

***Muslim Punjab's Fight for Pakistan:
League's Agitation Against the Coalition
Ministry of Sir Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana,
January-March 1947***

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In the movement for Pakistan, the elections of 1945-46 in which AIML candidates won and secured more than 75% of the Muslim votes proved to be very crucial. In most of the provinces majority ministry's governments were installed but the majority of the Muslim League in the Punjab Assembly was ignored and flouted. Instead, a Coalition Ministry headed by Tiwana whose Unionist Party secured only 20 seats in the Punjab Assembly house of 175 was installed with support of non-Muslim members. This was not to be tolerated by the Muslim League who started agitation which succeeded as discussed in this article.

The United Punjab was one of the largest Muslim province of British India with 57% of the Muslim population. When the elections of 1946 were held the Muslim League secured 80% of the Muslim votes. The Muslim League would have been invited to form the Provincial Ministry but the Governor of the province asked Sir Khizr Hayat Khan, a Unionist leader, to form the Punjab Ministry on 7 March 1946.¹ As the Unionists failed to get majority of the vote, they formed the Coalition Ministry with the support of the Hindu and Sikh MLAs belonging to the Congress and the Akalidal Party.²

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1. *Times of India*, 8 March 1946.
2. *Times of India*, 12 March 1946.

This Ministry was installed despite warning from the Muslim League leaders that Government will have to face grave consequences if the non-Muslim Ministry was installed in a Muslim province. Liaquat Ali Khan, Honorary-General Secretary of the All India Muslim League in his address at a mammoth public gathering in Lahore on 6 March 1946 had issued such a warning and said that “Nawab of Mamdot, leader of the Muslim League Party, had made it perfectly clear in his interview with the Governor on Wednesday afternoon that he (Nawab of Mamdot) was in possession of the signatures of 88 (73+5 independents + 10 others) members of the Punjab Assembly, including ten non-Muslims who formed majority in the House and that in the circumstances the Muslim League Party was in a position to form a ministry”.³ The election results of the Punjab Legislative Assembly were as follows:

Congress	—	51
Muslim League	—	73
Unionist	—	20
Akali	—	22
Independent	—	09
Total:		<u>175</u> ⁴

The Muslim League circles did not take the installation of Khizr Ministry lightly and planned long-term agitation. There was exchange of brickbats between Hindu and Muslim students on 9 March 1946 outside the Sanatan Dharam College in Lahore, situated a farlong away from the Punjab Civil Secretariat in which eleven student were wounded.⁵ Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah addressed a meeting of the Punjab Muslim League Party at the Assembly Chambers on the evening of 20 March 1946 and said:

The Punjab has taken up the fight, as the sword arm of India, and you have played your part heroically on different battlefields, which is recognised by the world. Let now your sword arm play a more magnificent part in the achievement of Pakistan. You can do it if Muslims stand united. My prescription is unity, faith and discipline, and we shall win.⁶

The arrival of Cabinet Mission delegation in British India in the last week of March 1946 did call for a peaceful atmosphere to which Jinnah responded positively. The issue of parleys with the Cabinet Mission by the Muslim League leadership was professed. It was at the dawn of next

3. *Times of India*, 7 March 1946.

4. *Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta: 16-1 Komedan Bagan Lane, 1946, Vol.I, p.230.

5. *Times of India*, 11 March 1946.

6. *Times of India*, 22 March 1946.

year in January 1947 that the issue of agitation against the Punjab Unionist Ministry was again taken up when a Civil Disobedience Movement was started. This movement after 36 days prolongation succeeded when on 2 March 1947 Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana's Ministry resigned.⁷

As a matter of fact the situation became grave in Dera Ghazi Khan in early January 1947 when there was bye-election campaign against the seat in the Punjab Assembly in which Muslim League candidate was going very high, but in order to influence the votes section 144 was promulgated by the Punjab Government on the polling day i.e., 8 January 1947. This heightened the political tension.⁸ The Punjab Muslim League Committee of Action at a meeting held at Lahore on the evening of 7 January 1947 presided over by Iftikhar Hussain of Mamdot protested against this. In a lengthy statement issued at the end of this meeting the Muslim League Committee declared that "this position is intolerable" and condemned this action of the Punjab Government.⁹ Another incident which flared up the Punjab Muslim League was that 29 volunteers of the Muslim League National Guards who were proceeding to Kotli Abdur Rahman, a suburb of Lahore, in tanga preceded by a green flag and shouting slogans were detained by the Mughulpura police under the "Public Safety Ordinance" on 7 January 1947. This also heightened the tension. Sardar Abdur Rashid Khan, prominent Muslim League worker protested against this cruel act of the Punjab Government.¹⁰ This agitation spread against Khizr Ministry and gained momentum day by day. On 24 January 1947 seven-front-rank leaders of the Punjab Muslim League were arrested in Lahore for obstructing the police from carrying out a search in the headquarters of the Muslim League National Guards where the police recovered over 1000 helmets and a large quantity of assorted volunteer badges bearing the insignia of a dagger, sword and revolver.¹¹ The arrested leaders were: Khan of Mamdot, President of the Punjab Muslim League; Malik Feroz Khan Noon, a former member of the Viceroy's Executive Council; Begum Shah Nawaz who recently toured the U.S.A. to present the Pakistan case to the American public; Mian Mohammad Mumtaz Daultana, member of the Muslim League Committee of Action; Mian Iftikharuddin, a former President of the Punjab Congress; Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan, son of the late Sir

7. *Times of India*, 3 March 1947

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Times of India*, 8 January 1947.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Times of India*, 25 January 1947.

Sikandar Hayat Khan, and Amir Hussain Shah, head of the Punjab branch of the Muslim National Guards. This further heightened the tension in the public. On getting the news of this raid students of the local Islamia College, Lahore staged a wild demonstration, about a dozen of them climbing on to the roof of the prison van, which was moving through milling crowd, and later defied the ban on processions. This harassed the government. No action was, however, taken against them for fear of further protest.¹² However, activities of the Muslim League National Guards were banned. In order to balance this, the opposing Hindu Rashtriya Sawayam Sewak Sangh was also banned but no action was practically taken against them.¹³ The real target of the police were the Muslim National Guards against whom no relaxation was showed in the whole of the Punjab. A repressive policy was adopted against them.

For fear of further public reaction, these leaders were released in the midnight but they immediately met at the residence of the Khan of Mamdot. The meeting which terminated at 2:00 a.m. decided: "We have decided to defy the ban again tomorrow by holding a public meeting at 3:00 p.m. outsider Mochi Gate" The statement added: "We were reluctant to come out of the jail but we were pushed out. There is no question of our remaining out of jail until the civil liberties are fully restored in the Punjab and each party is permitted to function and preach its creed freely, democratically and without any interference".¹⁴

The Muslim League agitation in the Punjab "overshadowed all other matters in the country".¹⁵ The news of this movement were carried in almost all the newspapers and journals of the country. Every district in the Punjab was affected, but Lahore remained the "main centre of the movement".¹⁶ Main items of the agitation were procession and public meetings organized in defiance of the provisions of the Punjab Public Safety Ordinance. In sympathy with the protesters some policemen also resigned from the service. For instance Fazal Hussain, a Head Constable of the Lahore District, not only resigned from service but also joined the

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Star of India*, 27 January 1947.

15. "Police Abstract of Intelligence, Punjab", Vol.LXIX, Lahore, 8 February 1947, in *Punjab Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence for the Year 1947*, NIHCR Library, Islamabad.

16. *Ibid.*

agitators in sympathy for his co-religionists and delivered speeches in support of the movement.¹⁷

The atrocities committed by the police in the Punjab were condemned in various other provinces especially the Muslim League quarters. Yusuf Abdullah Haroon, President of the Sindh Provincial Muslim League, in his appeal to the Muslims of Sindh on 26 January 1947 asked them to join the National Guards and to get ready to march to the Punjab to defy the ban and to secure civil liberties for Muslims in the Punjab. He asked Sindh to stand by the Punjab and should do its utmost to win back their liberties.¹⁸ Hasandali Inamdar, Salar-e Suba/Chief of the Bombay Muslim National Guards in a statement of 26 January 1947 condemned the action of the Punjab Government in declaring the Muslim National Guards organization unlawful and arresting the Muslim League leaders.¹⁹ In his statement to the press issued from Karachi on the same date Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, thus condemned this action of the Punjab Government: "The sudden swooping down upon the National Guard organisation and declaring it unlawful under Section 16 of the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act, is a most high-handed and unwarranted action and besides it raises another very serious question as it strikes at the root of civil liberties".²⁰ Jinnah added: "This is followed up with terrorist methods of searching the offices of the Muslim National Guards and arresting Muslim Leaguers. This policy of suppression and oppression of the Muslim League raises very grave issues."²¹ The Working Committee being the Executive body of the AIML also took a serious note of this in its meetings held on 29, 31 January and 2 February 1947 and condemned the Punjab repression of the Muslim League leaders.²² The Working Committee expressed that the Constituent Assembly should be forthwith dissolved. It also demanded that Congress Ministries in Bombay, Madras, C.P. Bihar, U.P and Assam should also be dismissed as they have failed to protect the Muslim population like the Muslims in the Punjab.²³

In the Punjab, the Civil Disobedience Movement continued to grow further. Nawabzada Rashid Ali Khan, President of the Lahore City

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Star of India*, 27 January 1947.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Star of India*, 27 January 1947.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Star of India*, 30-31 January and 3 February 1947.

23. *Star of India*, 3 February 1947.

Muslim League and 65 others, who led a huge processions of Muslims in defiance of the Punjab Public Safety Ordinance, were arrested on the evening of 4 February at the Mall, Lahore.²⁴ It was reported on 7 February that 74 out of a total of 79 Muslim League members of the Punjab Assembly were in jail in connection with the League agitation against the Coalition Ministry. The Muslim League quarters stated that there were about 13, 000 Muslim League workers in the Punjab jails.²⁵ On 24 February 1947 the British troops were called out to help the police in restoring law and order in Amritsar city, as the demonstration by the Muslim League took a serious turn. The police used tear gas and resorted to lathi charges and revolver firing to disperse a crowd of the Leaguers who became unruly and uncontrollable. There were pitched battles between the police and the crowd on the Cooper Road, the former using teargas and lathis and the latter stones and brickbats. Of the 115 persons brought to hospital, 36 were admitted, including Shaikh Ismail Haq, Additional District Magistrate and Pandit Lakhpat Rai, a Sub-Inspector of Police.²⁶

Not only the Punjab Government but the Central British Government on the whole was perturbed by this Punjab Agitation which had the chances to spread to other provinces. To the NWFP it had actually spread and gained momentum.²⁷ Now the time had reached for the British Government to take crucial decision. On 20 February 1947, Mr Attlee, British Prime Minister, announced in the House of Commons that Britain will leave India by June 1948.²⁸ On 26 February 1947 a compromise between the Punjab Government and the Provincial Muslim League in connection with 34-Day League agitation in the Punjab was reached on the following basis and Civil Disobedience Movement was to be called off by the Punjab Muslim league:

1. The ban on the public meetings was to be removed.
2. The introduction of such legislation as may be considered necessary to preserve peace and public order in place of present Punjab Public Safety Ordinance.
3. The release of all prisoners detained, under trial or convicted in connection with the movement other than those accused or

24. *Star of India*, 5 February 1947.

25. *Star of India*, 7 February 1947.

26. *Star of India*, 25 February 1947

27. *Star of India*, 28 February 1947

28. *Times of India*, 21 February 1947.

convicted of offences under Section 325 or of more serious offences against the person under the Indian Penal Code.

4. The ban on processions to continue.²⁹

According to the unwritten agreement it was also agreed between the Governor and the President, Punjab Muslim League that Malik Sir Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana Ministry will also be removed. As a result of this agreement Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana submitted resignation to the Governor on 2 March 1947. Thus the Muslim League agitation won and was able to get rid of the Unionist-Congress Ministry in the Punjab.³⁰ This resignation was followed by “unfortunate” events.³¹ But the resignation helped easing the situation which otherwise would have led to the “Civil War”.³² Hindu-Muslim riots had been worst in the cities of Amritsar, Multan, Rawalpindi, and Lahore. The spread of Hindu-Muslim riots to rural areas and the determination to give it brutal expression has been most marked in villages of Multan and Rawalpindi.³³ The Muslim League circles welcomed the resignation of the Khizr Ministry and they developed a hope of forming the Muslim League ministry, but, as a matter of fact, their chances seemed to be “remote”.³⁴ Hindus and Sikhs were made to believe this by the official circles of the Punjab. The Governor of the Punjab, for the time being, assumed the control of the Punjab province under Section 93 of the Government of India Act 1935.³⁵

After calling off the Muslim League agitation, the Punjab Muslim League Committee of Action held its meeting in Lahore on 27 February 1947 in which a decision was taken to hold meetings in all the cities of the province on 6-8 March 1947 in which the necessity to organize the Muslim League National Guards was to be emphasised.³⁶ On 3 March 1947 “Victory” was celebrated by the Punjab Muslim League. A crowd of 200,000 including 500 Muslim National Guards in uniform met

29. *Times of India*, 27 February 1947

30. *Times of India*, 27 February 1947. Also see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 1988), p.223.

31. “*Police Abstract of Intelligence, Punjab*”, Vol. .LXIX, Lahore, 8 March 1947 in *Punjab Police Secret Abstract for the Year 1947*, NIHCR Library, Islamabad.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

outside the Mochi Gate at Lahore where Iftikhar Hussain Khan of Mamdot, President of Punjab Muslim League, presided. Besides Mamdot, who addressed the gathering, were Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Feroze Khan Noon, Begum Shah Nawaz, Mian Iftikharuddin and Karamat Ali. Speakers from other communities were: Ch. Sulah Lal, representative of the Scheduled Castes who was Deputy Mayor of Lahore, and Hari Singh, a Mazhabi Sikh.³⁷ Similar meetings were held in Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Multan and other cities of the Punjab.³⁸ Khurshid Anwar visited Rawalpindi and called upon the Muslim population to join Muslim National Guards being “the disciplined army of Pakistan”. The “Victory Day” meetings held on 3 March at Rohtak, Ambala, Ferozpur, Gurdaspur, Gujranwala, Attock, Mianwali, Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), Muzaffargarh and Dera Ghazi Khan attracted audiences varying between 1000 and 6000.³⁹ The speakers demanded early formation of the Muslim League Ministry in the Punjab and exhorted the audience “to make further preparation for the final fight for Pakistan”.⁴⁰

Afterwards there was news of the change of Viceroy Lord Wavell. He was replaced by Lord Mountbatten who joined on 22 March 1947. This Agitation forced him to come to dialogue with Jinnah on the partition issue and pave the way by establishment of Pakistan. Mountbatten’s parleys with Indian leaders including Jinnah culminated in 3 June 1947 Partition Plan. This led to establishment of Pakistan on 14 August 1947.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. “*Police Abstract of Intelligence, Punjab*”, Vol.LXIX, Lahore, 15 March 1947, in *Punjab Police Secret Abstract for the Year 1947*, NIHCR Library, Islamabad.

40. *Ibid.*