

Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, Simla Conference (June 1945) and its Impact upon the North-West Frontier Province Politics

Dr. Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah

A commonly held view about the Frontier Muslim League is that of all the political organizations in the NWFP, it was the last one to make a start. Some others are of the opinion that by the time it emerged on the political scene of the province, the struggle for freedom was almost over and it reaped the harvest sowed by others. It is true that the League's rise in the Frontier is a late phenomenon, but the truth is that it was the first Muslim organization that had emerged as early as 1912. But despite being a Muslim majority province, the NWFP people chose to support the Indian National Congress instead of the Muslim League. Therefore, until 1945, there was no grass root support for the Muslim League as it was regarded a 'drawing room organization' of few influential Khans. However, M. A. Jinnah's firm stand at the Simla Conference (June 1945) on issues pertaining the Muslim India changed the minds of a sizable number of the Frontier Muslims and they began to join the Muslim League, making it an organization of the masses struggling for the achievement of Pakistan. In the following pages an effort has been made to analyse and elaborate the impact of Jinnah's stand taken at Simla in June 1945 and its impact upon the politics of the Frontier province.

The second decade of the twentieth century was of immense importance to the people of the NWFP. It provided great opportunities to the Frontier Muslims to share the vicissitudes of the Muslim world and to forge unity with their co-religionists in the rest of the country for the cause of pan-Islam. Events in Turkey leading to its disintegration, occupation of Tripoli (1911) the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and the Russian advances in the northern Persia (1913) were some of the major apprehensions of the Frontier Muslims who regarded these developments as a 'Christian conspiracy against Islam'. Alarmed at these developments, the young educated Peshawaris decided to start a branch of Muslim League in the Frontier. In 1912 they established the League in Peshawar with the following as the office bearers: Mian Abdul Aziz (president), Qazi Abdul Wali (vice president), Sayyid Ali Abbas Bokhari (general secretary), Qazi Mir Ahmad (joint secretary), and, Hakim Mohammad Amin (treasurer).¹ Formal contact between Bokhari and Wazir Hasan, general secretary of AIML, was established in 1914. As the anti-Turkish feelings increased in Europe, this group became more vociferous in their hatred of the British imperialism in the region. During the war years the British could not tolerate these 'extremists' in a sensitive area like the NWFP. The government decided to ban the activities of these pan-Islamists. Therefore the Muslim League was suppressed at its infancy. After banning the organization, the government intended to arrest its organizers but Bokhari escaped to Afghanistan where he participated in the anti-British activities and was last seen fighting against the British forces in Waziristan. Qazi Wali was jailed during the war period. After his release he also went to Afghanistan where he was welcomed by Amir Habibullah Khan, the ruler of Afghanistan. Mian Abdul Aziz left for Bombay and was not heard of until 1933 when he presided the joint session of Muslim League. And, Qazi Mir Ahmad was forced to abandon politics.²

¹ Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Muslim League in N.W.F.P* (Karachi, Royal Book Company, 1992), p. 20.

² *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.

Another factor that impeded the rise of the Muslim League in the Frontier was the popularity of the Khudai Khidmatgars, a social-reform movement led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan.³ Though the NWFP was an overwhelmingly Muslim majority province with 93 percent of the population being Muslims,⁴ there was no fear of 'Islam in danger' in the province that could be exploited to mobilize the Muslim public opinion. After the tragic firing incident of the Qissa Khwani Bazaar on 23 April 1930 that resulted in the killing of more than two hundred people in one day, the Khudai Khidmatgars affiliated their organization with the Indian National Congress that lasted until the partition in 1947.⁵ In October 1936 when Jinnah, the new president of the Muslim League, toured the province to campaign for the League in connection with the forthcoming elections, he met with little success. He remained at Peshawar for a week and tried to re-organize the League but Ghaffar Khan's opposition and rivalry among local Muslims contesting for power became major hindrances.⁶ Not even a single candidate contested the elections on the Muslim League ticket. It was not until 1937 that the resurgence of Muslim League in the NWFP was witnessed. A branch of the Muslim League was established in Nowshera during May of that year, followed by branches in Abbottabad, Peshawar, Hazara, Mardan, and Bannu during September–December and at Kohat in March 1938.⁷ Yet, during 1937-1939, the NWFP remained under a Congress ministry with Dr. Khan Sahib, the elder brother of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, as the Chief Minister. The Khan Sahib ministry took several steps to curtail the privileges of the big khans and nawabs. This gave a lease of life to the Muslim League.

During his life time, Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qaiyum Khan had been the main rallying-point for the Muslims of the province. After his death, Sardar Aurangzeb Khan, who had been persuaded to join the League,⁸ became the champion of the landed elite. As a result, the big khans flocked to the newly organized Frontier Muslim League, which they had earlier dismissed as an organization of the 'few un-influential people'.⁹ 'The old-fashioned Khans', reported Sir George Cunningham (governor of the NWFP), 'who had hardly heard the name of the League six months ago, now refer to it freely as an ordinary topic of conversation...'.¹⁰ Initially, they had joined the Muslim League was not because of their sympathy with its ideology and party programme but because the League was the only political platform which could protect them from the Congress onslaught in the province. The presence of the khans and other wealthy elements in the League in such great numbers, who frequently allowed the use of their cars for travelling purposes, earned for the organization the title of the 'Motor League'¹¹ or 'the drawing room

³ For details of Khudai Khidmatgar movement see Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province 1937-1947* (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 22-29.

⁴ *Census of India, 1921, Vol. XIV, North-West Frontier Province* (Peshawar, 1922), p.11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

⁷ Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, pp. 100-101.

⁸ Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, pp. 100-101.

⁹ CID Diaries, 1 November 1937, quoted in Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 102.

¹⁰ Governor's Report, 23 October 1937 quoted in *ibid.*, p. 103.

¹¹ Mian Ziaud Din, *The Memoirs of a Pakistani Diplomat* (Peshawar, University Book Agency, 1976), p. 39.

organization' of some important Muslims.¹² However, they had a positive impact on the organization as well. These khans brought with them a core group of personal retainers and traditional followers who proved a real source of power to the Frontier Muslim League.¹³ Eventually, this resulted in providing the Muslim League an opportunity to contest by-elections in spring 1938 and even win three of the four contested seats.¹⁴ On the outbreak of Second World War in September 1939, the Congress ministries in seven out of eleven provinces in British India resigned as a protest.¹⁵ On 7 November 1939, like the other Congress ministries, Dr. Khan Sahib's Congress ministry in the NWFP also resigned. Seeing no prospects for the formation of an alternative ministry, at least for the time being, Cunningham prorogued the legislative assembly indefinitely and proclaimed the Governors' Rule in the NWFP.¹⁶

During the War period an important feature of the British policy was to install as many non-Congress ministries in the provinces as possible to show to the outside world that despite the Congress non-co-operation the public opinion in India was still on their side and generously contributed to the Allied war efforts. In the NWFP, too, after hectic efforts a League ministry was installed in the province under Sardar Aurangzeb Khan. He remained in power for about two years but his mal practices, including nepotism and misuse of official clout, gave a bad name to the Muslim League.¹⁷ No wonder, the League was termed as an 'organization with sound principles in unworthy hands'. Indeed it was argued that in the Frontier the League had no Jinnah and not even the lesser leaders like Khaliqzaman, Nawab Ismail or Fazlul Haq at its back. Moreover, there was no primary Leaguers outside the towns and 'every district League is a packed body, controlled by a coterie of people who have never seen a jail, except perhaps as nominated visitors, and who have no love lost with the masses....'¹⁸ Elaborating the provincial League's weaknesses in the NWFP, a Leaguer, commented:

Ever since that master pilot Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah came to the helm of League, the Muslim League has been increasing in popularity and gaining the confidence of the great Muslim masses of this vast sub-continent. By his selfless devotion to its cause, his sincere and bold leadership and political sagacity, the Quaid-i-Azam has made this once almost derelict body into the one great national organization of Indian Muslims ...

It is one of the fundamental weaknesses of the League in the Frontier that its organization lacks mass workers who would spread over the entire countryside, cultivate intimate contact with the masses and kindle a new fire in their hearts.

Like an army which consists of all officers and no soldiers, our organization at present has all leaders and no field workers. Another trouble is that some of our leaders are thoroughly disturbed by the masses for their past association by even though they might have really cast them off by now. But things being what they are, it is in the best interest of the Mussalmans that these gentlemen should voluntarily become back-benchers and hand over responsibility to the younger and more popular element. Only in this

¹² Allah Bakhsh Yusufi, *Sarhad aur Jiddo Jihad-i Azadi* (Urdu) (Karachi, Nafees Academy, 1989), pp. 715-716.

¹³ S. A. Rittenberg, 'The Independence Movement in India's North-West Frontier Province, 1901-1947' (Columbia University, 1977), pp. 259-260.

¹⁴ Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, pp. 113-114.

¹⁵ Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography* (New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1994), p. 497.

¹⁶ Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, pp. 81-82.

¹⁷ For details see Shah, *Muslim League in NWFP*, pp. 64-71.

¹⁸ 'A Frontier Man's Diary', *Khyber Mail*, Peshawar, 20 July 1941.

way can sincere and devoted field workers be attracted to the League fold and public confidence in the League leadership created.¹⁹

Simla Conference (June 1945)

The year 1945 saw some significant changes in the political scenario at an all-India level. As the war situation improved, the British government found itself compelled by the world public opinion, particularly the USA, to do something positive regarding the solution of the Indian political problem. In March 1945, Lord Wavell, the viceroy of India, went to London to discuss with the secretary of state for India the next step in this particular connection.²⁰ There, it was decided to convene a Round Table Conference of the Indian political leaders to create a favourable political atmosphere.²¹ On 15 June, all the members of Congress working committee, who were kept in detention since the 'Quit India' movement, were released as a gesture of good will.²² The deliberations at Simla started on 25 June 1945 and were attended by twenty-one delegates, including the presidents of both the Congress and the Muslim League, the representatives of the Scheduled Castes, the Sikhs and the premiers and ex-premiers of the British Indian provinces.²³ The first day was uneventful. By the second day the Conference had agreed on certain main principles, including the representation for minorities, whole-hearted support for the war effort and continuance of the reconstituted executive council under the Government of India Act till the end of the war.²⁴ Differences, however, arose between the Congress and the League over the composition of the viceroy's executive council.²⁵ Jinnah took the stand that the Congress should include only Hindu members in

¹⁹ A Leaguer, 'Reconstructing the League in NWFP', *Khyber Mail*, 25 September 1942.

²⁰ War Cabinet India Committee, 1 (45) 13th Meeting, 26 March 1945, Nicholas Mansergh, (ed.), *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942-7*, vol. V (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976), pp. 733-746.

²¹ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India, 26 March 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 746-748.

²² V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Chennai, Orient Longman Limited, 1997), p. 188.

²³ In addition to Lord Wavell as Chairman, the delegates of the Simla Conference included the following: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Bhulabhai Desai, P. N. Bannerjee, Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, Hossain Imam, M. A. Jinnah, Dr. Khan Sahib, B. G. Kher, Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, Govindlal Shivilal Motilal, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, The Maharaja of Parlakimedi, C. Rajagopalachari, Sir Henry Richardson, Muhammad Saadullah, N. Shiva Raj, Ravi Shankar Shukla, Sri Krishna Sinha and Master Tara Singh. Sir Evan Jenkins and V. P. Menon served as the Secretaries to the Conference. M. K. Gandhi did not attend the Conference as a delegate but remained in Simla for the period of the Conference. *Transfer of Power*, vol. V, pp. xxxii and Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, p. 191.

²⁴ Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta, Orient Longmans Private Ltd., 1959), pp. 109-110.

²⁵ It was proposed by the British Government that the Viceroy's Executive Council 'should be reconstituted and that the Viceroy should in future make his selection for nomination to the Crown for appointment to his Executive from amongst leaders of Indian political life at the Centre and in the Provinces, in proportions which would give a balanced representation of the main communities, including equal proportions of Moslems and Caste Hindus'. Statement of Policy of HMG. made by the Secretary of State for India, 14 June 1945, *Transfer of Power*, vol. V, p. 1120. It further stated that 'In order to pursue this object, the Viceroy will call into conference a number of leading Indian politicians who are the heads of the most important parties or who have had recent experience as Prime Ministers of Provinces, together with a few others of special experience and authority. The Viceroy intends to put before this conference the proposal that the Executive Council should be reconstituted as above stated and to invite from the members of the conference a list of names. Out of these he would hope to be able to choose the future members whom he would recommend for appointment by His Majesty to the Viceroy's Council, although the responsibility for

its quota to the executive council²⁶ and leave the nomination of Muslim members to Muslim League.²⁷ Jinnah's stand had the full support of League working committee²⁸ but Wavell was unable to give a guarantee of its acceptance.²⁹

The Congress rejected Jinnah's demand as it could not accept the League as the sole representative body of the Indian Muslims.³⁰ Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress president refuted Jinnah and cited the examples of the Muslim-majority areas like the Frontier, Bengal, the Punjab, and Assam where non-League ministries were in power. He insisted that the Congress had the right to nominate any Indian it liked regardless of 'whether he was a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, a Parsee or a Sikh'.³¹ Moreover, the Congress demanded complete independence for India whereas the Muslim League was unwilling to compromise the demand for Pakistan. For Jinnah, independence at that stage was akin to shelving the Pakistan issue for an indefinite period 'whereas the Congress will have secured under this arrangement what they want, namely, a clear road for their advance towards securing Hindu national independence for India....'³² Thus, the deliberations at Simla ended in failure, marking a 'watershed' in Indian political history.

Support to Jinnah from the NWFP

The NWFP intelligentsia had been watching the events at Simla with interest but the outcome was not encouraging. However, it provided a good chance to the provincial League to portray itself as the sole champion of Muslim rights on an all-India level. The *Khyber Mail*, a local newspaper, reported that over one thousand telegrams supporting Jinnah's stand had been sent to Simla from the NWFP.³³ Sardar Mohammad Aurangzeb Khan, the former League Premier, gleefully informed Jinnah that 'the stand that we took under your leadership has galvanised Muslim India and has definitely put Muslim India [*sic* for League] on a wave of popularity. [The] NWFP has taken to League work seriously. Mardan has broken the ice. Hazara is also forging ahead...'.³⁴ On 15 July, a

the recommendations must of course continue to rest with him, and his freedom of choice therefore remains unrestricted'. See *ibid.*

²⁶ Lord Wavell to L. S. Amery, 25 June 1945, *Transfer of Power*, vol. V, p. 1153.

²⁷ Jinnah's press statement, 29 June 1945, in Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *The Nation's Voice: Towards the Popular Verdict* vol. IV, (Karachi, Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 2000), pp. 145-150.

²⁸ ²⁸: M. A. Jinnah to Lord V. Wavell, 7 July 1945, Z. H. Zaidi (ed.), *Jinnah Papers* vol. XI, (Islamabad, Quaid-i-Azam Papers Project, 2005), p. 614.

²⁹ Lord Wavell to M. A. Jinnah, 9 July 1945, Zaidi (ed.), *Jinnah Papers*, pp. 615-616.

³⁰ On 29 June Wavell informed Amery regarding Jinnah that he 'is difficult and neither Congress nor League will at present give ground'. Lord Wavell to S. Amery, 29 June 1945, *Transfer of Power*, vol. V, p. 1174.

³¹ Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, p. 110. V. P. Menon, one of the Secretaries of the Conference, informed that at one point Jinnah remarked that the Congress represented only Hindus. At this Dr Khan Sahib, the NWFP Premier, objected vehemently and the Viceroy immediately dispelled the negative impression created by Jinnah's remarks and observed that the 'Congress evidently represented its members', and Jinnah said that he accepted it. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, p. 196.

³² Jinnah's press conference at Simla, 14 July 1945, in Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *The Nation's Voice*, IV, p. 179. Lord Wavell seemed unhappy over Jinnah's remarks because he informed the Secretary of State for India that 'Jinnah's attitude is still uncertain—he has made uncompromising statements to a Press Conference and to individual journalists'. Wavell to Amery, 1 July 1945, *Transfer of Power*, vol. V, p. 1182.

³³ *Khyber Mail*, Peshawar, 13 July 1945.

³⁴ Sardar M. Aurangzeb Khan to M. A. Jinnah, 11 August 1945, Zaidi (ed.), *Jinnah Papers*, XII, p. 23.

large meeting was held in the Municipal Garden, Abbottabad. Maqbul-ur-Rehman, a local League leader presided. The following resolution was moved at this occasion.

This representative gathering of the Musalmans of the Hazara District heartily congratulates Mr. Jinnah for his bold and firm determination which he had shown at the Simla Conference and assures him that the Musalmans of the N.W.F.P. are solidly at his back and will leave no stone unturned for the achievement of Pakistan.³⁵

The same source reported another meeting of Muslim League held on 18 July in Abbottabad on the same topic. The main speakers included a local League leader Qazi Asadal Haq, Advocate, Malik Barkat Ali, the veteran Leaguer from Lahore and Khushal Khan Jadoon, another local firebrand of Muslim League. On this occasion, fifteen Congress workers announced that they were leaving Congress to join the League.³⁶ Mohammad Zaman Advocate from Charsadda appreciated Jinnah's 'memorable stand' at Simla and remarked that the League, which used to be a dead political body in the NWFP was rising again.

... the Simla Conference [and] the memorable stand taken by the Qaidi Azam [*sic*] ... [have] opened the eyes of the Pathans of this province. It worked as a miracle and changed the political philosophy of the Pathans. The worthy Qaidi Azam [*sic*] by his ability, foresight and himalayan firmness revealed the true nature of the Hindu mind...'.³⁷

The change was definitely there and is apparent from the report of Sir George Cunningham, governor of the NWFP, who submitted to Lord Wavell that ever since the failure of the talks at Simla, the educated Muslims in the Frontier were becoming anti-Hindus and pro-Muslim League.

I find that the failure of the Simla Conference has made people think and talk more about the Pakistan issue. What I heard tends to confirm my earlier impression that not many people here believe in Pakistan in the sense of dismemberment from the rest of India. Even professional Muslim Leaguer's like Aurangzeb Khan, my late Chief Minister have expressed his views to me, and one went so far as to say that it is the time that the young Muslim element took the matter into their hands and defined what they really believe is the essence of Pakistan—safeguarding of Muslim interests at the Centre, and no complete severance...³⁸

Immediately after the failure of the talks at Simla, a significant number of 'political heavy-weights' in the NWFP joined the Muslim League. Cunningham informed Wavell again that

A good many defections from Congress to the Muslim League have been reported in the last few weeks. They are symptomatic of the steadily increasing antipathy between the more highly educated Muslims and Hindu.³⁹

³⁵ C.I.D Diary dated 21 July 1945 on Muslim League Hazara, File No. 796, Bundle No. 49, p. 181, Special Branch Peshawar, NWFP Provincial Archives, Peshawar.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Mohammad Zaman Advocate to M. A. Jinnah, 15 August 1945, NWFP-I, pp. 53-53(a), Shamsal Hasan Private Collections, Karachi.

³⁸ Governor's Report No. 11, 9 August 1945, L/P&J/5/222 IOL, 131, National Documentation Centre, Cabinet Division, Islamabad.

³⁹ Cunningham to Wavell, 9 October 1945, *Transfer of Power*, VI, p. 318.

Prominent amongst those who deserted the Congress and joined the League was Abdul Qaiyum Khan, former deputy leader of the Congress in the central legislative assembly. In a letter dated 16 August 1945, he told Jinnah that 'I have decided to join the Moslem League. I believe that the stand taken by you is absolutely correct & that any Moslem who opposes you is betraying the cause of Islam in India'.⁴⁰ Jinnah appreciated his decision of joining the League and hoped that other Congress Muslims would follow suit because 'there is no room [or] place left [for] any honest Muslim to support it after [the] Simla Conference'.⁴¹ Other prominent Muslims who joined the League included Arbab Abdul Ghafoor, former Congress MLA, Ghulam Mohammad Khan Lundkhwarh, ex-president of the Frontier provincial Congress committee, Rab Nawaz Khan, the one time *salar* of the Khudai Khidmatgars, and Mohammad Abbas Khan, former industries minister in first Congress ministry. A number of other noteworthy persons of the province also started joining Muslim League. The most prominent among them was Amin-ul-Hasanat, the Pir of Manki Sharif, who joined the League with a large number of his disciples. These new entrants brought with them not only a large number of their followers but strengthened the League with their experience and organizational skill to combat the Congress and help achieve of Pakistan.

The last two years before the partition of India were crucial for the NWFP. The provincial Congress tried to prove that the Muslims of the Frontier were struggling against British imperialism under its banner. On the other hand, the Muslim League struggled to prove that the influence of the Congress had waned and that the Frontier Muslims were flocking under its banner for the achievement of Pakistan. Although these details are not part of our present discussion, no one can deny that the bold stand taken by Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah at the Simla Conference changed the outlook of the Frontier Muslims and they began to give priority to the Pakistan demand as in other provinces of India. They now considered themselves as part of the larger Muslim community of South Asia and were convinced of the genuineness of the demand of Pakistan.

⁴⁰ Abdul Qaiyum to M. A. Jinnah, 16 August 1945, NWFP II, SHC, p. 91.

⁴¹ M. A. Jinnah to Abdul Qaiyum, 20 August 1945, NWFP II, SHC, p. 92.