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# UNIT 31 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE MINORITIES\*

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## 31.1 INTRODUCTION

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A minority is a sociological category within the demographic profile of a country. The term usually refers to a category that is differentiated and defined by the social majority, that is, those who hold the majority of positions of social power in a society. The differentiation can be based on one or more observable human characteristics, including, for example, ethnicity, race, gender, wealth or sexual orientation. However, the minority may be based on real or assumed sense of suffering discrimination and subordination, physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart, and which are disapproved by the dominant group, and a shared sense of collective identity and common burdens. In a colonial society where power belongs to the powerful alien rulers, minority/majority distinction is based not on the real power differences among groups, but may show the differences in population size among groups as well as their relative socio-economic position within the colonial society. Prior to the British conquest, relations between regional polities and the sovereign power had never been defined wholly by religion. Despite a long history of ingeniously accepting multiple levels of sovereignty, the renegotiation of the terms for division of power at the time of independence led to the partition of the subcontinent along superficially religious lines. In this Unit, therefore, we would focus on the problem of relation with religious minorities especially Muslim religious minority with the mainstream national movement represented by the Indian National Congress.

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## 31.2 THE MAJOR HISTORIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

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A straightforward approach to the study of nationalism traces the development of nationalism from the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and culminating in the winning of independence from the British. The 'two-nation'

theory or British strategies of divide and rule is seen as the main reason behind subsequent failure of the process of nation-in-the-making and the ultimate partition. Some goes to the extent of supporting the thesis of Hindu-Muslim difference as incapable of assimilation. This view conflates religiously informed cultural identities with the notion of a coherent Muslim politics. However, like all the other communities of religion in colonial India, Muslims were split on doctrinal issues and divided by class, region as well as language. The opposing viewpoint subscribed to by Indian nationalist historians is equally untenable. They charge British colonialism of creating the historical and cultural divisions of the subcontinent and propose that cultural difference or, worse still, the religious 'communalism' was the pejorative 'other' of Indian nationalism fostered by British policies of separate electorates and selective patronage of the 'Muslim community'. C.A. Bayly, the prominent Cambridge historian locates the pre-history of communalism in the merchant corporations and the declining service gentry of urban north India during the transition to colonialism. Scholars of 'Subaltern' school emphasise the resilience of age old communal consciousness in attempting to explain failure of nationalism to unify the various classes and communities and concerned themselves with the colonial construction of communalism. However, we see that there were complexities, inconsistencies and contradictions in the relationship between the nationalist movement and the minorities whether Muslim, Sikh or Depressed Castes.

The colonial state's stated policy of neutrality based on indifference towards religion was a product of expediency, not belief. In their search for collaborators and the organisation of social control, religion also served a useful political purpose. British perceptions of Indian society as an aggregation of religious communities created a belief in the distinctiveness of various religious communities in idioms emphasising differences, not commonalities between Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Christian and Parsi. Yet British social engineering on its own cannot explain the strength of the process marking Indian attempts to deploy the categories of the colonial state to their own social and political advantage. With the limited introduction of the electoral principle in the late nineteenth century, members of the educated, propertied and privileged sections belonging to all religious denominations had an interest in promoting the politicisation of communitarian identities. Taking advantage of a rapidly growing press and publications market, those claiming to represent 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' interests projected their specifically class and regional concerns in terms of religious community interests. Such political discourses, however, were internally divided and vague and ambiguous.

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### 31.3 CONGRESS AND MUSLIM MINORITY RELATIONSHIP FROM 1885 TO 1914

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A large section of Indian Muslims from the *ashraf*, literally respectable, classes opted to stay away from the Congress which was founded in 1885. However, political boundaries were very fluid and economic class interests, regional identity and different notions of community all played a crucial role at the historical moment when the idea of an Indian nation was itself in the process of being forged, negotiated and contested. Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the most important spokesperson of the north Indian Urdu-speaking *ashraf* classes in the late nineteenth century, spearheaded a reform movement within Indian Islam. In 1875

with British support he set up the Aligarh Anglo-Muhammadian Oriental College which attracted the sons of Muslim landlords of northern India. While firmly opposing Muslim involvement in the Indian National Congress, Sayyid Ahmed spent the better part of his energies exhorting his co-religionists against cultural exclusiveness and the pest of religious narrow-mindedness. His criticisms of the Congress had less to do with the threats it posed to the religious identity of Muslims than with the cultural pretensions and different claims of the north Indian *ashraf* class. Just a year before the formation of the Congress, he had expressed his contempt for those who identified religion or community with the nation: terms like Hindu and Muslim had a religious significance, and all those living in India constituted one 'nation'. Yet sometimes he is depicted as a person who began the process of 'Muslim separatism'.

Within his own community, Sayyid Ahmed was attacked for his rational approach to Islamic religious studies and commandments by *ulema* in religious seminaries at Deoband and Farangi Mahal in Lucknow. His passionate backing of western knowledge and culture as well as allegiance to the raj annoyed many Muslims deeply fond of their community moorings and the ideal of a universal Muslim *ummah*. Disapproval of the Aligarh school received a boost from the great cleric of Islamic universalism, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, who lived in the subcontinent between 1879 and 1882. In India, Afghani tempered his loyalty to the political principles of universalism by calling for Hindu-Muslim unity against British imperialism. Sayyid Ahmad may have been the most well-known spokesman of regionally based North Indian Muslim powerful social groups, but his leadership was disputed by the very Muslim *ashraf* classes on whose behalf he made his loudest appeals. By the late 1880s Britain's imperial policies in India and new colonial conquests in the Islamic world were leading more and more Muslims to avoid the policy of non-participation in the Congress. An increasing number of Muslims from the North West Provinces began attending the annual sessions of the Congress. In 1887, Badruddin Tyabji, a Bombay based lawyer from the Bohra community, became the first Muslim president of the Congress. By 1895 the well known Islamic scholar Maulana Shibli Numani, who had in the beginning associated himself with Sayyid Ahmed Khan, was publicly opposing the policy of Muslim non-participation in the Congress. Secular nationalism was mainly territorial nationalism, based on the reference to India as a nation-state. This concept was introduced into India from Britain and France after the French Revolution and the era of 'Enlightenment' in the 18th and 19th centuries. Contrary to territorial nationalism, or rather in addition to it, the Indian nationalist movement developed nationalist variations in which a sometimes dispersed religious community was taken as a reference basis for nationalist aspirations instead of an ethnic group or a political territory with comparatively fixed boundaries of geographical settlement.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 may have provided the main drive for the orchestration of the Muslim claim to separate political representation and the establishment of the self professedly 'communal' All-India Muslim League in December 1906. But it was the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 which institutionalised what until then had been a main colonial perception of the importance of religious divisions in Indian society by granting Muslims separate electorates in representative bodies at all levels of the electoral system. It was a historic step that gave Muslims the status of an all-India political category but one effectively consigned to being an everlasting minority in any scheme of

constitutional reforms. The structural contradiction between communal electorates and the local based and region based political horizons was to have large consequences for India's regionally differentiated, economically dissimilar and ideologically divided Muslims and, by extension, for Congress's agendas of an inclusionary and secular nationalism. The common idioms of an otherwise wide-ranging discourse created the colonial Muslims as a separate and exclusive 'communal' category.

The Indian Councils Act 1909, commonly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that brought about a limited increase in the involvement of Indians in the governance of British India. John Morley, the Liberal Secretary of State for India, and the Conservative Governor-General of India, The Earl of Minto, believed that cracking down on uprising in Bengal was necessary but not sufficient for restoring stability to the British Raj after Lord Curzon's partitioning of Bengal. They believed that a dramatic step was required to put heart into loyal elements of the Indian upper classes and the growing Westernised section of the population. The Indian Councils Act of 1909 (Morley-Minto reforms) did not go any significant distance toward meeting the Indian National Congress demand for 'the system of government obtaining in Self-Governing British Colonies'.

The Act of 1909 was important for the following reasons. It effectively allowed the election of Indians to the various legislative councils in India for the first time. Previously some Indians had been appointed to legislative councils. The majorities of the councils remained British government appointments. Moreover the electorate was limited to specific classes of Indian nationals. Muslims had expressed serious concern that British type of electoral system would leave them permanently subject to Hindu majority rule. The Act of 1909 stipulated, as demanded by the Muslim leadership:

- i) that Indian Muslims be allotted reserved seats in the Municipal and District Boards, in the Provincial Councils and in the Imperial Legislature;
- ii) that the number of reserved seats be in excess of their relative population (25 percent of the Indian population); and
- iii) that only Muslims should vote for candidates for the Muslim seats ('separate electorates').

These concessions were a constant source of strife during 1909-47. British statesmen generally considered reserved seats as regrettable in that they encouraged communal extremism as Muslim candidates did not have to appeal for Hindu votes and vice versa. As further power was shifted from the British to Indian politicians in 1919, 1935 and after, Muslims were ever more determined to hold on to, and if possible expand, reserved seats and their weightage. However, The Congress repeatedly tried to eliminate reserved seats as it considered them to be undemocratic and to hinder the development of a shared Hindu-Muslim Indian national feeling. Under the system, Muslim voters (and later Sikh and Christians) were put in separate constituencies from which candidates of that particular community could stand as candidates or vote. It heightened community based mobilisation and conflicts. Since the voters were exclusively from a single religious community, the candidates could easily appeal to sectarian interests.

The Muslim political elite was opposed to revocation of the Partition of Bengal and Muslim League was moving in a more militant direction. Alienated by Britain's refusal to help Turkey in her Italian and Balkan Wars (1911-12), Hardinge's rejection of proposals for a Muslim University at Aligarh in August 1912 and the August 1913 riot in Kanpur over demolition of a platform adjoining a mosque. There was some sort of an accommodation with 'nationalist' Hindus and growing impact of pan-Islamism on the young leaders. Its leaders now included Wazir Hassan, T.A.K. Sherwani, and more radical Ali brothers (Muhammad and Shaukat) and Hasrat Mohini in U.P. and Fazlul Haq in Bengal. Papers like Muhammad Ali's Comrade (Kolkata), Abul Kalam Asad's Al-Hilal (Kolkata) and Safar Ali Khan's Samindar (Lahore) propagated pan-Islamist and anti-British ideas. The Muslim League passed a resolution in March 1913 favouring colonial self-government through constitutional means, a stated objective of the Congress Party. The stage was, thus set for a broader Hindu-Muslim political accommodation and co-operation.

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### 31.4 UNITY AT LUCKNOW

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In 1915, already there was re-entry of the 'extremist' faction into Congress and both the Congress and Muslim League, meeting simultaneously at Bombay, set up committees to draft a programme of minimum constitutional demands through mutual consultations. At Lucknow in December 1916, a common demand was raised by both parties for elected majorities in the Councils, while Hindu-Muslim differences were sought to be removed through the famous Lucknow Pact by which Congress accepted the separate electorates and an understanding was reached for distribution of seats. The Muslim League accepted under-representation in Muslim-majority areas (40% of seats in Bengal, for example), in return for over-representation in other Hindu-majority provinces like Bombay or United Provinces, where about 30% seats were assigned to them. The Pact, thus paved the way for accommodation of United Province's faction of Muslim League but there was also some resentment against the pact in Bengal despite the support of Fazlul Haq. Both Tilak and Annie Besant played important role in these negotiations. However, leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya felt that too much have been given to the Muslim League. But Tilak felt that this concession was necessary in view of common interests of different shades of political opinions within the country against the third party of the British colonial rulers. It was a controversial decision but the Congress leaders thought that it was indispensable to allay minority fears about majority domination.

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### 31.5 CONGRESS AND THE MINORITIES DURING KHILAFAT AND NON-COOPERATION

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The Khilafat issue was a significant anxiety of the Indian Muslims in the wake of the British pressure on Turkey and the resulting reduction in size as well as importance of Ottoman Empire after the First World War. The religious sentiments of Muslims in India were also intensified due to the fact that India was a colony of the British. The Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements created a very strong emotional and political appeal against the British. Gandhi used these sentiments to create a united front of Hindus and Muslims and demanded steps towards self-government in India and also protection for the religious and political institution of Khalifa. The Khilafat movement emerged among Indian Muslims

to protect the institution of Khalifa in Turkey, which was considered to be the religious and political successor of the Prophet Muhammad and hence the protector of all Muslim holy places. Turkey fought against the British and its allies during the First World War. After the War, The British removed the Khalifa from power in Turkey. The pan-Islamic feelings became intense among the Indian Muslims. However, the pan-Islamic symbols may have been used to establish a pan-Indian religious and political identity for Muslims and to bridge the communal boundaries between the nationalist leadership and Muslims. The Khilafat movement was also anti-imperialist in its nature and scope. There were several other political and economic factors that fuelled the political mobilisation in this period. Gandhi's techniques and ideas made possible the convergence of a purely secular and territorial notion of nationhood with religious issues of Muslim minority. The Khilafat leaders and Muslim elites also realised the need to garner the support of Hindus and especially Congress organisation for furthering their cause. This campaign brought about an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity. Both Hindus and Muslims demonstrated together at various places. The Khilafat leaders urged the Muslims not to kill cows for Bakr-Id festivities; Swami Sharddhanand was asked to give a speech from the pulpit of Jama Masjid in Delhi, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was given the keys of Golden Temple in Amritsar. There were hundreds of such acts of communal harmony throughout the country. The idioms and symbols used by the Khilafat leaders were entirely community-oriented and they were simply trying to get the support of the Hindus against the set of non-Muslim, i.e., the British. Even though the movement was anti-imperialist, the political language was basically Islamic and some Congress leaders were apprehensive that it would be dangerous for the Congress to use such issues for nationalist mobilisation. However, Gandhi and his group went ahead with Khilafat leaders and tried to forge Hindu-Muslim unity and mobilise people of both communities in Non-Cooperation agitation. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali toured the entire country for this joint mobilisation. However, When Gandhi withdrew the Non-Cooperation after the famous Chauri-Chaura incidents in February 1922, Ali Brothers reacted angrily to the decision of withdrawal of the movement.

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### 31.6 CONGRESS AND MINORITIES AFTER NON-COOPERATION PERIOD

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Congress considered the Indian national movement indivisible which meant that its stake to power was also indivisible. This prevented Congress leaders from coming to terms with the Muslim League in 1937 and thereafter, until it was too late for an amicable settlement. Things were made even more complicated because leaders like Nehru and Gandhi, no matter how sensibly and carefully they behaved in most cases, or how hard they tried to unite all Indians and all religions on a common platform against colonialism, could not shed the religious cloth of their nationalist aspirations entirely. Gandhi, on a unitarian note, incorporated Hinduist values like non-violence and the reverence of the *chakra* (wheel) into the nationalist movement which helped it spread out among the masses, but which also gave political leaders of religious movements a pretext for confrontation. Gandhi argued that the practice of religious pilgrimage which involved the visiting of sacred centres in various parts of India, linked people from many regions into a cultural unity: "We were one nation before [the British] came to India." Indian civilisation, culture and nationhood all predated the British arrival. He argued that "India . . . has nothing to learn from anybody else. India did not cease to be

one nation because different religious groups or foreigners lived in it". He maintained that India "must have a faculty for assimilation." He supported the introduction of Hindi in either Persian or *Devanagari* characters as a compulsory medium of instruction with optional English courses all over India.

The gulf between Congress and the minorities especially the Muslims widened more after the withdrawal of Non-Cooperation movement. Older communally-minded organisations were revived after the movement and some new ones came into existence. *Tanzeem* and *Tabligh* movements gained ground among the Muslims in the same way as the *Sangathan* and *Shuddhi* had grown among the Hindus. It was period when leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malaviya and N. C. Kelkar joined the Hindu Mahasabha and argued for Hindu unity and solidarity. Khilafat leaders Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali accused the Congress of trying to establish a Hindu Government and Hindu domination in the polity. There were communal riots too in many parts of the country during 1923-24. Congress tried to deal with this situation by attempt to unify two communities through unity of top leaders. This 'unity from above' approach meant that negotiations with 'communal' leaders and organisations were used as tools to arrive at a compromise with minorities on the question of 'protecting' and 'safeguarding' their interests in terms of reservation of seats in the legislatures and in government jobs. In order to meet the challenge posed by the Simon Commission, Indian leaders organised several all-India Conferences to settle these issues and to draw up a blue print of an agreed constitution for India. A large number of Muslim leaders met at Delhi in 1927 and came up with four basic demands which came to be known as Delhi Proposals. These Proposals were as follows:

- 1) Sind should be made a separate province;
- 2) The North-West Frontier Province should be treated constitutionally on the same footing as the other provinces;
- 3) Muslims should get one-third representation in the Central Legislature; and
- 4) In Punjab and Bengal, Muslims should get representation in proportion of their population, thus guaranteeing a Muslim majority in the legislatures and in other provinces, where Muslims were in minority, the existing reservation of seats for Muslims should continue.

In opposition to these proposals, Congress came up with its own proposals drafted by an all-parties committee. This Report came to be popularly known as Nehru Report and was placed before an All-Party Convention in Calcutta in December 1928. The Nehru Report recommended that India should be a federation of linguistic provinces and there should be some level of provincial autonomy for these provinces. Elections were to be held on the basis of joint electorates but the Report suggested that seats in Central and provincial legislatures should be reserved for religious minorities in proportion to their population. The Report also recommended separation of Sind from Bombay and constitutional reform in North-West Frontier Province. Differences cropped up in the All-Party Convention in Calcutta. A section of Muslim League and Khilafat leaders were willing to accept joint electorates and other proposals provided their amendments moved by M. A Jinnah were accepted. These amendments were same as point number 3 and 4 of Delhi proposals and they also demanded the residuary powers

of legislation should rest with the provinces in the proposed federation. But a larger section of Muslim League led by Mohammed Shafi and Agha Khan refused even to accept these amendments and showed their unwillingness to surrender separate electorates. The Hindu Mahasabha and The Sikh League also raised objections to separation of Sind as well as other provisions suggested for North-West Frontier Province, Punjab and Bengal in the Report. They were also adamant not to accede to Jinnah's amendment. Even Congress was not in a mood to accept amendment regarding the residuary powers to the provinces and favoured a strong centre. Muslim Leaders of all hues now put forward a joint front and Jinnah too joined them and declared that Nehru Report was biased towards Muslims and a tool to create Hindu domination. Muslim leaders came up with fourteen points which were based on Four Delhi Proposals along with the amendments moved by Jinnah to Nehru Report and continuation of separate electorates and reservation of seats for Muslims in government services and all self-governing bodies. The attempt at compromise formula thus ended in a complete failure.

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### **31.7 THE COMMUNAL AWARD OF 1932 AND THE CONGRESS**

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The British tried to use the religious and other identities for their own political purposes. The Communal Award announced in August 1932 was also such an effort of the British ruling class. The Award allotted to each minority a number of seats in the reconstituted legislatures to be elected on the basis of separate electorates. Muslims, Sikhs and Christians had already been treated as minorities earlier and now the Award declared that the Depressed Classes would also be treated as a minority and hence entitled to separate electorates from the rest of the Hindu community. The Congress has been opposed to the principle of separate electorate for various communities on religious ground, although it has accepted it briefly under Lucknow Pact (1916) as a kind of compromise. Congress thought that such a move to grant separate voting rights under separate electorates would divide Indian people and prevent the growth of national consciousness. Congress took the position that although it was opposed to separate electorates, it will not demand change in the Award without the consent of minorities.

But the effort to treat the Depressed Classes as a minority community was vehemently opposed by the Congress leaders because that would create separate electorate for them from the rest of the Hindus and make them separate political entities. Gandhiji, particularly, in Yervada prison at that time, took a strong exception to this move and saw it as an attack on Indian nationhood and felt it would endanger his social reform agenda of abolition of untouchability. Gandhiji demanded that the representatives of the Depressed Classes should be elected by a general electorate under a common franchise. He however favoured a larger number of reserved seats in legislatures for the Depressed Classes. He went on a fast unto death on 20 September, 1932 to put into effect his demands. There was an emotional reaction to the news of Gandhiji fast and leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya, M. C. Rajah and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar held discussions and negotiations. The end result of this was the famous Poona Pact, according to which the idea of separate electorate for the Depressed Classes was dropped but the seats reserved for them in provincial legislatures were increased from 71 to 147 and in the Central Legislature to 18% of the total seats.

In the Punjab the Unionist leaders Fazl-i-Husain and Sikander Hayat Khan, and in Bengal the Krishak Praja leader Fazlul Haq, had made sure that by 1937 the provincial interests had prevailed over a specifically Muslim communal line within the domain of representative Muslim politics. The All-India Muslim League's dismal performance in the 1937 elections revealed the complete bankruptcy of any notion of an all-India Muslim 'interests'. The Muslim League, won only 109 out of 482 seats allotted to Muslims under separate electorates, securing only 4.8 per cent of the total Muslim votes despite attempts to project popular programmes. Congress was relatively more successful and formed ministries in a few provinces under provincial autonomy. It was the perceived threat from the singular and uncompromising 'nationalism' of the Congress to provincial autonomy and class interests which gave the discourse and politics of the Indian Muslims a fresh lease of life. The famous resolution passed at the Muslim League's Lahore session marked the transition of the Indian Muslims from a minority to a 'nation'. Jinnah made the demand that all future constitutional arrangements be reconsidered afresh since Indian Muslims were a 'nation' entitled to equal treatment with the Hindu 'nation'. But in attempting to give territorial expression to the Muslim claim to nationhood, Jinnah and a mainly minority province based All-India Muslim League had to make large concessions to the autonomy and sovereignty of the majority provinces. For Jinnah, religion was a political weapon to wrench his share of power. On the basis of the concept of 'Muslim nationalism' he argued that India was not homogeneous, but consisted of two nations, Hindus and Muslims. Muslim nationalism was operating on the same level as 'monolithic nationalism': beyond the religious Hindu-Muslim polarisation it did not recognise any further divisions. Congress had refused a coalition government with The Muslim League in U.P. in 1937 and in subsequent negotiations with the League Congress was not willing to accept itself as a Hindu political body or Muslim League as the sole representative of the Muslims. The demands put forward in 1940s by league regarding a separate 'homeland' for the Muslims was not acceptable to secular Congress leaders.

### 31.8 CONGRESS AND THE SIKH MINORITY

The formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee provided a focal point for the movement for the reformation of the Sikh religious places and creation of Sikh religious identity. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee began controlling Gurdwaras one by one, but the trouble arose where the *mahants* were stubborn as they were shielded by law. Starting in late 1920, large number of reformers both in urban and rural Punjab had joined to form separate and independent groups called *jatha*, for gaining control over their local Gurdwaras. Leader of a *jatha* was called *jathedar* under whose command a *jatha* would occupy a shrine and try to gain transfer of management in its favour from its current incumbents. Sometimes the transfer went peacefully especially in the case of smaller Gurdwaras with less income resources, and sometimes with the threat of force. It enlisted the active support and sympathy of some of the important nationalist papers in the country like *The Independent* (English), *Swaraj* (Hindi), *The Tribune*, *Liberal*, *Kesari* (Punjabi), *Milap* (Urdu), *Samindar* (Urdu) and *Bande Mataram* (Hindi). Two of the vernacular dailies *Akali* (Punjabi) and the *Akali-te-Pardesi* (Urdu) also played an important role. It brought the necessary

awakening among the Sikh masses and prepared them to undertake the struggle for reform. Master Tara Singh remained the editor of these two papers. With the direct and indirect support of the Central Sikh League, the Indian National Congress and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the Shiromani Akali Dal started a non-violent struggle against the government for the control of the Gurdwaras. In the agitation at Nankana Sahib Gurdwara, many agitators were killed and nationalist leaders including Gandhi visited the scene of the tragedy and expressed sympathy for the Akalis. Similarly Congress leaders also supported other Sikh agitation like Nabha agitation, the immediate cause for which was the deposition of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha. It was believed by the British that he was in sympathy with the Akali movement and was also considered to be too independent to suit their political needs. The Sikh leaders Master Tara Chand and Kharak Singh supported Non-Cooperation movement.

However, the political relations were not stable between Congress and Akalis. About the communal aspect of the report relating to Punjab, the Nehru Report had stated, "As regards the special claim of the Muslims and Sikhs for greater representation than their population would justify – it is enough to say that in the view we have expressed above, no such claim is admissible on the part of any community, however, important it may consider itself to be". The report accepted claims by the Muslims in the provinces where they were in minority while dismissed the Sikh claims on the basis that the Punjab problem is a peculiar one where there is the presence of the strong Hindu minority side by side with the Muslim majority and the Sikh minority. The report further said that "endless complications will arise if we recommend reservations for all minorities. The communal question is essentially a Hindu-Muslim question and must be settled on that basis". The Nehru Report deeply affected the politics of Punjab as it did not only cause disappointment to the Sikh community but was also responsible for the division among them especially over the communal clauses of it which provided for universal adult franchise in Punjab with no reservation of seats for the minorities, as was done in other states excepting Bengal, where the Muslims were in minority.

The Report became the root cause of acute differences between Master Tara Singh and Sardar Mangal Singh on one hand and Baba Kharak Singh and the Congress on the other hand. Master Tara Singh was the first Sikh leader to react sharply to the communal clauses and provisions of this report. He immediately expressed his resentment by sending a telegram to Moti Lal Nehru. Sardar Mangal Singh came in for severe criticism for having signed the report ignoring the Sikh interests. Mahatma Gandhi later tried to mollify the feelings of the Central Sikh League leadership. On December 30, 1928 while addressing the All Parties Conference he stated that personally he believed that the Nehru Report had not done justice to the Sikhs. Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Moti Lal Nehru, and M. A. Ansari met Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh and other Sikhs leaders before the start of the Congress session of Lahore (1929). They assured them that in the open session of the Congress; a resolution would be passed assuring the minorities, especially the Muslims and the Sikhs, that no such constitution would be promulgated in the country that would not satisfy the minorities. Such a resolution was passed in the Lahore Session of the Congress.

The Simon Commission favoured the separate electorate and reservation of seats and recommended only 19 per cent representation to the Sikhs in Punjab. The dispatch was strongly criticised by the Shiromani Akali Dal. As the Congress and the Sikh rejected the Simon report, the Viceroy called the Round Table Conferences from 1930 to 1932 to decide the future of India with the involvement of Indians. The first Round table Conference was boycotted by both the Congress and the Sikhs. After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 5, 1931 Gandhi went to attend the second Round Table Conference on behalf of the Congress. Before going to London he met leaders of all communities, princes and leaders of important organisations. A Sikh deputation under the leadership of Master Tara Singh placed the Sikh point of view before him and stressed that the Sikhs being an important minority, required adequate safeguards in any future constitution. Important among them were the re-demarcation of Punjab territories by transferring overwhelming Muslim majority areas to the North West Frontier, joint electorate without reservation of seats and one third share for the Sikhs in the Punjab Cabinet and the Public Service Commission. In the absence of any acceptable solution for the communal problem, the British Government on August 16, 1932, gave its own verdict in the form of Communal Award. The Award made the position of Muslims in Punjab and Bengal strong. According to the Award the system of separate electorate was retained and the Award represented the three communities in Punjab as such that the Muslims got the statutory majority of seven seats in Punjab while the Hindus and the Sikhs gained nothing. The Sikhs were very agitated over the issue, there was a lot of anger against the Loyalist Sikhs, but on this issue even the loyalists gave strong statements in the press, which further encouraged the Sikhs. Previously, on July 24, 1932, a Sikh conference representing the Akali Dal and the Central Sikh League was called at Lahore, which rejected the proportion of seats allocated to the Sikh as unacceptable. It voiced its grim determination not to allow the successful working of any constitution, which does not provide full protection to the Sikhs by guaranteeing an effective balance of power to each of the three principal communities in the Punjab. During the entire period till Independence and Partition, Congress and Sikhs minority relation was turbulent. At the time of Independence, however, the Congress Party assured Tara Singh, Baldev Singh and other Sikh leaders that India would belong to all its religious communities, and the Constitution would be secular and tried to win them over.

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## 31.9 SUMMARY

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We find that the relationship between various minorities and national movement was never an easy one. It passed through various phases and it was full of inconsistencies and contradictions. Sometimes Congress tried to win them over with political concessions. But the belief that British were fostering these divisions and a simplistic way to paper over internal contradictions in the name of a singular national identity proved that there were various possibilities. The formation of a national identity involved negotiations and contestations. These were manifested especially in the relationship between Congress as the representative of national consciousness and various political formations claiming to represent and articulate the interests of various religious and social minorities.

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## 31.10 EXERCISES

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- 1) Evaluate the relationship between Congress and Muslim minority from the formation of Congress in 1885 to 1914.
- 2) Discuss the orientation of Muslim politics and its relationship with the Congress since the Lucknow Pact till the partition.
- 2) Describe the progress in the relation between Congress and the Sikhs represented by the Akali leadership.

