

Nationalist Politics in the British Punjab: An Alliance between Muslim League Parliamentary Board and Majlis-i- Ahrar-i-Islam

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Abstract

Early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new political leadership which influenced the masses in the Punjab. The resultant awareness of British oppression led to the formation of many political parties including the Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam (MAI). The MAI not only gave the Muslims in Punjab a platform to raise their voice against the British policies but also provided them with an alternative to the existing political parties such as the Indian National Congress and the Unionist Party, with which they were disenchanted. The MAI entered into an alliance with the All India Muslim League in 1936. Due to several factors this alliance did not last very long but the interaction of the MAI intelligentsia with the AIML had an impact on the course of events. The scholarly debate on MAI's political domain as well as its interaction with AIML was never explored in the annals of Muslim Punjab objectively. This article analyzes the dynamics of the MAI-AIML coalition and the reasons behind the failure of this alliance. The article aims to study the MAI as a popular party of Muslim masses in Punjab and employs the model of 'Subaltern Studies' to analyze the socio-political contribution of the party.

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A new political chapter opened in Punjab in the early twentieth century and was dominated by leaders like Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1875-1938), Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928)¹, Sir Muhammad Shafi (1869-1932)², and Sir Fazl-i-Husain (1877-1936).³ It was a new phase in agitational politics, and it began to impact the people at large. These political stirrings resulted in the creation of political organisations, such as the *Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam* (MAI), *Khaksars*, *Mahasabha*, Unionist Party and *Akali Dal*. Muslim urban intelligentsia in the Punjab was getting increasingly disenchanted with the attitude and policies of ruling hierarchies on the socio-religious and economic issues facing the Muslim community. Support for political parties such as MAI, *Khaksars* and *Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat* sprang from this dissatisfaction among the Muslim masses in the 1930s. They felt estranged from the mainstream Hindu-dominated INC, and showed a growing sense of Muslim identity, within a multi-cultural Punjab. Unionists had to face crosscurrents of growing emphasis on religion-based identity in the form of communal, political and religious movements; such as the *Khaksars*, MAI and the *Mahasabha* in the decades before the Partition. All these parties had slogans of anti-Imperialism and anti-feudalism all over Punjab and few Princely states. The MAI had a short term alliance/interlude with AIML which could have changed the course of Muslim intelligentsia if it survived. The scholarly debate on MAI's political donation as well as its interaction with AIML was never explored in the annals of Muslim Punjab objectively. The new theoretical models like,

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- 1 See Shyamnandan Shahi, *Lala Lajpat Rai: His Life and Thought* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publication, 1986).
 - 2 He was a member of Imperial Legislative Council (1912), and a Punjabi politician from Baghbanpura locality of Lahore. He was first General Secretary of Punjab Muslim League and participated in all three sessions of Round Table Conference (1930-1932). He was the President of Muslim League for a short while in 1928. See Hafeez Malik, Yuri V. Gankovsky eds. *The Encyclopedia of Pakistan* (Karachi: OUP, 2006), p.249.
 - 3 *Ibid.* He was a politician and remained a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly (1920), and was nominated as minister for education in Punjab in 1920, and on the Viceroy's Executive Council during the 1930-1935 period. He was a member of Indian delegation to the League of Nations, and a delegate to Round Table Conference in 1930s. He remained a Vice President on the Governor-General's Council (1934).

‘Subaltern Studies’ and ‘History from Below’ can be used to analyze the socio-political contribution of MAI.

The *Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam*⁴ was founded in Lahore on 29 December 1929.⁵ The dominant group amongst its founders was the dissident Punjab section of the Khilafatists,⁶ who were influenced by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1889-1958).⁷ In the decade of 1930, it had a small interlude/alliance with All India Muslim League and its leadership on the issue of joint Parliamentary Board for the Election 1937.

The origins of the MAI can be traced back to the Khilafat Movement which was aimed at the preservation of the Ottoman Empire - the symbol of the unity of *Ummah* for the Muslims of India. In the wake of the Khilafat Movement, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had already started his Non-Cooperation Movement against the British government in India, by forming an alliance with the Ali Brothers and the ulama of *Farangimahal*.⁸

4 ‘*Ahrar*’ is a plural of ‘*hur*’, meaning a free or an independent person. Various forms of this word were used during the Khilafat Movement; such as *hurriyat* (freedom) and leader of freemen (*rais-ul-ahrar*), a prefix that was used for Maulana Mohammad Ali Johar. *The Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam*, (trans. League or Committee of Free Men of Islam) reflected the quest of Muslim community in British India for a political identity. Maulvi Feroz-ud-Din ed., *Feroz-ul-Lughat* (Rawalpindi: Ferozsons, 1973), p.518.

5 *Inqilab* (Lahore), 14 January 1930; *SPPAI*, 8 August 1931, Vol. 2, pp. 498-99; Afzal Haq, *Tarikh-i-Ahrar* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Tabsra, 1968), pp. 25, 71, 91; also see M. Rafique Afzal, *Political Parties in Pakistan, 1947-1958*, vol. 1 (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1986).

6 The Khilafat Movement was the first mass movement of Indian Muslims to be directed against the British rule in India. As soon as it became apparent that Germany, along with its ally the Turkish Ottoman Empire, would loose the First World War, Indian Muslims became apprehensive about the fate of the Sultan of Turkey who was also the Caliph the spiritual head of the Muslims. The agitation in India became pronounced with the imposition of the Treaty of Sevres (1920), which was harsh and was rejected by Turkey. Ever since Indian Muslims had been deprived of political power, the Khilafat had served as a symbolic reminder of past greatness, and its survival was a matter of deep sentimental concern. Hafeez Malik, Yuri V. Gankovsky, *The Encyclopedia of Pakistan*, (Karachi: OUP, 2006), p. 151.

7 Afzal Haq, *Tarikh-i-Ahrar*, p.24.

8 Abdul Bari Farangi Mahal, one of the ulama, who founded the Madrasa Nizamia in Lucknow in 1908, supported by donations from his disciples and Shi'a magnates like Mahmoodabad and Rampur. He took part in Muslim politics in India, and was elected the first-ever president of *Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind* in 1919. *SPPAI*, 1 February 1919, Vol.12, No.5, p.33.

The guiding spirit and the main financier behind the Central Khilafat Committee was Haji Mian Jan Muhammad Chotani (1873-1932), a businessman from Bombay. Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Shaukat Ali (1873-1938), Maulana Muhammad Ali (1878-1931), Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Dr. Mukhtar A. Ansari, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988) and Saif-ud-Din Kichlew were some of the prominent leaders of this Pan-Islamic movement, which created a cadre of political workers tempered and trained in the art of agitation, strikes, mass meetings, processions and willing to be jailed in large numbers.

In British Punjab, at the turn of the century, new associations attempted to mobilise popular support on issues of immediate concern among a growing educated class; such as the communal competition for jobs and elections to the municipal committees.⁹ They also reflected increasing pressure from ‘urban Muslim leaders’ including ulama, popular orators, and journalists. They used identity and newer techniques of popular communications to challenge the leadership of urban *ra'is*,¹⁰ who were tied to the administration. Some of these leaders controlled the ‘vernacular press’, and had thus developed a wider access. During the early part of the twentieth century, a number of Urdu and English newspapers from outside the province began to influence Muslim opinion on contemporary issues, such as the Balkan crisis and the future of the Ottoman Caliphate.¹¹

Despite a policy of strict censorship, the concerned Punjabi elite read newspapers and periodicals published from other South Asian urban centres also. However, rural Punjab remained oblivious to the influence of the print media, because of the lower rate of literacy, isolation from the cities, and the well-entrenched feudal system. Here life revolved around the news items filtering down from schools or mosques, or from the returning soldiers.

9 N.G. Barrier, “The Punjab Government and Communal Politics”, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, No.27, Vol.3, May 1968, quoted in David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.78.

10 Urban notable, man of substance.

11 *Ibid.* These included *Comrade* and *Hamdard*, owned by the Ali Brothers, whereas Maulana Abul Kalam Azad established *Al-Hilal*.

Khilafat, for a while, was a populist movement in the Punjab, and the masses joined it in big numbers. The peasantry identified with the Muslim cause, but it remained a stronger force in urban centres like Lahore, Gujranwala and Amritsar. The influential Punjabi landlords were absent from the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements. During this period, Muslim intelligentsia such as Malik Barkat Ali, Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, Afzal Haq, Zafar Ali Khan, Allama Iqbal, Saif-ud-Din Kichlew, Gazanfar Ali Khan and Malik Lal Khan played a vital role in activating the middle and lower classes in urban Punjab, on a trans-regional cause, which was emotionally important to the Muslims. Muslim leaders like the Ali Brothers, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Saif-ud-Din Kichlew, Chaudhry Khaliq-uz-Zaman and Maulana Zafar Ali Khan led various rallies and processions, under the auspices of the Khilafat movement. The Khilafat Movement became a lost cause when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the leader of the revolution in Turkey, abolished the Caliphate in 1924. One of the Khilafat leaders, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, issued a religious decree supporting the action of the Ataturk, which the new Turkish government distributed in the form of leaflets.¹² The Muslim movements like *Khudai Khidmatgars* in the NWFP¹³ and *Khaksars* in Punjab,¹⁴ all came into being with the efforts of the former Khilafatists and pro-INC nationalists.

The primary reason for the formation of MAI was the dissension among the Khilafatists in Punjab. After the decline of the Khilafat Movement, the Punjabi Khilafatists had developed and maintained their autonomous identity within the All-India Khilafat Committee, and their critics denigrated them by referring to them as the Punjabi *toli*.¹⁵ After the break with Maulana Shaukat Ali and the Central Khilafat Committee, the ex-Khilafatists from Punjab

12 See Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence: Abul Kalam Azad: A Fresh Look* (Karachi: OUP, 1998).

13 See Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the Northwest Frontier Province 1937-47* (Karachi: OUP, 1999).

14 See Muhammad Aslam Malik, *Allama Inayatullah Mashrafi: A Political Biography* (Karachi: OUP, 2000).

15 Members of the 'Punjabi toli' Clique included Maulana Abdul Qadir Qasuri, Zafar Ali Khan, Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman, Afzal Haq, Ataullah Shah Bokhari and Abdur Rahman Ghazi. See Haq, *Tarikh-i-Ahrar*, pp.13, 25, 27, and 71.

sought help and guidance from Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who advised that they should organise themselves into a regular political party. They had been together over the contentious issue of the Nehru Report, and had followed Azad in supporting it, unlike the Ali Brothers. The Punjab Khilafatists had been thinking of forming a new Muslim party for quite sometime, but it was finally on Azad's 'suggestion and great insistence' that they laid the foundation of this new party, which eventually took the shape of the MAI.¹⁶ The MAI stood for equal distribution of wealth, eradication of untouchability, respect for every religion, and freedom to live according to Sharia. Its members acquired considerable political experience, organisational and mobilising skills; and by using their oratorical gifts, could easily stir up emotions at public meetings. The important group of people in the MAI was that of the ulama and workers belonging to the Deobandi school of thought. These ulama had emerged as a new political force during the Khilafat Movement, and claimed the right to lead Muslims in politics. The result was the infusion of religion into politics. Such traditionally educated Muslim religious scholars had existed in Muslim societies for over a thousand years, and played an increasingly important role in Indian politics. Their transformation, discourse and religio-political activism were important for the recent history of the Muslim community in India.¹⁷

As a matter of fact, the Khilafatists in Punjab were split into three main factions; those who joined the AIML, those who took refuge in the INC programme, whereas the third consisted of those who had formed the MAI.¹⁸ Another important component of the MAI was a group of the INC Muslim leaders, who were disenchanted with the communalism pervasive within the INC, and felt a need for a new political identity.¹⁹ That is why the MAI used

16 See *Ibid.*, p.71.

17 For a detailed discussion see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Karachi: OUP, 2002).

18 W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (Delhi: Usha Publications, 1946), p.270.

19 On 17 April 1937, in his presidential address at the Ahrar Political Conference in Lucknow, Mazhar Ali Azhar spoke on 'Congress and Ahrar'. He admitted that during the civil disobedience movement, the Ahrar followed the Congress programme. He confirmed the cordiality that developed between the two parties

slogans that related only to 'Muslim issues'. Their membership included those people who had lost hope both in the INC and the AIML, and were radically opposed to the British imperial presence in the Sub-continent. Led by idealists and individuals with humble economic backgrounds, the MAI's politics was influenced by the INC, while representing Islamic particularism in its religious outlook.

By the early 1930s, the MAI had become an important political party of Muslims in the Punjab. Its agitation in the princely states, and mobilisation on socio-religious issues, earned it an important position in regional politics. Besides these campaigns, the MAI also participated in the mainstream political developments of British India. After participating in the campaigns for the Muslim cause in princely States like Kashmir and Kapurthala, it also took part in by-elections of 1933 and 1934.

The British Government issued a White Paper after the third Round Table Conference in March 1933. The Conference appointed a Joint Select Committee, which finalised its report in November 1934, and was subsequently debated in Parliament.²⁰ The Report consisted of recommendations for the future government of India. It also discussed the issue of communal representation, and provided a basis for the British government to introduce Communal Award. When the Indian Legislative Assembly debated this report in February 1935, the INC moved a resolution for the total rejection of the report, condemning it as one of the 'usual imperialist devices' "to deprive the Indian people of the power to assume charge of their affairs".²¹ M. A. Jinnah, then the leader of the Independent Party, disagreed with the INC, and moved an amendment that was finally accepted.²² The MAI

during 1930. Shorish Kashmiri, ed., *Khutbat-i-Ahrar* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Mujahideen, 1944), p.144.

20 The 16-member JSC was presided over by Lord Linlithgow. It submitted its report to the Parliament on 22 November 1934, which was approved by the House of Commons on 12 December 1934, and the House of Lords on 18 December.

21 See K.B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1947* (Karachi: OUP, 1998), pp. 78-80.

22 *Ibid.* The amendment consisted of three resolutions; the first accepted the Communal Award until the Indians, by mutual agreement, could produce a substitute. The second resolution was critical of only the details of the provincial

supported Jinnah's position on the White Paper, and also the report of the Joint Select Committee.²³

The British Parliament passed the Government of India Act 1935 on 2 August 1935, which provided for a federal political system for the Sub-continent.²⁴ Its important features were that it defined provinces as separate legal entities, and lowered property qualifications for voting, thus enlarging the provincial franchise. The Muslim elite had always been apprehensive of a centralised government dominated by the Hindu majority, and the danger of being turned into a 'permanent minority'. The MAI, like all other Muslim political parties, was concerned about the federal part of the constitution, though it preferred to wait and watch. However, this part did not come into operation, since the required number of states did not accede to the proposal of federation. This similarity of views on constitutional issues was an important factor that brought the MAI closer to the All-India Muslim League (AIML). In 1936, the MAI allied itself with the Muslim League, and its leaders accepted membership of the Central Muslim League Parliamentary Board, although this alliance was also short-lived.

MAI contested the provincial assemblies' elections under the Government of India Act 1935. The MAI realised that it had to broaden its electoral platform in the Punjab, as it could not face the Unionist Party alone.²⁵ It looked towards M. A. Jinnah and the

autonomy scheme, but conceded that it represented a real advance in the sense that dyarchy was replaced by provincial autonomy. Jinnah's third resolution dealt with the plan of All-India Federation.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 2-22. Jamil-ud Din Ahmad, ed., *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, vol. 1 (Lahore: United Publishers, 1968), p. 9. See also Jinnah's speech on the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Indian Constitutional Reforms in the Legislative Assembly on 7 February 1935.

24 The *Daily Telegraph* (London) on 3 August 1935, declared that the passage of the Act was the "most important job of the Parliament".

25 The Unionist Party was formed by the Muslim elites in British Punjab. Sir Fazl-i-Husain founded it in 1924. It believed in the rural-urban divide and had strong links and basis in feudal system. In Punjab when Colonial rulers introduced the canal colonies, poor and lower classes in rural and urban areas were not beneficiaries of them; they later proved to be the crowds available for political activism, and even for communal strife. The rural elites having obtained their status and position from the canal colonies, had an economic basis for their continued loyalty to the British, and thus proved a bulwark against any political challenge. Several other land grants came their way as reward for helping the administration

Muslim League as its natural allies. It had supported Jinnah and his Independent Party in the Central Legislative Assembly. The MAI leaders and the Punjab Leaguers especially their president, Allama Mohammad Iqbal, had jointly struggled for the welfare of the Kashmiri Muslims and had similarity of views on the Ahmadis. Jinnah himself had been active in resolving Shahidgunj dispute and had visited Lahore several times for this purpose. Therefore, when the AIML, under Jinnah's leadership, decided to contest the elections and Jinnah visited the Punjab in search of partners, he held talks with the Ahrar leaders. He knew that the MAI was a popular political force among the urban Muslims. His abortive attempt to win over the Unionists led by Mian Fazl-i-Husain²⁶ had further strengthened his desire to woo the MAI.

The Ahrar leaders held several meetings with Jinnah who, following the AIML's Bombay session in April 1936, had been authorised to constitute a Central Parliamentary Board on the eve of the 1937 provincial elections.²⁷ On 26 April, when Jinnah convened a meeting of the Muslim leaders in Delhi to negotiate for a pre-election alliance, two Ahrar leaders, Afzal Haq and Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman, were invited to attend the meeting. Jinnah asked the Ahrar leaders to participate in the provincial elections under the League umbrella. They were initially receptive to the idea but hesitant in signing an agreement to the effect. They laid down two conditions for an alliance: firstly, the alliance should have 'complete independence' as its primary objective; and

on political matters. See for details, Ian Talbot, *Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimensions in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in Northwest India* (Karachi: OUP, 1996) and Imran Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism: 1885-1947* (Karachi: OUP, 2003).

- 26 Fazl-i-Husain (1865-1936) had started participating in politics since 1903, and during the First World War, he refuted the validity of the provincial politics of Michael O'Dwyer. In a session of the First Punjab Provincial Conference in 1917, he openly criticised the British policy, which to him had turned Punjab into the 'worst treated province in India having no Executive Council, no High Court'. In later years, Fazl-i-Husain proved a dynamic personality, having some influence even on the Viceroy. He was an efficient Punjabi politician, who brought together all the communal elements on one platform, and formed the Unionist Party. It was the most influential political organisation in the province with cross-communal roots, which ruled the province triumphantly just before Partition. See Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography* (Bombay: Longman, 1946), p. 89.
- 27 Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase*, p.82.

secondly, the League would expel all Qadianis²⁸ from its ranks. Jinnah remarked that he could not do so given the AIML constitution, which could be amended only in accordance with the procedures laid down in it. The MAI leaders still wanted concrete assurances in regard to their condition about the Ahmadis.²⁹ They agreed to continue these parleys in Lahore. In May 1936, Jinnah visited Lahore to hold further talks with the political parties but his negotiations with Mian Fazl-i-Husain did not succeed. The Unionist leader had declined to be part of the Central Muslim League Parliamentary Board; earlier, he had refused to accept Jinnah's request to preside over the all-India session of the AIML.³⁰ Jinnah's talks with the leaders of the MAI and *Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat* were successful and Iqbal provided the much needed help in this context.³¹ Jinnah used the same arguments that he had used with his colleagues in the UP in his effort to establish a cross-party alliance in India focusing on Muslim issues.³²

Jinnah visited the head office of the MAI and then held an exclusive meeting with its leaders at Abdul Qavi Luqman's residence. They requested him to preside over a public meeting in Lahore. Subsequently, the MAI arranged the function, which its volunteers guarded with their symbolic axes.³³ After the meeting, Jinnah left for Srinagar where he met Kashmiri leaders including Mirwaiz Muhammad Yusuf who apprised him of the Ahrar

28 The Qadianis/Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims under the Constitution of Pakistan in 1974. For history and origin of the movement see *The Ahmadiyya Sect: Notes on the Origin, Development and History of the Movement 1938* (Lahore: Punjab Government, 1939), file no. 35/5/1938 (Islamabad: NDC, 1986), pp.1-25.

29 *Aljamiat*, (Delhi), 13 May 1936.

30 Azim Hussain, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography*, p. 310.

31 Mirza Ghulam Nabi Janbaz, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, Vol.II (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Tabsra, 1976), p.359. Also see a pamphlet by Tajuddin Ludhianwi, *Akabar-i-Ahrar aur Quaid-i-Pakistan Janab Mohammad Ali Jinnah*, (Urdu), (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam Pakistan (hereafter MMAP), 1969) and Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Iqbal Key Akhri Do Saal*, (Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications, 2000), p.290-95.

32 His reply to Maulana Habib-ul-Rahman was, the "people leading ahead would easily guide others heading towards the same destination." The issue was, how the League would deal with those Muslim nationalists who believed in 'complete independence'. Aziz ur Rahman, *Raees-ul-Ahrar*, p. 184.

33 See the pamphlet by Tajuddin, *Majlis-i-Ahrar Aur Tarikhi Tehreef ki Yalghar*, (Multan, MMAIP, 1968).

contribution towards the cause of the Kashmiri Muslims.³⁴ While in Srinagar Jinnah announced the formation of the AIML Parliamentary Board and four members of the MAI — Abdul Aziz Begowal, Afzal Haq, Sheikh Hissamuddin and Ghulam Hussain — were included in the Board. The MAI president accepted these nominations and announced that they would participate in the proceedings of the Board.³⁵ Soon, the MAI incurred the displeasure of the Unionists, particularly of Mian Fazl-i-Husain for associating themselves with Jinnah who was a political foe as far as the Unionist leader was concerned. The MAI had to face the Unionist animosity in the Punjab; nevertheless, Jinnah's sincerity and integrity and his concern for the welfare of Muslim community was the motivating factor for their alliance with the AIMNL.³⁶

The MAI's association with the AIML did not last too long as the conflict started soon over the process of selection of candidates after the announcement of the Central Parliamentary Board. The Punjab Parliamentary Board required the applicants for the ticket to cough up 500 rupees as a non-refundable contribution and an additional sum of 150 rupees for the ticket. This amount was more than the Ahrar candidates would volunteer to pay.³⁷ The Ahrar leaders alleged that it was a device to keep out their candidates from the electoral contest and block them from becoming a part of the larger 'Muslim oneness'.³⁸ The Ahrar were unwilling to pay the required sum and dissociated themselves from the activities of the Provincial Board. It may not be outlandish to suggest that the Unionist pressure also played a crucial role in making MAI revise its alignment. Another unresolved point of conflict was the Ahrar insistence that there should be a clause in the oath for a Punjab Muslim League candidate that he would struggle for the expulsion of Ahmadis from the Muslim community.³⁹ Interestingly, the Unionists were not willing to accept that as well. Still another point of conflict was that in some cases, the candidates of both the

34 *Inqilab*, 13 May 1936.

35 *Inqilab*, 21 May 1936.

36 Afzal Haq, *Tarikh-i-Ahrar*, p. 211.

37 Batalvi, *Iqbal Key Akhri Do Saal*, pp. 327-28.

38 Tajuddin, *Akabar-i-Ahrar*, pp.13-14.

39 Batalvi, *Iqbal Key Akhri Do Sal*, p.326.

parties wanted to contest the same constituencies in urban areas. When the MAI conflict with the provincial Muslim League leadership heated up, they approached Jinnah for its resolution but by then the discord could not be arrested. The pro-Unionist Muslim press in the Punjab played a significant role in aggravating the MAI-AIML differences.⁴⁰ Finally, on 25 August 1936, the Majlis broke the alliance, putting the blame for the chasm on the Punjab League leadership, and decided to contest the elections from its own platform.⁴¹

The all-India working committee of the Majlis authorised provincial branches to select and field their own candidates. On 30 August, the MAI in the Punjab appointed a fifteen-member parliamentary board that included its three MLCs.⁴² The board invited applications by mid-September 1936, and, in November 1936, considered the names of twenty-four candidates for the Punjab Legislative Assembly.⁴³ Finally, after considerable consultations, it selected candidates for ten out of a total eighty-six seats.⁴⁴ The MAI also supported one independent candidate, Syed Mohammad Habib, in the Rawalpindi constituency.⁴⁵ Unlike the earlier elections, the MAI put up one female candidate on a rural Muslim seat in the Punjab.⁴⁶ The nine male candidates were given tickets in constituencies spread all over the Punjab. They included, Shaikh Hissamuddin (Amritsar), Chaudhry Afzal Haq (Hoshiarpur), Mazhar Ali Azhar (Sialkot), Chaudhry Abdur

40 These newspapers were given subsidies on monthly basis to malign Jinnah. According to one source, Fazl-i-Husain was the architect of this propaganda campaign against Jinnah and the Central Muslim League Parliamentary Board. Khalid Shamsul Hasan, *Punjab Muslim League and the Unionists*, (New Delhi: Usha Publications, 2006), pp. 75-79.

41 They always remained doubtful of the Punjab Unionist leadership and mobilised people against their pro-establishment role in the politics. During their meetings with Jinnah, they stressed their point of view that he should not trust his colleagues as they were 'British agents' and were not sincere to his cause. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, Vol.II, p.367.

42 *Ibid.*, pp.426-8.

43 *Inqilab*, 23 November 1936.

44 Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, Vol.II, p.473; see also *Inqilab*, 8 January 1937.

45 Here the polling was held on 6 February 1937, and Dr Muhammad Alam of the *Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat* was elected.

46 See, *C&MG*, 10 February 1937; also see Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, Vol.II, p.495.

Rahman (Jullundur), Ghulam Husain (Jhang), Ghulam Haidar (Ferozpur), Ghulam Rasul (Daska), Sardar Muhammad Shafi (Qasur), Mazhar Nawaz Khan (Multan), and Khwaja Muhammad Yusuf (Ludhiana).⁴⁷ These candidates included the top leadership and activists known as, 'dictators' and 'salars'. In addition to Punjab, the MAI aimed at contesting elections in the UP, Bombay and Bihar. In the UP, the MAI initially boycotted the polls because of its civil disobedience movement in connection with the *Madah-e-Sahaba* movement. Later on, when the movement was called off, the provincial MAI fielded its candidates for the elections. The Bombay Provincial MAI put up one female candidate in addition to three male candidates. Similarly, its provincial organisation in Bihar also fielded candidates.

The MAI in the Punjab had to fight not only against the AIML and *Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat* candidates but also faced strong opposition from the Unionist candidates.⁴⁸ After the death of Mian Fazl-i-Husain in 1936, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan (1892-1942), his political successor, led the Unionists in the elections. Every Unionist candidate wielded influence in his constituency in his own right while the Unionist Party also enjoyed the tacit support of the provincial administration. The MAI organised a more systematic campaign in this election than it had in the elections of 1933 and 1934. It started a campaign to persuade prospective voters to register themselves for polls.⁴⁹ It issued a new election manifesto that reiterated a commitment to basic social and economic problems of the lower and middle classes. It called for the exemption from land revenue for agricultural income up to 500 rupees per year; a minimum wages of 30 rupees per month for workers to relieve them from the burden of inflation; reduction in salaries of highly paid government servants; the abolition of *zamindari* and *jagirdari* systems; the nationalisation of industries;

47 *Ibid.*, p.473.

48 In this constituency, Sheikh Hissamuddin had to face two independent candidates, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Shaikh Sadiq Hasan. As a result of an election petition, Dr Kitchlew was unseated and then a Unionist candidate was elected on this seat. Afzal Haq could not win his seat. See, Governor's Report, Punjab, Chief Secretary to Governor, IOR/L/P&J/5239, ac No.155, NDC, Islamabad.

49 See, Mazhar Ali Azhar's appeal to the Muslims to register their names as voters within the specific time. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, Vol.II, p.208.

a ban on interest to inculcate Islamic values protection of the peasants and factory workers from the traditional moneylenders, and availability of free elementary education for all. It also promised military training to improve the health of the youth; expansion of industries to create opportunities for employment so as to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor, and postulated equality before law. The Ahrar manifesto promised prohibition of prostitution and the abolition of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and race. It also promised to establish Islamic courts along with the commitment to enforce Islamic law of inheritance and protect the religious places.⁵⁰

The MAI leaders publicised their party's socio-economic programme, but when the Unionists put them on a defensive over the Shahidgunj Mosque issue, they began to aggressively focus on the Qadianis.⁵¹ With insufficient funds and practically no press, the MAI candidates depended on the Ahrar firebrand speakers who among others included Syed Ataullah Shah Bokhari, Shaikh Hissamuddin, Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, Sahibzada Faizul Hasan, Qazi Ahsan Ahmad Shujahabadi, Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman Ludhianwi and Maulana Daud Ghaznawi. The MAI often took out long processions characterised by uniformed 'jayush', (bands) and cavalry of the MAI volunteers carrying swords and hatchets. The provincial elections in the Punjab were held on 16-25 January 1937 and about one million voters polled during the closing four days. Fifty thousands Muslim women participated in the voting process which was certainly an unprecedented number.⁵² Considering the limited resources of the MAI, the results were not very discouraging for them although some of its prominent figures lost the elections. Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, Chaudhry Abdul Rahman Khan and Khwaja Ghulam Husain won urban Muslim seats⁵³ and Mazhar Ali Azhar defeated Malik Lal

50 See full text of the Ahrar manifesto in Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, Vol.II, pp. 444-54.

51 One of their public meetings in Jallundhur was disturbed when a hostile group in the audience questioned their non-participation in the Shahidgunj Mosque movement. Because of the ensuing chaos, the entry of Ataullah Shah Bokhari and Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar into Jallundhur was banned. *C&MG*, 27 January 1937, p.5.

52 *C&MG*, 29 January 1937, p.5.

53 *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.I, 5-12 April, 1937, p.154.

Khan, the general secretary of *Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat*.⁵⁴ Three members were elected to the Bihar Legislative Council,⁵⁵ and two Ahrar candidates won the elections to the UP Legislative Council.⁵⁶ The MAI president, one salaar, one Ahrar 'dictator' and one ex-MLC lost to the Unionist candidates. Ghulam Jannat, the only female candidate who contested from the outer Lahore Muslim woman constituency, also lost to Begum Shah Nawaz who stood on the Unionist ticket.⁵⁷ A Unionist candidate, Rana Nasrullah, decisively defeated Afzal Haq, the MAI president, in the urban Muslim constituency of Ferozpur and Hoshiarpur districts. Later on, he again suffered defeat in a bye-election for Muslim urban seat of Amritsar where the AIML candidate, Sheikh Sadiq Hasan, won with the 'support and approval of the Unionists'.⁵⁸ The two members in the Punjab Legislative Council and one member in the Indian Legislative Assembly stayed loyal to the party till the dissolution of the legislatures before the 1945-6 elections.⁵⁹

The impact of short time interlude/alliance between MAI and AIML during the formation of provincial Muslim League Parliamentary Board was decisive and had many far reaching effects, for the future of Muslims in British Punjab. If that alliance could survive between the two rival parties in the elections, a joint force for the welfare of the Muslim masses could be founded in British Punjab, where the Ahrar could mobilize the masses for the Muslim league cause. After launching different campaigns in Princely States, MAI had become significant in Muslim urban areas especially in Sialkot, Gujranwala, Amritsar, and Lahore. The

54 Tauqir Ahmad, *Life and Times of Malik Lal Khan*, (M. Phil. Diss., Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 1998), p.33.

55 *C&MG*, 7 February 1937. Later on, they joined the Muslim League and the Majlis working committee expelled them from the party. *Inqilab*, 29 October 1938.

56 *Inqilab*, 3 November 1937. The two members were Aziz Ahmad Khan and Maulana Zahiruddin. When they joined the Muslim League, the MAI expelled them also from the party.

57 She got 201 votes against 2062 secured by her opponent. *C&MG*, 10 February 1937.

58 Chief Secretary to Governor Punjab, IOR/LP&J/5/239, No.155.

59 Khwaja Ghulam Hussain had to vacate his seat on an election petition filed by Zainul Abidin Shah who then became the member from Multan.

primary reason for the failure of forming this alliance was Unionists anti-Ahrar feelings and skeptical attitude of Muslim leadership of Punjab Muslim League. During 1936 Ahrar had confided upon Jinnah's leadership to counter the Unionist grip on the Muslim political scenario in the Punjab. The Unionists also wanted to break the Ahrar leaders' charisma on the future vote bank of the urban Punjab. So the unity of thought between leaders of the Punjab Muslim League and the Unionists played a big part to undo the possible alliance of MAI with AIML. The MAI's strong anti-Qadiani ideology also barred the Party to become a part of the Muslim League Parliamentary Board. The inclusive character of Jinnah's politics never let AIML merge the MAI whose basic identity among urban Muslim masses was its hatred with Qadianis/Ahmadis on the issue of finality of Prophethood. The MAI never compromised on that issue, although they had been confided by Jinnah on the first clause of their agreement — complete independence — during his meeting with Maulana Habib ur Rahman in Lahore.

The case of Jinnah's effort to include MAI as the part of Muslim League Parliamentary Board in 1936 is a forgotten part of political history of Muslim Punjab which requires considerable mention in the saga of Pakistan.