

Sapru Proposals and the Demand for Pakistan

Amanullah Khan*

Abstract

Sapru Committee was formed under the patronage of Gandhi but it failed to get the support from all the three main parties in the political game i.e., the British, Congress and the League; Congress initially supported the committee under the influence of Gandhi but when Sapru Committee introduced the suggestion for Hindu-Muslim parity, the Congress also rejected the report of the committee. The Committee opposed the idea of Pakistan on the basis of language, race, religion, and the impossibility of segregating Hindu and Muslim communities. It also rejected the two nation theory. The Committee argued that the idea of Pakistan or division of India cannot satisfy the problem of minorities. In other words these proposals rejected the Muslim demand of separate electorates and most importantly the partition of India, which at that time was advocated by both Jinnah and the League. Therefore, the League also strongly rejected the proposals of the committee and considered it as a conspiracy against the demand for Pakistan. This article analyses the Sapru Proposals in context of the demand for Pakistan and investigates the reasons behind the failure of the proposals.

Sapru Committee (also known as the Conciliation Committee) published its proposed constitutional proposals for India in April 1945. The Committee had been appointed by the Standing Committee of the Non-Party Conference in November 1944,

* Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

shortly after the deadlock on constitutional issues and later after the breakdown of Gandhi-Jinnah talks. The committee was instructed to examine the whole communal and minorities related problems of India from a constitutional and political perspective.

This article will be an endeavour to analyze the proposals put forward by Sapru Committee with special reference to the demand for Pakistan. The study will look into the reasons which did not allow the committee to accept the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. The present study intends to analyze those considerations due to which Sapru Committee opposed the demand of Pakistan and hence did not get appropriate response from Muslim League and Jinnah. Moreover, it will also probe into the causes of the failure of the Sapru proposals and its rejection even by the Congress.

The Second World War brought momentous political changes in the Indian political environment. The British Raj in pursuing the Indian backing in the war made certain promises, which in future could have secured the Indian demand for independence. Muslim League after a poor performance in the provincial elections of 1936-37, demanded an independent state(s)¹ consisting of Muslim majority areas for the first time in its Lahore session in 1940. Apart from the ambiguity in the Lahore Resolution of State or States, it became clear that Muslims wanted independence and in no way could live under the Hindu dominance in the absence of the British Raj.

The League and the Congress did not make any alliances or coalition ministries in different provinces after 1936-37 provincial elections. Although even before the elections, Congress and the League had not reached at any unanimous constitutional formula since Lucknow Pact but the elections of 1936-37 and the resultant rule of Congress ministries proved that League and Congress could

1 The words of, "Independent States" were used in the resolution of 1940 which later aroused a heated debate amongst the historians about the intentions of Muslim League, i.e., whether they demanded and struggled for one or more than one states. See Liaqat Ali Khan, comp., *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League: From December 1938 to March 1940* (Delhi, n.d.), p.48.

not work together. It made an impression that the Indians cannot agree on one formula, as one party's gain is another party's loss.²

Still, to break-up the deadlock and to introduce some reforms in the Government of India Act 1935, the British Government sent Cripps Mission, which put forward Cripps Proposals. The proposals however also could not satisfy the demands of the Indians. At the same time, Congress, in its wish to get something from the weak position of the British due to the prolonging of war, started its Quit India Movement under the leadership of Gandhi. The British authorities controlled the situation with an iron hand and put all the top-brass Congress leaders behind the bars.

Following the Cripps proposals was the Wavell plan. To solve the Indian constitutional problems, the then Viceroy Lord Wavell put forward his own proposals, which in his view might bring change in the prevailing bitter political scenario of India. "The Secretary of state was inclined to support the specific proposals made by the Viceroy ... He reiterated that he himself would go a long way towards the recognition of India's self-governing status

2 See for instance Jinnah's statement to press on June 22, 1942, in which Jinnah said, "He (Gandhi) has tried to fool Muslims but has at last shown himself in true colours. I have held that Gandhi never wanted to settle Hindu-Muslim question except on his own terms of Hindu domination." In N. Mansergh, and E.W.R. Lumby, eds., *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, (London, 1970), p.251. Moreover, on March 22, 1945 Jinnah put out a Pakistan Day message which suggests that for the time being, he was not interested in coming to terms with the Congress. He said "It is not possible to believe that any Muslim can tolerate a ministry in a Muslim majority Province, which takes orders from, and is subject to the control of Mr. Gandhi at Sevagram or the Congress, who are deadly opponents of Muslim aspirations." See Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.754.

As a writer rightly observed that except for a short and rather unusual period of six years (1915-1921) during and after the world war, when the Muslim League came to be dominated by Muslim Congressman and temporarily subordinated its creed of Indian Nationalism, its relations with the Congress had never been cordial. The Congress stood for democracy, secularism and a common Indian nationality. The Muslim League existed primarily to safeguard and promote the interests of the Indian Muslims as a separate political entity. In the circumstances created by the basic conflict between the ideologies and objectives of the two organizations, there were possibilities for manoeuvre, but little ground for compromise on essentials. For details see, S.R. Mehrotra "The Congress and the Partition of India" in C.H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright ed., *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947* (Karachi: Afro-Asian Book Company, 2005), pp.192-93.

without waiting for a solution of her internal constitutional problems.”³

The political situation however was moving from bad to worse, as the two parties had yet not reached at any conclusion on the matter of constitutional arrangements. The next effort of reconciliation between the Congress and the League proved fruitless as Gandhi-Jinnah talks ended without producing any formula for the constitutional problems.⁴ After the failure of Gandhi-Jinnah talks “a few of the Hindu and Muslim extremists had been carrying on a bitter controversy over the Pakistan issue and the use of the words ‘Civil war’ was becoming too frequent in public speeches.”⁵

The deadlock over constitutional problems led to a deteriorating communal situation, which one-way or the other could harm the cause of independence. At this, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru⁶ as he was alarmed at the way in which the communal

3 V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd., 1957), p.172.

4 Gandhi-Jinnah talks failed due to many reasons. Jinnah adhered to “two nations” theory according to which Muslims are separate nation from Hindus though intermingled with them. Jinnah pressed acceptance by Gandhi of Muslim League’s Lahore resolution of March 1940. However, Gandhi denied “two nations” theory. Moreover, Jinnah stick to “separation before independence” while Gandhi wanted “independence first and separation of Muslims later”. For details see, Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, pp.62-63.

5 Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, pp.172-73.

6 Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was born on December 8, 1875 at Aligarh, belonging to a highly respectable Kashmiri Pandit family who migrated to Delhi towards the end of 18th century. He got degrees in English literature and Law and started practice at Moradabad in 1896. Later on at Agra he came in close touch with Professor Andrews of the Agra College, and Andrews initiated his young pupil into the world of Victorian liberalism and here one can trace the beginning of his life-long liberal creed. Sapru’s grandfather was close friend of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and in the company of his grandfather he used to visit Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his son Mr. Mahmood. This interaction helped broaden his sympathies and generated in his life long secularism and cultural catholicity. Later on Sapru came in the influence of Gokhale, for whom he had the highest admiration. Sapru was no platform politician and never aspired to be one. Belonging to the Liberal Federation till the early 1930’s, he however had no intention of leading a political party and, latterly, even of seeking election to the Houses of legislature. His political activity was almost wholly confined to constructive criticism, counselling, conciliation and constitution making. Sapru’s entire political career may be said to have been a saga of conciliation. In 1913 he was nominated to the U.P. Legislative Council and in 1916 became a member of the Indian Legislative Council. He was the Law Member of

situation was worsening wrote to Gandhi suggesting the holding of an All-Parties Conference; but Sapru himself was doubtful whether his proposals would lead to any satisfactory result and, after some discussion with Gandhi, the idea was dropped. Another proposal was that Gandhi should call a National Convention but he did not show any willingness. Subsequently, Sapru suggested to Gandhi that the Standing Committee of the Non-Party Conference should set up a separate committee, “to examine the whole communal and minorities question from a constitutional and political point of view, putting itself in touch with different parties and their leaders including minorities interested in question, and present a solution within two months to Standing Committee.” Furthermore, “the committee is to consist of people who are not *repeat* [authors italics] not actively associated with any of the recognized political parties and have not publicly expressed opinions on the controversy”, and the committee’s object was to “lift discussion of communal and political problem from partisan level to scientific and judicial level.”⁷

Gandhi accepted the suggestion but argued that the members of the committee should not be from the Congress, the League, the Mahasabha or any other recognized political party; instead the committee should be consisted of those members who had not committed themselves to any particular view since the break-up of Gandhi-Jinnah talks. Sapru fulfilled this criteria as he was amongst those Congressmen, who left the party in 1919 “... due to the growth of extremist opinion in the Congress and founded National Liberation Federation”.⁸ From the platform of National Liberation Federation, Sapru played an active role in the constitutional debates, which were initiated by the British Raj, to find out the constitutional solution of the Indian problems. As V.P Menon observed, “All members of NLF (National Liberation Federation) wanted desperately to find some solution of communal

Viceroy’s Executive Council 1920-23; represented Government of India at the Imperial Conference London, 1923. For details see, S.K. Bose, *Builders of Modern India: Tej Bahadur Sapru* (New Delhi: Director Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1978).

7 For details see, Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, pp.211-12.

8 Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, p.27.

problems and differences and a conference (non-party) of political leaders was organized in 1941.”⁹ Through non-party conferences and in individual capacity, Sapru was continuously struggling for bringing a solution for constitutional problems but, “H[h]e was against civil disobedience”.¹⁰

Sapru, with the support of Gandhi, organized the Standing Committee of the Non-Party Conference in November 1944 and decided to set up a committee of people from none of the main political parties. The committee only enjoyed the confidence of Gandhi¹¹, a leader of All-India repute as other political organizations especially the League did not show any interest in the working of the committee, and even the then Viceroy Viscount Wavell wrote to Mr. Amery Secretary of State that “I am convinced Sapru Committee will produce no proposals of value especially in views of Jinnah’s hostility. It may however save face by playing to Hindu Nationalist gallery and making communal situation worse not better.”¹²

Sapru started his campaign from getting acquaintance with the viewpoint of different political parties to end the deadlock on constitutional controversies. He wrote to Jinnah, that “I am, therefore, earnestly approaching you, on behalf of the committee and on my own behalf, to enquire if you will kindly allow me and one or two other members of the committee to see you in order to obtain clarification on the practical aspects of the problem.”¹³

Jinnah in his reply, which provided clarity about the League’s stand, stated that, “I regret to say that I can not recognize the Non-Party Conference or its standing committee, and it follows therefore, that I can not recognize the committee recently

9 *Ibid.*, p.106.

10 *Ibid.*, p.141.

11 It seems that Gandhi, after the failure of his discussion with Jinnah, was anxious to call a representative All-Parties Conference and to start afresh, and invited Sapru to do the job for him. See, Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.225.

12 Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr. Amery, November 19, 1944, in *Ibid.*, p.334.

13 Z. H. Zaidi, ed., *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers: Consolidating the Muslim League for Final Struggle August 1944 – 31 July, 1945* Vol. XI (Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam Papers Project, Culture Division Government of Pakistan, 2005), p.345. Also see *Dawn*, (Delhi) December 16, 1944.

appointed by the Standing Committee of the Non-Party Conference for the purpose and manner in which you propose to proceed and deal with the present political situation ... In these circumstances, I am unable to comply with the request contained in your letter.”¹⁴ Moreover, Jinnah once compared the Non-Party Conference leaders to a “Dutch army which has generals but no soldiers.” Jinnah further argued that, “If Sir Tej and his associates are anxious in any large measure to serve India they should appeal to Mr. Gandhi to accept the just and reasonable demands of the Muslims.”¹⁵ Moreover, Sapru settled his plan in consultation with Gandhi without reference to Jinnah and is generally known to have detested both Jinnah and the idea of Pakistan. Moreover, it is easy to interpret the plan as another move by Gandhi to work up publicity against the Muslim League and to split the League ranks if possible.¹⁶ Jinnah’s statement shows the concerns that Muslims had towards the Sapru committee as the League and Jinnah both were convinced that this committee cannot produce proposals which can satisfy the demands of the Muslims. When the committee was about to submit the proposals, Jinnah declared on April 02, 1945 that, “Sapru conciliation committee is nothing but the handmaid of the Congress.”¹⁷

Jinnah on one hand rejected the committee’s own existence and on the other hand did not show any confidence on the way in which the committee handled the political situation. In response to Jinnah’s non-recognition of the committee, Sapru reiterated that, “I (Sapru) have tried to approach Mr. Jinnah. He does not want to recognize the Non-Party Conference or this Committee. I have no quarrel with him. He may not recognize us, but we recognize ourselves. This is my answer. This Committee will go on. This Committee must discharge its duty.”¹⁸ The committee’s legitimacy

14 *Ibid.*, p.353. Also see *Dawn*, Delhi, December 16, 1944.

15 Waheed Ahmad, ed., *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah: The Nation’s Voice Towards the Popular Verdict: Annotated Speeches, Statements and Interviews November 1944-April 1946*, Vol. V (Karachi: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 2000), p.26.

16 Wavell to Mr. Amery, November 23, 1944, Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol. V, p.225.

17 Ahmad, ed., *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah*, p.42.

18 For details see, *Dawn*, Delhi, December 30, 1944.

came under severe criticism after Jinnah's clear-cut rejection of it and, "Sapru ... announced that the committee will use the material already available on the Muslim League case."¹⁹

In fact, the League viewed the whole exercise of forming Sapru Committee as a mere delay move, engineered to sabotage the demand of the Muslims already made public in its 1940 Resolution.

League had also genuine concerns over the composition of the committee, which was dominated by Hindus and very few but less influential Muslim leaders were on its panel. Those Muslim leaders were Wazir Hassan, Mohammad Yunus, and Nabi Bakhsh Mohammad Hussain. While on the other hand the committee had some very influential Hindu leaders, like Sapru, Jayakar, Jagdish Prasad and the Metropolitan, who could never dominate the Muslim members of the committee and hamper their free participation in the working of the committee.²⁰

The British authorities showed luke-warm attitude towards the committee as it did not get the support of the League and perhaps was not able to produce proposals, which may be agreed upon by all the power brokers. The Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State about the assistance, which might be provided by the British authorities. He wrote that the "Government will consider sympathetically any request by committee for assistance. I will see that all reasonable assistance is given but did not intend to make offers or suggestions." The Viceroy even continues, that, "If Sapru asks to see me I will see him, but shall not invite him."²¹ The British administration perceived the committee as a tactic, which had the backing of Gandhi as Viceroy put it, "committee cannot

19 Wavell to Mr. Amery, December 20, 1944 in Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.315.

20 The Sapru Committee consisted of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru (Chairman), Jagdish Prasad (Secretary), Jayakar, P.R. Das, Wazir Hassan, P.K. Sen, The Metropolitan, Radha Karishna, Ramalinga Reddy, Gopaldaswami Ayyangar, Honi Mody, Maharaj Singh, Mohammad Yunus, N.R. Sarkar, K. Srinivasan editor *The Hindu* Tushar Kanti Gosh editor *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Joha Matthai, F.R Anthony, Sachchidananda, Deshmukh Sinha, San T. [Sant] Singh, B.L. Rallia Ram and Nabi Bakhsh Mohammad Yunus see Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, pp.272-73.

21 Wavell to Amery, November 21, 1944 in Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.212.

avoid direct attack on communal problem. He (Jinnah) will also point out that this is another move by Gandhi who is always trying to by-pass either His Majesty's Government or League and hopes this time to work up publicly against and possibly split League."²² However, the British authorities did not want to sabotage the whole process, as Viceroy observed, "I agree that we must not make a move which could be interpreted as an attempt to sabotage a genuine effort by Indian leaders to produce a settlement."²³

Therefore, Sapru Committee received the half-hearted support from the two main parties in the political game i.e. the British and the League; albeit the Congress, which was at that time under Gandhi's influence and Gandhi was the main sponsor of the committee.

One of the English daily articulated the Muslim view point about the committee in these words; "the Non-Party Conference consists of leaders who do not represent public opinion. They are inherently incapable of doing any good to the country. They can hardly be expected to voice Muslim sentiments and support Muslim aspirations."²⁴

Yet, along with these concerns of the League and Jinnah and the unenthusiastic approach of the government, the committee kept continuing its work and proposed some steps, which in the view of its members had to be taken to break the already existing deadlock over communal and constitutional issues. The committee before reaching a conclusion formulated a questionnaire, which was aimed to get the views of the leaders of the committee in the hope to reach at a certain conclusion, which will be in the form of proposals. The questionnaire consisted of eight parts and each part dealt with certain communal or constitutional problems but the remarkably important questions are those, which were devised to settle the demand of Muslims i.e. Pakistan.

The part-II of the questionnaire was, "what are your views regarding the claim of the Muslim League, as expounded by Mr. Jinnah in his letter to Mahatma Gandhi dated 25th September,

22 *Ibid.*

23 Wavell to Mr. Amery, November 23, 1944, *Ibid.*, p.226.

24 Ahmad, *The Nation's Voice*, Vol.V, p.26.

1944, for the establishment of an independent Pakistan state composed of two zones, North-West and North-East comprising six provinces, namely Sind, Baluchistan, The North West Frontier Province, the Punjab, Bengal and Assam, subject to territorial adjustments that may be agreed upon, as indicated in the Lahore Resolution?" the questionnaire further probes that, "If you are agreeable to the establishment of such an independent state, (i) on what principles should its territorial adjustments and boundaries be determined and (ii) what machinery would you suggest for such determination?" and "In case you do not agree to the Muslim League claim for Pakistan, what alternative scheme would you suggest?"²⁵

Gandhi in his reply to the committee's questionnaire stated that, "one thing he (Jinnah) insisted upon was that if I first accepted the Pakistan of his conception, he could then discuss other things with me even though I was but an individual."²⁶ Gandhi further argued that, "I suggested an authority acceptable to both the parties, but he (Jinnah) would insist first on complete partition as between two nations and then an agreement between them as on foreign affairs etc."²⁷

Gandhi rejected the two nation theory in his reply to the committee's questionnaire in these words, "Although I could not agree to the two nations theory, I agreed of the basis of members of a family desiring severance of the family tie in matters of conflict but not in all matters so as to become enemies one of the other as if there was nothing common between the two except enmity."²⁸

All this demonstrates that the proposals, which were to be formulated by the committee, were to be influenced by Gandhi's thinking about the political situation and its solution. It also shows the clear tendency of the committee to propose either delay or postponement of the demand for Pakistan. Muslim press in

25 See Enclosure 2 to No. 218 in Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.432.

26 See Annex to No.344 in *Ibid.*, Vol.V, p.758.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, p.759.

response to the committee's proposals wrote, "Sapru Committee recommends Akhand Hindustan."²⁹

The committee opposed the idea of Pakistan on the basis of language, race, religion, and the impossibility of segregating Hindu and Muslim communities. It also rejected the two nation theory. The Committee argued that the idea of Pakistan or division of India could not satisfy the problem of minorities. The Hindu and Muslim populations were intermingled demographically in a way that, except in parts of the Punjab and Bengal, segregation of the two communities by territorial redistribution was impossible. Under Mr. Jinnah's scheme of partition there would be about 44 million non-Muslims including about 4 million Sikhs in Pakistan as against about 59 million Muslims, and in Hindustan about 20 million Muslims as against 151 ½ million Hindus including the Scheduled Castes. These figures showed that Pakistan would not achieve a segregation of the Hindus and Muslims. The two Muslim and Hindu States, after separation, would continue to have a large Hindu and Muslim populations respectively.³⁰

The committee further stated that Muslims were not justified in demanding a separate state on the basis of nationality, which apart from other considerations depends on language, race and religion. On the question of language the committee argued that "If the test of language is applied, Punjabi is the common language of both Hindus and Muslims in the Punjab and Bengali in Bengal."³¹ The proposals while dealing with the problem of race also rejected the Muslim's approach that separate state should be given to Muslims on the basis of race, which distinguishes them from Hindus. The committee argued that in Bengal there is no ethnological distinction between Hindus and the Muslims, as the Muslims are largely converts from Hinduism. On the other hand the Muslim in the Punjab is more akin to the Hindu of the Punjab than to the Muslim of Bengal.³² While considering religion as a criterion for Muslims to demand separate state, the committee

29 *Dawn*, (Delhi), December 28, 1945.

30 Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, *et.al.*, *Constitutional Proposals of the Sapru Committee* (Bombay: Padma Publication Ltd., 1945), pp.127-28.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

reiterated that this novel theory pushed to its logical conclusion would justify the Indian Christians, Jains and Parsis in claiming that they are a separate nation and entitled to form separate states for their own.³³

The committee further rejected the two nation theory on the basis of its affects, which would be more apparent in Indian states. In the premier State of Hyderabad with a population of nearly 16 ¼ millions, the Muslims were only 12.8%. In Kashmir, on the other hand, the non-Muslim percentage was 23.6. The ruler of Hyderabad was a Muslim while the ruler of Kashmir a Hindu. How will the two nation theory be applied to these large States and what will happen to the right of self-determination? The committee stated that the two nation theory by itself could not be a justification for the division of India, nor does it in any way solve the communal problem.³⁴

Considering the importance of the Punjab for the future Pakistan, the committee argued that Muslims gained a slight majority in this province in a decade or two in the 20th century. Between the years 1881 and 1901, the Muslims in the Punjab were in minority. It is only after the census enumeration of 1911 that they appeared in a small numerical majority.³⁵ On the other hand considering the Muslim population in British India, the committee concluded that in the whole of British India, the Muslim percentage is 26.82. On such a slender basis rests the theory of homeland.³⁶ The committee rejected the League's fear of Hindu domination in a united India and instead argued that, "If the Muslims of India, as claimed by the Muslim League, are afraid to live in a united India with 66 per cent Hindu population, how can the Hindus of Pakistan are expected to agree to live in a 75 per cent Muslim majority zone?"³⁷

The committee, while talking about the defense of the future Pakistan, clearly stated that two areas of Pakistan on the North

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, p.131.

35 For details see, *Ibid.*, p.132.

36 *Ibid.*, p.134.

37 *Ibid.*, p.144.

West and North East will be separated by hundreds of miles of foreign territory belonging to Hindustan. How will they be connected together? Will it be necessary to have a long corridor? Who will ensure the safety of such a corridor if the two States of Hindustan and Pakistan are at war with each other?³⁸

For the provinces, the committee recommended that, “Popular ministries should be re-established in the provinces and allowed to function under the provisions of the Act.” The Committee further recommended that, “In the formation of such ministries the prime minister representing the largest single party in the legislature should be required, as far as possible, to include in the ministry persons commanding the confidence of other important parties in the legislature.”³⁹

Apart from these proposals, the Committee drafted the most important suggestion, which was very essential for the deadlock prevailing at that time in the Indian politics. The Committee recommended that, “In addition to the restoration of autonomy in all the provinces of British India a National Government should replace the present Executive Council at the Center.”⁴⁰

To solve the problem of replacing present Executive Council at the centre by National Government, the Committee put forward two alternatives, which according to the representation of the Committee would provide a solution to the constitutional deadlock. The Committee proposed that, “a federation on [of] India without insisting on the entry of Indian states ..., Indian states being at liberty to accede to the federation in accordance with the terms ...”, the Committee further declared that, “amendments should be brought into force and steps taken immediately to hold elections to the two houses of the Federal legislature and to appoint a Council of Ministers.”⁴¹

The Committee also declared, “Hindu-Muslim parity (excluding scheduled castes) in a constitution-making body;

38 *Ibid.*, p.145.

39 Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to Wavell March 31, 1945 in Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.800.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*

similar parity at the centre, conditional on joint electorates to replace separate communal elections; No partition of India; decisions of the constitution-making body to require a three-fourth majority, in the absence of which His Majesty's Government would make an award."⁴² At the same time the committee recommended that separate communal electorates should disappear and should be replaced by joint general electorates with reservation of seats.⁴³

In other words these proposals rejected the Muslim demand of separate electorates and most importantly the partition of India, which at that time was advocated by both Jinnah and the League. These proposals made the League and Congress both unhappy and dissatisfied, as on one hand it proposed replacement of separate electorate by joint electorate and rejected partition of India, while on the other hand it suggested giving Hindu-Muslim parity in the constitution-making body and similar parity at the centre. "This scheme was strongly opposed by the Muslim League because it rejected Pakistan and reverted to joint electorates" while on the other hand, "Hindu politicians equally opposed the parity principle."⁴⁴

Jinnah rejected the Committee's proposals and in a statement issued to the press declared that, "Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and his associates have been passing off under different labels from time to time, first as All Party Conference then as Non-Party Conference and now they have assumed the label of conciliation committee." Jinnah further argued that, "they (the Committee's members) are nothing but the handmaids of the Congress and have played and are playing to the tune of Mr. Gandhi." Jinnah criticized the character and attitude of the Committee's members, "their pompous and pious profession that they are a detached and independent body of men is utterly false and this is clear from their

42 Hodson, *The Great Divide*, p.118.

43 For details see, H. N. Mitra, *The Indian Annual Registrar: An Annual Digest of Public Affairs of India 1919-1947*, Vol.II (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990), p.177.

44 Hodson, *The Great Divide*, p.118.

previous activities and resolutions and from the character and the nature of present resolution.”⁴⁵

Bitterness of Jinnah was due to the biases the Committee had shown towards the demands of Muslims, as in the mid-40’s the word Pakistan was on the lips of every Muslim Leaguer. Jinnah and the League wanted partition of India, which would lead towards the attainment of Pakistan, while the Sapru proposals insisted “no partition of India”, which did not satisfy the Muslim demand. At another occasion Jinnah reiterated the Muslim demand, that, “Hindus want a central Government controlled by the Hindu majority vested with all the vital powers and thus bringing the Muslims under the control of the government in the centre, this is a position, the Muslims will never accept.”⁴⁶

Thus, the Committee’s proposals did not satisfy the demands of the main political parties of India i.e. Congress and Muslim League, and Malik Barkat Ali, Member Legislative Assembly and member of League Working Committee, termed the proposals as “a dishonest document.”⁴⁷ Jinnah while commenting on a Sapru Committee reflected on the legitimacy of the Committee, “One wonders how conciliation between the Congress and the Muslim League parties is to be brought about by framing proposals for the future constitution of India which, however good on its merit, have not secured the approval of these two parties.”⁴⁸ The Committee was set up to reconcile the differences between Hindus and Muslims as the name itself suggests, but instead of reconciliation, widened the gulf between the two communities.

Now, it is to be analyzed that how the British authorities perceived the proposals. In a letter to Mr. Amery, Sir J. Colville drafted his comments, which represented the British authorities’ reaction towards the Committee’s proposals. About the future of India, which had been proposed by the Committee, Sir J. Colville wrote, “proposals that India be declared Independent State or

45 Ahmad, *The Nation’s Voice*, Vol.IV, pp.78-79.

46 Zaidi, ed., *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers*, Vol.XI, p.333.

47 *Dawn* (Delhi) December 30, 1945.

48 Ahmad, *The Nation’s Voice*, Vol.IV, p.77.

Dominion is clearly inconsistent with present constitution.”⁴⁹ Colville further argued that, “It is clear that Sapru’s resolution gets us no further and may even have prejudiced chance of interim arrangement by provoking violent reaction from Jinnah.”⁵⁰ In yet another letter, Colville while commenting on the Muslim response to the proposals, wrote that, “At first sight the offer to the Muslims seems a generous one, but it is clear that the Muslim League will insist on Pakistan and that most Muslims are frightened of the condition of joint electorates.”⁵¹ Similarly, in a letter to Lord Pethrick-Lawrence, Viceroy Wavell declared the proposals of the committee as “more or less obsolete” and argued that “the weakness of the report, I think, is that it does nothing to bridge the gulf between the Congress and the Muslim League ...”⁵²

To draw conclusions from the Sapru’s proposals, it is important to take into consideration the overall political scenario of India in the mid-40s. It was the period when the British revealed their future policy by certain clues, which indicated that the Raj will soon leave India and in order to get share in the future political set up both the parties, the League and the Congress, were advocating their manifestoes. The League wanted partition of India, which would grant the Muslims with a separate state, while the Hindus were professing the slogan of united India, which will enable them to control the Indian affairs from a strong centre in the absence of British Raj due to their majority.

The Sapru proposals were somehow influenced by the Congress as Gandhi played an important role in formulating this plan, so it proposed ‘no partition of India’ in order to sabotage the idea of Pakistan. The conciliation Committee was Gandhi’s delaying tactics to avoid the partition of India. Sapru proposals demanded ‘parity’ of Muslim-Hindu at centre but proposed to replace ‘separate electorate’ by ‘joint electorate’ which will benefit all those members, who had a Congress backing as Hindus were in

49 Sir J. Colville to Amery April 03, 1945 in Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.810.

50 *Ibid.*, p.811.

51 Sir J. Colville to Amery April 10, 1945 in Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.V, p.860.

52 Wavell to Lord Pethrick Lawrence, January 01, 1946 in *Ibid.*, Vol.VI, p.718.

majority. The members, who were to contest elections on Muslim seats, would get the support of Hindus and will support the Congress at the centre and in the provinces. Thus, the League rejected the Sapru proposals, which did not represent the Muslim sentiments and aspirations. Surprisingly enough, it either did not make its supporters happy and hence proposals were meant for no one, and it did not get the recognition of anyone. The Committee's composition was such that no leader of All India repute was present, so politically it did not get the fame. Constitutionally, however the Committee had reputation but at the end it did not produce anything of practical value.

It is significant to conclude that the Sapru proposals did not make any impact on the political scene of India as the League and British authorities did not consider it worthwhile and the Committee failed even to get the League's opinion as Jinnah refused to meet Sapru. In fact, the matter of resolving the constitutional deadlock between different political parties of India was not an easy task. In such a situation, it was not a wise step to keep on formulating plans without prior approval and consent of major political actors. Jinnah rightly pointed the real hurdle in the working of constitution in India when he stated that "unless the Congress party, which is in a majority in seven provinces, change their mental attitude and learn that real democracy means adjustment and compromise. Unless the largest single party learns this truth and practices it, no constitution can work satisfactorily."⁵³

53 Ahmad, *The Nation's Voice*, Vol. IV, p.77.