabad municipality did not prevent the former from veering round the Congress. Similarly, Kayastha and Brahmin professionals, who took sides of the feuding municipal factions of both Hindu and Muslim anti-Congress landlords in the towns of the Eastern UP and Oudh, had no difficulty sometimes to sympathise with the Congress. Conversely, some among Lala Jagat Narayan's men in Allahabad, and many among Muslim commissioners in the Western UP and Doab towns, as well as Muslim and Kayastha commissioners of the towns of the Eastern UP and Oudh, studiously kept themselves away from the Congress. Pro- and anti-Congressism apart, factional politics in the municipalities of the NWP and Oudh were taking a sharp competitive turn between the two powerful elites of Hindu and Muslim communities.

The Muslim minority in the NWP and Oudh, or the United Provinces (varying between 13 and 15 per cent of the total population from the 1880s to the 1920s), was a very powerful component of the provinces' overall urban populace (about two-fifths or 40 per cent). A substantial section being engaged in lowly paid and artisanal jobs, the urbanite Muslims were handicapped in the run with their Hindu counterparts of qualifying for property-based municipal franchise. This is the reason why it had been found in 1911 that out of eighteen Muslim majority Western UP and Doab municipalities, they had a majority of voters only in six.<sup>12</sup> But even then it was grossly inequitable to discover that in Allahabad, where they formed 30 per cent of the population, Muslims could not manage to send even a single representative till 1889. They constituted 41 per cent of the population in Muzaffarnagar, but out of four nominated and twelve elected municipality members, their share was a paltry two nominated and one elected. They also lost heavily through the redrawing of ward boundaries and manipulation of electoral rolls. In Moradabad in 1897 Muslims had a nine to eight majority in the municipal board, but by 1907 they were reduced to a four to eight minority. In Bareilly, where Muslims numbered 50 per cent and Hindus 49 per cent of the population, and both had nine municipal seats each in 1901, Muslims were outnumbered in 1906 by seven to eleven. Between 1884 and 1908 Muslims steadily lost seats in such important cities like Kanpur, Meerut, Agra and Saharanpur, and they seemed also to be losing in Badaun, Chandpur, Bijnor and Bulandshahr. The situation in the Eastern UP and Oudh—where day-to-day communal bickerings happened to be less in intensity—was not uncomfortable for Muslims. This is borne out by the following enumeration (Table 4).

A feeling that their representation in municipal affairs had suffered because they were included into the composite general electorate, and thus forced to compete with candidates from the Hindu majority started, therefore, gaining ground in the Muslim psyche. Their elites felt, in fairness to the protection of what they

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, 'Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism', 84.

**Table 4.** Population Ratio of Hindu and Muslim Communities in the UP

Towns in the Region of	Community	1884–85 (%)	1907–08 (%)
West UP and Doab	Hindu	60.7	65.6
	Muslim	34.1	30.1
	Other	5.2	4.3
East UP and Oudh	Hindu	62.2	64.3
	Muslim	30.1	33.5
	Other	7.7	2.2

**Sources:** Calculated from returns of elections to municipal boards, *The N.W.P. and Oudh Gazette*, Part II, for 1884 and 1885, Allahabad, 1886, and *The U.P. Gazette*, Part III, for 1907 and 1908, Lucknow, 1909.

perceived to be their position of strength, and their ‘special’ interests, Muslims should have separate representation by which Muslim electorates could vote for the Muslim candidates. As early as 1888, the Muslim Anjuman-i-Rifah-i-Islam demanded that the existing municipal board in Allahabad be abolished and the number of Hindu and Muslim seats be fixed to ensure Muslim representation.<sup>13</sup> Viqar-ul-Mulk, the Muslim leader from Rohilkhand region, and member of the Amroha Municipal Board, raised about the same time the Muslim claim for separate electorate. Leading Muslims of Muzaffarnagar identically demanded in 1896 separate representation for their municipality.<sup>14</sup> As a culmination of all these in 1896 a memorial came up for the Lieutenant Governor A. Colvin from the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association (an offshoot of the Muslim Educational Conference) for securing ‘proper’ representation of the Muslim community by creating separate communal electorates, equal representation of Muslims in the NWP and Oudh Legislative Council, and giving weightage to Muslim representation in municipalities and boards.<sup>15</sup>

Whether the urbanite Muslims’ plea for separate electorate was justifiable or reprehensible by the nationalist democratic standards, and whether such Congress liberal stalwarts as Gopal Krishna Gokhale was right in supporting it or not,<sup>16</sup> it appeared somehow to be in line with the community uplifting styles that all the North Indian elites, including Hindus, adopted for political mobilisation behind their causes. When the elitist Muslims in Allahabad organised in 1891 the Mohammedan Boarding House for accommodating outstation Muslim students, the Hindu elite did the same there in 1896 for the similarly placed Hindu

<sup>13</sup> Robinson, ‘Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism’, 90.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–95.

<sup>15</sup> M.S. Jain, *The Aligarh Movement: Its Origin and Development, 1858–1906* (Agra: Shri Ram Mehra and Co., 1965), 128–29.

<sup>16</sup> Gokhale’s speech in the Imperial Legislative Assembly, 24 January 1911; S.V. Desika Char, ed., *Readings in the Constitutional History of India, 1757–1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 433.



students by setting up a Hindu Boarding House. Again, for pursuing their respective objectives in the Urdu versus Hindi language controversy in the 1890s, Hindus established Nagri Pracharani Sabha with as much gusto as Muslims did by putting up the Urdu Defence Association. Hindus organised local Hindu Sabhas which first combined in the Hindu Mahasammelan in 1905, and then grew into the United Provinces Hindu Sabha in 1909, exactly in the similar manner Muslims had set up their District Political Associations in Badaun, Saharanpur and Shahjahanpur in 1903. Hindu attempts at the beginning of the twentieth century for founding a Hindu University in Benares (which came into existence in 1915) were matched by the Muslim efforts about the same time for setting up a Muslim University at Aligarh (which was finally established in 1920). What is more significant, however, had been the Raj's anxiety in the NWP and Oudh for encouraging both the elites' welfarist proclivities on communal lines. The case at hand was that of the MAO College at Aligarh, which from its very inception had conspicuously been sponsored by the Raj in its various capacities. The local government was believed to have overruled its Director of Public instruction's objections to giving Syed Ahmed Khan's college a generous grant-in-aid, the Viceroy (Northbrook) made a personal donation of ₹10,000 towards its funding, the Lieutenant Governor (A. Colvin) and his officials arranged for selling 73 acres of government land for a pittance to the college for setting up its campus, and another Viceroy (Lytton) laid the foundation stone of the college. Every lieutenant governor and most of the viceroys religiously visited the college thereafter, patronised it generously and contributed crucially to its survival at times of acute financial crisis, notably in 1898 when the college finances collapsed after the death of Syed Ahmed Khan. The viceroy sent personal donation to encourage others in paying off the college's debts, the provincial government dispatched accountants to put the college finances in order, and the Lieutenant Governor A.P. Macdonnell himself supervised the rescue operations. All these were consciously done to ensure the college continued to enjoy the prime place that it had come to occupy in the consolidation of the Muslim elite—as an alternative means for balancing the Hindu elite—and the great influence it started exercising over Muslims throughout India.

A parallel case—that of the Raj's encouragement to the Hindu community's interests—was apparent from its treatment of the Nagri Pracharani Sabha. The Sabha, which was formed in 1894, and included a number of prominent government employees as its members, used to receive regular government grants for propagating the cause of Hindi in Devnagri script. By 1897 it seemed to have gathered sufficient momentum, and in 1899 the Sabha succeeded in sending a delegation to the lieutenant governor at Nainital to plead for the simultaneous use of the Nagri (Hindi) and the Persian (Urdu) scripts in the government offices and the lower courts. As an outcome of discussions with this delegation, the controversial Nagri Resolution of 18 April 1900 was passed by the same Lieutenant Governor A.P. Macdonnell who took so much care in solving the Aligarh M.A.O. College's



financial difficulties in 1898. The resolution stipulated that communications in vernacular with the government and the courts could now be conducted not only in the Persian script but also in the Nagri script, to facilitate the understandings of a vast majority of the population who were not acquainted with the Persian script. As a corollary to this decision, and more importantly of course, the resolution introduced a language qualification for recruitment in the provincial services, that is, the appointed persons must be able, within a period of one year of their appointments, to read and write both the Nagri and Persian characters fluently.<sup>17</sup> Enforcement of such a qualification was bound to prevent all those from future government appointments who had been bred in the old ways, especially many among the Muslim petty bourgeoisie who did not learn Nagri script ordinarily in the course of their system of education. Actual and prospective Hindu government employees, on the other hand, were familiar, more or less, with the Persian script from the pre-British days, apart from knowing Nagri—the script of their mother tongue. From the viewpoint of government employment, more particularly at the subordinate lower levels, therefore, the Nagri Resolution was likely to spell an immediate doom for the Muslim intelligentsia, and might have contributed to their further sliding down at a faster rate. Their number in the subordinate executive and judicial services in the NWP and Oudh, or the United Provinces, had gone down already by more than 10 per cent between 1886 and 1913.<sup>18</sup> That the Lieutenant Governor La Touché (the successor of Macdonnell in December 1901, who was favourable to Muslim service interests) did not give effect to the Nagri Resolution that had, in fact, spared the British counterbalancing act between the two sides from tilting heavily towards one side. Beyond this damage-controlling, however, it had not brought down much the Muslim elite's rising temper, nor was it meant for wholly doing so.

Meanwhile, the Urdu Defence Associations started springing up in many parts of the UP, and quite noticeably so in Allahabad and Lucknow. A Defence of Urdu Conference was held in Lucknow in August 1900 with delegates from various parts of the provinces and outside them. The 'young' section of educated Muslim petty bourgeoisie (notably Sheikh Zahur Ahmad, Mohamed and Shaukat Alis, Mirza Samiullah Beg, Dr M.A. Ansari, Syed Wazir Hausan, etc.)—those relatively less privileged aspirants for placements in public life, professions and services—seemed to have turned impatient and aggrieved over their and the community's prospects. They appeared to be getting increasingly disenchanted with the appeasing approaches and gentle persuasions that the 'old' (notably Viqar-ul-Mulk, Syed Hosein Bilgrami, Nawab of Chhatari, Nawab Abdul Majid, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan, etc.)—the well-entrenched, the propertied and the influential

<sup>17</sup> Hamid Ali Khan, *The Vernacular Controversy: An Account and Criticism of the Equalisation of Nagri and Urdu as the Character for the Court of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Lucknow: Self Published, 1900).

<sup>18</sup> Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (Delhi: Vikas, 1975), 46, Table V.

Aligarhians in Muslim society—had devotedly been following towards the British authorities. The ‘young’ apparently felt that the machinations of the ‘old’ travellers on Sir Syed’s trodden path were not yielding results in such matters as the community’s educational advancement, employment opportunity and representational exclusivity, as expeditiously as they should have. An urgency, therefore, was growing among the ‘young’ for exerting political pressure on the government in order to have ‘a political organization of our own’.<sup>19</sup> By 1903 a scheme for the Central Mohammedan Political Association was already in the air, and it gained further momentum when Muslims—who had not secured any representation in the provincial legislative council, created under the Indian Councils Act of 1861 and 1892<sup>20</sup>—failed in 1904 to send their representatives to the first-elected senate of Allahabad University. Some of the ‘young’, in desperation in the absence of a full-fledged Muslim political organisation, were even thinking of joining the Congress in view of the national body’s effectiveness in bringing political pressures on the authorities, and voicing elitist concerns of ‘all’ communities. ‘Young’ Aligarhians like Tufail Ahmad and Hasrat Mohani, in fact, attended the Congress session in Benares in 1905, and in May 1906 the Aligarh MAO College Students’ Union passed a resolution by an overwhelming majority calling for joint action by Hindus and Muslims in politics.<sup>21</sup> At the heart of their hearts, however, most people belonging to both the ‘young’ and the ‘old’ knew that their joining hands with the Congress would jeopardise the favourable treatment they hoped for getting from the government, and that it would result in their claim for ‘special’ concession being overshadowed by the Congress’ focus on the common interest of all. But the threat of joining the Congress that the ‘young’ held out, the upheaval that the Swadeshi Movement caused against the carving out of an Eastern Bengal and Assam from the Presidency of Bengal (which, according to many among the Muslim elite in the eastern India, would relieve them in the new province of the competition with the Hindu elite), and the resignation from the lieutenant governorship of the new province that Bampfylde Fuller was compelled to tender in August 1906—all forced the ‘old’ to act to reassure Muslims of their working in favour of the community’s ‘special’ interests. Together with the ‘young’ they also had to hit the iron hard when it was turning hot, following the Secretary of State

<sup>19</sup> Presidential Address of Syed Ali Imam of Bihar, Amritsar Session of the All India Muslim League, 1908; Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, ed., *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents, 1906–1947*, Vol. 1 (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1969), 49.

<sup>20</sup> It was only in 1888 that the NWP and Oudh were brought under the purview of the Act of 1861, allowing the provinces’ Lieutenant Governor to have a Legislative Council in which three were nominated non-officials. By the Act of 1892 the number of nominated non-officials in NWP and Oudh Council was raised from three to five. None from Muslims, however, was nominated either among the three or the five of the non-officials.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims*, 142.

Morley's agreeing under the Congress pressure (through Gopal Krishna Gokhale in the main) in the spring of 1906 to an increase of representative Indian element in the legislative councils, as well as an extension of the powers of the legislatures.<sup>22</sup> It had become incumbent on the Muslim elitists, under this circumstance, to go all out for taking full advantage of any proposal for constitutional reform. The 'old', therefore, took the initiative for drafting a memorial to the viceroy on behalf of their community, placed it before a gathering of Muslim delegates in Lucknow for approval, and submitted it to Minto at Shimla on 1 October 1906.

The memorial to the viceroy claimed a due proportion of employment in the gazetted, subordinate and ministerial services for Muslims all over India, and a separate representation of Muslims in the municipalities and local boards and in the legislative councils, apart from soliciting the viceregal help in setting up a Muslim university at Aligarh. Minto apparently ignored both the issues of a Muslim university and the proportionate appointments, but he was willing to accommodate the Muslim demand in the electoral arrangements of municipalities, local bodies and legislative councils. He also agreed to the view that the Muslim community's position should not be assessed merely by numerical strength but by its overall importance, and that the community's political rights and interests should be safeguarded.<sup>23</sup> Though his response seemed positive, without of course being specific, and also vindicative of the stand of the 'old' school generally, it did not satisfy many of the 'young'—and even some of the 'old' venerables, especially outside the United Provinces. The feeling that the Muslim community must use all its strength to extract clear-cut concessions from the authorities was still running high, and so did the craving for a political organisation of the community's own—to plead and bargain for its demands. Nawab Salimullah of Dacca—being sore at the memorialists' indifference towards the continued existence of Eastern Bengal and Assam and the Muslims therein—took advantage of the prevailing mood, gave a call for the formation of an all-India Muslim confederacy and convened a conference for this purpose in Dacca in December 1906. Since the Muslim Educational Conference session was also scheduled to be held in Dacca, a large contingent of both the 'young' and the 'old' from UP assembled there among others, and on 31 December 1906 the 'old'—who always preferred pleading for concessions than asserting rights—had to agree to the formation of the All-India Muslim League (AIML) as a means of retaining Muslim solidarity, and keeping the 'young' away from the Congress fold. Simultaneously, the Aligarhian Muslim leaders in UP were determined to exercise a firm control over the AIML and the 'young', which they did by capturing from the very outset the key posts

<sup>22</sup> These were made clear, in private, by Morley's first letter as Secretary of State to Viceroy Minto, 15 June 1906, and in public, by Morley's Budget Speech of 1906 in Parliament.

<sup>23</sup> Matiur Rahaman, *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics, 1906–1912* (London: Luzac, 1970), Appendix II, 300–02.

of secretary and joint secretaries of the organisation, by ensuring that Nawab Salimullah and his Bengali associates did not enjoy any free play in it and by imposing on it a constitution in its Karachi session in December 1907 in favour of 'men of property and influence'.<sup>24</sup> But despite its high elitism, the newly founded AIML did manage to some extent to deliver the goods for which it was brought about. It gave on the whole an organisational direction to the Muslim petty bourgeoisie, and between 1907 and 1909 provincial Muslim Leagues were set up, somewhat loosely though, in all the major provinces of India, including a branch of the AIML in London. What had, however, been more significant was the manner the AIML and its London branch tried to intervene on behalf of their community, and press for the acceptance of its viewpoints at various stages of crystallisation of Indian constitutional reforms in 1909.

The Indian Councils (Morley-Minto) Act of 1909, which had been deliberated upon for about two years (1907–09), was significant as much for slightly raising the legislative councils' sizes and powers as for introducing for the first time in them the principle of election—to determine a substantial number of their non-official membership. Apart from the election of a specified number of members province-wise by a minuscule mixed or joint electorate (0.2 per cent of India's total population), based on high property qualifications, provisions were also made for nominated members, as well as for the representation of local bodies, landholders, trade associations and universities. Most importantly, however, the Act conceded the Muslim petty bourgeoisie's demand for creating a separate Muslim electorate, with considerably low income qualifications than all other non-Muslim electors, to elect Muslim legislators in a specific number of seats reserved for them in the legislative councils. The separate Muslim electorate and the reserved number of Muslim seats—clearly in excess in proportion to their numerical strength—did in no way preclude a qualified Muslim from seeking representation of, or exercising franchise in, all other constituencies. Such extraordinarily unequal bestowal of constitutional favours to Muslim petty bourgeoisie cannot be explained merely by referring to the misinformed British public opinion, or by emphasising on the exertions of a barely two-year-old, infantile AIML. One cannot but take into account, in the light of the tumultuous Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, and the emergence of an 'extremist' line of thinking (as opposed to a 'moderate' one) within the Congress, the acute British sense of insecurity of being surrounded in India by millions 'composed of factors of an inflammability unknown to the Western world'. To avert such obsession with insecurity, it became imperative for the British policy-makers to think in terms of 'a possible counterpoise to Congress aims', for withstanding an emergent nationality that had done 'much to

<sup>24</sup> The AIML constitution of 1907 substantially restricted the constituency of the 'young' by laying down strict property qualifications for members, such as their having an annual income of more than ₹500, and their being able to pay an annual subscription of ₹25 and an entry fee of the same amount.

unite Hindus and Mohammedans in a common cause'.<sup>25</sup> Clearly the most effective counterpoise in the Indian circumstances, apart from the Council of Princes, could be found in the Muslim elite, whose members in the majority were willing to be won over at a price. Morley and Minto had paid for the show in advance in 1909, and the authorities naturally expected a reasonable performance to follow, without wholly knowing, of course, the mindset and the ability of the performers.

To begin with, the performers seemed to have started playing their roles on the anticipated lines, and the elitists—not only among Muslims but also Hindus—began acting and overacting in the UP in relation to each other. Tensions were evident in the municipalities and local boards which, under the Councils Act of 1909, had turned into the provincial legislative council's electorates. All the boards in the provinces were formed into twelve divisions or general constituencies, each returning one council member in the elections (some in alternate elections) where Muslims and Hindus both could vote. Additionally, Muslims were given four separate constituencies (Agra–Meerut, Rohilkhand–Kumaon, Lucknow–Fyzabad and Allahabad–Benares–Gorakhpur) to send representatives to protect their 'special' interests. Consequently, Muslims could vote twice—in the general constituencies, as well as in their separate constituencies—guaranteeing them a greater percentage of representation than their proportion in the population. The Hindu elitists could not take kindly to this, and felt that Muslim candidates should keep themselves confined to their separate constituencies, and not meddle with the general constituencies. In other words, according to the Hindu elite opinion, the Muslim candidates should be satisfied with their own electoral preserves, leaving the general seats exclusively to the care of the non-Muslims and Hindus.<sup>26</sup> As a result, pressures were built upon Muslim electorates in the general constituencies against setting up their co-religionists as candidates, and voting for them. Counteractions immediately followed suit, with Muslim petty bourgeoisie sounding hoarse in protest, demanding separate courts of justice, separate schools and separate clubs and associations. Electoral politics thus had caused separatism to become almost all pervasive by 1914, and the tension that was growing between the elites of two communities in the urban centres of the Western UP and Doab now gripped the Eastern UP and Oudh. By the authorities' own admission, elections in various municipalities were clearly being decided 'to a larger extent than previously, on the question of religion [religious community]'.<sup>27</sup> It was natural in such circumstances for the Muslim elite, with the feather of separate council electorate already in its cap, to bid vociferously for the introduction of separate, and

<sup>25</sup> Minto to Morley, 28 May 1906, Minto Papers, cited in Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. III (New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, 1972), 366.

<sup>26</sup> The issues of the pro-Congress English daily, *Leader*, often expressed such views between October 1909 and April 1912.

<sup>27</sup> Chief Secretary, Government of UP to Secretary, Government of India, Education Department, 4 September 1912, Home Education, Municipal A, 22–31 April 1914, National Archives of India.

even as high as 'equal' representation in the UP municipal boards for safeguarding the community's security of local interests.

The issue was raised prominently in the Legislative Council in July 1915 when the UP government brought a Bill for effecting changes in the provinces' municipal self-government, such as the removal of official influence from the boards, and the separation of their executive and deliberative functions. Although the Bill did not say much about elections, the Muslim council members were determined to win their demands for separate and equal representation, leaving the non-Muslim and Hindu members to respond, either by opposition or through compromise. Political situation in the meantime, between 1909 and 1915, had significantly changed in the country as a whole, as well as in UP. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 raised the prospect of further constitutional concessions in India—substantially more than what the Councils Act of 1909 grudgingly acceded—in return for its wholehearted support to the British war efforts. The Theosophist leader, Annie Besant, had already contended in 1914 that a substantial measure of self-governance in India, on the line of the Home Rule that the Irish agitated for, was essential for a mutually beneficial Indo-British relationship. The war also profoundly disturbed the Muslim mind in India when Turkey was caught in November 1914 in its vortex as an opponent of Britain, endangering the safety of the Holy Places in Arabia (Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, the Holy Shrines, Najaf, Kerbella, Sumerra, Kaziman and Baghdad) under the jurisdiction of the Khalifa (the Turkish Sultan). The Muslim elite nevertheless did not waver in loyally supporting the British in the war, but the politically more advanced among its members, the 'young', expected—as the nationalists and Hindu elitists did—a certain constitutional reward in return. Disenchanted by the complete dependence of the 'old' on the Raj, they initially did not either command the organisation of the AIML or gained much from the 1909 Councils Act. The 'old'—the combination of landlords, veteran lawyers and retired government officials—captured most of the Muslim seats in the UP Legislative Council between 1909 and 1912, and still continued to dominate the AIML proceedings, despite the emerging strength of the 'young'. Mohamed Ali had already provided the 'young' with a freshness of approach towards their community's concerns, and a touch of agitational politics vis-à-vis the government through his famous 'Comrade' and 'Hamdard'. Both he and his brother, Shaukar Ali, were interned by the authorities for agitational pan-Islamic writings from 1915 to 1919. Taking the cue from him, what the 'young' required were new allies within the community to corner the 'old', and outside it to face the government. Their agitation for further constitutional reforms to back up the Muslim petty bourgeois causes led them to a course of rapprochement with the nationalist Congress. Simultaneously, their highlighting the need for protecting Muslim interests in the Islamic countries, and taking recourse to pan-Islamism, impressed the Ulama, or the Islamic traditionalists (belonging to such varied schools as Deoband, Bareilly, Firangi Mahal and Shia Majtahids) who enjoyed considerable influence at the base of Muslim society.

The 'young' or the 'new' (*nai raushni*)<sup>28</sup> rapidly grew in stature, and even before the commencement of the war they captured the AIML in its Lucknow session in March 1913. Overtures for an understanding with the Congress began in May 1913 when the AIML Secretary Wazir Hasan proposed a joint Hindu–Muslim Conference,<sup>29</sup> following the Congress recognition of the expediency of communal representation for Muslims.<sup>30</sup> The AIML's announcement in February 1915 of its intention to prepare a schedule of political demands after the war was succeeded first by the revelation of Gokhale's testament in favour of provincial autonomy, and then by the Muslim League's participation in the founding of the Home Rule League in Bombay in December 1915, as well as by its resolution at the Bombay session held concurrently for forming a reform scheme in consultation, if necessary, with other communities and organisations,<sup>31</sup> notably the Congress. The League–Congress coming together on the issue of constitutional progress hinged crucially upon the Congress' readiness to accommodate—not merely in words but in deeds—the Muslim elite's unflinching demand for separate electorate. By conceding the demand, the Raj in 1909 managed to nurture the League as a counter-poise to the Congress, and by doing the same the Congress in 1915–16 was in a position to rally it in the nationalist confrontation with the Raj. The Muslim legislators' anxiety for the adoption of separate Muslim electorate in the UP Municipalities Bill (July 1915) provided the nationalist council members with the rare opportunity to demonstrate by concrete action their accommodating spirit. This they (led by the Kashmiri Brahmin trio—Tej Bahadur Sparu, Jagat Narain Mulla and Motilal Nehru) did in March 1916, first by agreeing to concede the separate Muslim electorate for the municipal boards, and soon thereafter by detailing—at the instance of Syed Riza Ali, a member of the 'young' in the council—the proportion of seats in each board, for example, no additional seat in those board areas where the minorities constituted 40 per cent of the population, 40 per cent of seats in those where they formed 25 to 40 per cent of population and an equal percentage of seats plus one-third in those where they were under 25 per cent.<sup>32</sup> The compromise over separate electorate was never easy, and the 'young' were accused of getting little out of it (far less than the expected 'equal' Muslim representation) by the 'old' council members like Syed Abdur Rauf, and the nationalists faced the charge of giving too much away in it (much more than the population ratio of Muslims warranted) by the Hindu council members like Brijnandan Prasad.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalist Conscience: M.A. Ansari, Congress and the Raj* (Delhi: Manohar, 1987), 33.

<sup>29</sup> Wazir Hasan to Secretary, the UP Congress Committee, 1 May 1913, published in the *Leader*, 18 May 1913.

<sup>30</sup> Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Indian National Congress Session held at Bankipur, 26–28 December 1912.

<sup>31</sup> Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, 245.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, 'Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism', 114–15.

<sup>33</sup> Proceedings of the United Provinces' Legislative Council, 1916, Allahabad, 1917, 167 and 229.



The backlash to the compromise was particularly virulent among the staunch Hindus who disliked the Congress's appreciation of the Muslim cause, felt alienated from its secular ideology and had already created in 1915 a parallel organisation of the All-India Hindu Sabha. The Sabha's leaders like Lala Sukhbir Sinha and Bhagwan Das launched an agitation against the provision of separate electorate in the Municipalities Act with the support of C. Y. Chintamani and Madan Mohan Malviya, through writings in the *Leader*, organising meetings in the districts, urging the Hindu members to resign from their boards in protest and convening a provincial Hindu conference in Benares (August 1916) to denounce the measure.<sup>34</sup> The Hindu agitation did seriously disturb the nationalist compromisers, and the Kashmiri Brahmin trio apparently felt jittery for the moment, but it could not force them to give up their sacrificing the local interests at the altar of the national requisites, and mobilising the Muslim petty bourgeoisie in line with all other similar elements. Notes continued to be exchanged between the Congress and the League on the prospects of Home Rule, the possibility of tangible responsible government and the immediacy of countrywide Muslim–Hindu accord on the mode of the UP Municipalities Act. A Joint Reform Committee came promptly into existence for putting together the common constitutional demands of both the Congress and the League, and in the course of its discussions the committee accepted separate representation of Muslims in legislative councils, provided they had no vote in the general constituencies. It also discussed the proportion of representation in all the provincial councils and decided—so far as UP was concerned—on the mutually bargained figure of 30 per cent Muslim representation (more than the Hindu leaders wished to concede, that is, 25 per cent, and less than the Muslim Leaguers insisted upon having, that is, 33.5 per cent).<sup>35</sup> The understanding thus reached was ratified at the annual sessions of both the Congress and the League held in Lucknow in December 1916. This 'Lucknow Pact' of 1916 symbolised a rare mutuality in the subcontinental society, following about fifty years of ceaseless elitist bickerings, and it seemed to have shown a glimpse of a shared Indian future ahead. Whether such hopeful enactment would prosper or flounder depended largely on two major elite performers—Hindus and Muslims, at least on the more forward-looking among them—who after eight years from 1909 did not quite agree to perform in the manner the Raj wished them to do.

Constitutional politics during the latter part of the war seemed suddenly to be losing the limelight on the Indian political scene to the emergent and vibrant popular politics. The change was apparent from the functioning of Gandhiji, who was ready to join any fray for resisting the local injustices, be it the case of indigo peasants in Champaran (1917), of textile workers in Ahmedabad (1918) or of the peasant proprietors in Kheda (1918) and bring them sharply to national focus.

<sup>34</sup> Resolution 1 of the Hindu Conference at Benares, 20 August 1916, Home Municipal A, 3–4 March 1917, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims*, 254.



His style of popularising politics was in marked contrast with the hitherto elitistic concerns of the nationalist Congress and the Home Rule League. The ‘young’ Muslim League leaders at this point were also showing some latent tendencies towards popularisation of their brand of politics vis-à-vis that of the ‘old’. Their eagerness from May 1917 for launching a popular campaign to secure the release of Mohamed Ali and other Muslim internees was a pointer in this direction, and Gandhiji had no hesitation in 1918 in supporting them on this issue. The ‘young’, who shared the overall Muslim alarm over the fate of Turkey and the Khilafat in the war, were also anxious for cashing in the religious populism of the Ulama on the subject. Like the Congress, they too, found the initial Montagu–Chelmsford report on constitutional reforms (April 1918) to be inadequate and unacceptable, and in the Delhi Muslim League session of December 1918 they gathered the Ulama as much for strengthening the Khilafat cause as for sidelining—with their support—the reform proposals, and seeing the ‘old’ practically off from the organisation. Meanwhile, the Turkish reverses in the war in October 1918 and the occupation of Constantinople by the Allied armies heightened the tension in the Muslim mind over the fate of the Khalifa and the security of the Holy Places. The alliance between the ‘young’ (represented by such leading personalities like Dr M.A. Ansari and Hakim Ajmal Khan)<sup>36</sup> and the Ulama (represented by such prominent among them as Abdul Bari and Abdul Majid Badauni) worked up this tension so effectively with Gandhiji’s backing (who felt everybody in India, including the authorities, should never fail to appreciate the Muslim religious sensibilities) that by the latter half of 1919 the Khilafat issue overshadowed the constitutional reforms in the Muslim eyes, and a newly formed All-India Central Khilafat Committee (September 1919) eclipsed the All-India Muslim League.

Coinciding with the twists and turns of Muslim circumstances, the nationalist politics had also been undergoing decisive changes at the beginning of 1919 when Gandhiji stormed into the all-India political scenario through the Rowlatt Bills agitation—an imaginative non-violent, direct mass action for protesting against an unjust and oppressive measure that was being passed in the Imperial Legislative Council. The popular agitation was so uproarious that it erupted in violence in Gujarat, and somewhat more seriously so in Punjab. Although Gandhiji called off the agitation in April 1919 for averting further violence, the authorities’ use of unbridled force in retaliation caused havoc in Punjab, and their atrocities committed on the people of Punjab reached the climax in the Jalianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar on 13 April 1919. To the agony of Punjab was now being added the cold-shouldering of the Khilafat—against which the All-India Central Khilafat Committee observed a ‘Khilafat Day’ of protest on 17 October 1919. Since the dismemberment of Turkey seemed imminent, the Khilafatists met in a conference

<sup>36</sup> Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalist Conscience: M.A. Ansari, Congress and the Raj* (Delhi: Manohar, 1987), 54, and Z.A. Nizami, *Hakim Ajmal Khan* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, 1988), 81.

in Delhi on 23 November to decide upon the form of a nationwide protest on the issue and adopted—wholly at Gandhiji's instance—a programme of boycott of British goods, as well as non-cooperation with the Raj, if the Muslim sentiments were not respected. Far from respecting, these were comprehensively rebuffed on 14 May 1920 in the publication of the treaty terms the Allies had resolved to impose on Turkey—by stripping it of all territories, except Constantinople and some predominantly Turkish-populated areas, sharing out its Ottoman empire among Britain, France, Greece and Italy, reducing drastically the forces under its command, and taking out the Holy Places from its jurisdiction and placing them with the Arabs under the Allies' protection. The arrangements were to be formalised in a treaty scheduled for signing at Sevres in August 1920, brushing aside the assurances that the British Premiers, Asquith and Lloyd George, and the British Viceroy, Hardinge, had given off and on as to the Khalifa's supervision of the Holy Places, the integrity of Turkish dominions and the independence of Muslim territories.<sup>37</sup> To Gandhiji all this constituted, so far as the Indian Muslims were concerned, a flagrant breach of faith—no less unjust than his discovery, following the Congress enquiry into the Punjab disturbances, of the 'insufferable wrong' done to the Indian people. The Khilafat and Punjab 'wrongs' so convinced Gandhiji of the dishonesty, unscrupulousness and tyranny of the British rulers in July 1920 that he could 'no longer retain affection for a Government so evilly manned now-a-days',<sup>38</sup> and prepared animatedly for a massive anti-imperialist showdown.

In the latter half of 1920, a tumultuous mass mobilisation was in the offing all over the country on the lines of non-violent non-cooperation for the attainment of 'Swaraj' for all Indians. Piloted by Gandhiji, and worked out by the Khilafatists and nationalists of different hues, the movement was to draw its strength from the support of the people belonging to various clusters of Indian society, especially the Hindu and Muslim communities. Thus the joint front that it apparently was going to throw up by pushing inter-communal squabbles into the backstage, and the popular character that it was going to assume by casting aside elitism from political conduct, the movement seemed dramatically to be presenting—at least at that point of time—the most congenial condition for Indian nationalism to prosper—the rosier prospect for unity of the Indian people, the United Provinces' people included, in a significant way. It was the United Provinces where a staunch Hindu elite faced a strong Muslim elite, carried on their respective factional fights over educational facility, government employment and professional outlet; battled for supremacy in municipal boards and membership in the legislative council; engendered separatism in matters of representation and electorate; and mutually

<sup>37</sup> Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. III (New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, 1972), 492.

<sup>38</sup> D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, 1916), 316.

distanced themselves in such a manner as if they could not tolerate each other's company. All these contrarious and implicitly divisive proceedings for the last forty years were presided over continually by the Raj with the aid of its apologists, some time patting one group at the back, and at another time nodding pointedly to the other. But it could not all be acrimony in a long-standing pluralist society where its multiple segments had learnt through experiences—pleasant and unpleasant—to live and let live. The spirit of reciprocal accommodation that survived among the common people was also capable of influencing some elitist behaviours. The nationalists of the Congress, and the 'young' in the Muslim League represented this spirit, first in the compromise over the municipal electorates issue for the UP, and then in arriving at the Lucknow Pact for all the provinces—and both for presenting a joint front to the Raj to obtain an instalment of Home Rule for the entire nation. An Indian Home Rule, or some substantial constitutional advancement for India—the theme that absorbed all the attention of the elitist and petty bourgeois politicians so far—was marginalised towards the end of the war period by the 'young's' and the Ulama's raising of the Khilafat issue, and more decisively by Gandhiji's rise in nationalist politics. Constitutionalism all of a sudden appeared to have lost its relevance before the impending upsurge against a tyrannical, treacherous and diabolical Raj. The tumult, it was passionately felt, would bring a united India on its victorious march towards self-determination—to 'Swaraj within one year'.<sup>39</sup> Did it happen the way most Indians then felt convinced that it should? And if it had taken place differently in post-1920 India, then how was it, and why?

One can, of course, find out the answers in a different account of the subsequent developments, but '[t]hat's another story, Watson'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Young India*, 22 September 1920.

<sup>40</sup> Words of Sherlock Holmes, the legendary creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.