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## Topic- Simla Deputation (1906): Prelude to Partition

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### Abstract

The speech undoubtedly prevented the ranks of sedition being swollen by Muslim recruits, and an inestimable advantage in the day of trouble which is drawing. It was a disturbing sign also for the government who was already in the deep crisis due to the situation created by the aftermath of the post-partition period of Bengal. The government was in need to retain friendship with their traditional Muslim friends who, in turn, were bent to safeguard their threatened position. It was in this background that the fabrics of Simla Deputation was built. It was to steer Muslims towards a natural and legitimate direction grounded in closer co-operation between officials and old fashioned advanced school of Muslims.

**Keywords:** Muslim, deputation, Simla, Minto, Lucknow, government, political

### Introduction

The unabated initiatives of the congress for the liberalisation of Indian legislatures received a warm response from the hands of ruling liberal leaders of England. This created uneasiness in the minds of Muslim leaders as they felt that more Indian representation in legislatures was unavoidable. This uneasiness further grew with the emergence of a more radical group within Muslims who were bent upon either to abandon the Muslim traditional policy of cooperation with the government or to ally themselves with the congress. This threatened the position of conservative Muslim politicians. It was a disturbing sign also for the government who was already in the deep crisis due to the situation created by the aftermath of the post-partition period of Bengal. The government was in need to retain friendship with their traditional Muslim friends who, in turn, were bent to safeguard their threatened position. Thus the concept of Simla Deputation emerged from political compulsions of both sides.

In May 1905, Congress sent its president Gopal Krishna Gokhale to England to publicise its case for the reform of Indian Councils beyond the terms stipulated in the Act of 1892. Gokhale argued that the Congress's demands were consistent with the stated objectives of the British rule in India, namely to prepare Indians for Self-Government. Gokhale's views elicited a warm response in England. Prominent members of the Liberal Party, notably Fawcett, Allen Hume, Henry Cotton and William Wedderburn, lent their enthusiastic support or changes in the substance of Indian representation, particularly at higher levels.<sup>1</sup> In his presidential address to Congress, Gokhale declared, "..... the only real and permanent remedy for Indian discontent lay in the institution of Self-Government based on a system of popular elections."<sup>[2]</sup>

Again, there was a change of ministry in England in 1905. The Liberals came to power and John Morley was appointed the secretary of state for India. In July 1905, Morley made his famous speech on the floor of the House of Commons in which he stressed the importance of expanding 'the representative element' within Indian legislative councils.<sup>3</sup> He further suggested Minto to take immediate step towards substantial Indian representation in Indian councils, Minto agreed with him and wrote the Secretary of State "Ideas can only be combated by ideas, and you won't keep the younger generation away from the congress unless you have another programme and another set up of ideas to set-up against theirs."<sup>[4]</sup> With this purpose in mind Minto appointed a Committee known as the Arundel Committee, with a view of finding ways and means for the reforms of Indian legislatures.<sup>[5]</sup>

It was in this background that the fabrics of Simla Deputation was built. It was to steer Muslims towards a natural and legitimate direction grounded in closer co-operation between officials and old fashioned advanced school of Muslims. Certainly the question of representation for Muslims proved to be a meeting place for both.

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The first drafting of the memorial was the outcome of private consultations among Muslim leaders from different parts of the country. The first draft was drafted by Syed Hussain Bilgrami. The contents of the memorial were finally discussed at a meeting of the Muslim leaders from different parts of India held at Lucknow on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September 1906 under the presidency of Ruffiudin Ahmad, a Bombay Barrister. Though the Lucknow meeting was held behind closed doors, the Government of India, however, got information about the discussions through Butler, Commissioner of Lucknow. Butler had received the information from Mohsin-ul-Mulk who considered him as evincing "a kindly interest in matters connected with the Mohammedans".

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1906, thirty five Muslim leaders from all over India gathered in the viceregal Lodge at Simla to present a memorandum to Lord Minto. They were led by His Highness Agha Khan, a former member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council. It was in this address that the claim to separate Muslim representation was made, and it was in the reply given by His Excellency that the claim is commonly understood to have been conceded. Both the address therefore and Lord Minto's reply are documents of the highest importance in tracing the history of Communal electorates in the country.<sup>[6]</sup>

The memorial pointed out, "the position accorded to the Muslim Community in any kind of representation, direct or indirect, and in all other ways affecting their status and influence should be commensurate not merely with their numerical strength, but also with their political importance and the value of the contribution which they make to the defence of the Empire."<sup>[7]</sup>

That while Muslims are a distinct community with additional interests of their own, which are not shared by other communities, no Muslim would ever be returned by the existing electoral bodies, unless he worked, in sympathy with the Hindu majority in all matters of importance.<sup>[8]</sup>

On these grounds the deputation made the following proposals<sup>[9]</sup>:-

- (a). That in the case of municipal and district boards the number of Hindus and Muslims entitled to seats should be declared; such proportion being determined in accordance with the numerical strength, social status, local influence and special requirements of either community and that each community should be their own representative, as in the Aligarh Municipality and in many towns in the Punjab.
- (b). That in case of provincial Legislative Councils the proportion of Muslim representatives should be determined and declared with due regard to the considerations noted above, and that the important Muslim landlords, lawyers, and merchants and representative of other important interest, the Muslim members of district boards and municipalities and Muslim graduates of universities of a certain standing, say five years, should be formed into electoral colleges and he authorized to return the number of members that may be declared to the eligible.
- (c). For their representation in the Imperial Legislative Council they suggested:-
  - (i) That the proportion of Muslims should not be determined on the basis of numerical strength and that they should never be an ineffective minority.
  - (ii) That as far as possible appointment by election should

be given preference over nomination.

- (iii) That for the purpose of choosing Muslim members, Muslim landowners, lawyers and merchants, and representatives of every important interest of a status to be subsequently determined by government, Muslim members of provincial legislative councils and Muslim fellows of universities should be invested with electoral powers.

His Excellency's reply to the address contained the following observations:-<sup>[10]</sup>

The pith of your address, as I understand it, is a claim that under any system of representation, whether it affects a municipality or a district board or a legislative council, in which it is proposed to introduce or increase an electoral organisation, the Muslim community should be represented as a community. You point that in many cases electoral bodies as now constituted cannot be expected to return Muslim candidates and that if by chance they did so, it could only be at the sacrifice of such a candidate's views to those of a majority opposed to his community whom he would in no way represent, and you justly a claim that your position should be estimated not only on your numerical strength but in doubt that it was purely a creation of Muslim Political consciousness. The inspiration for formation of the Simla Deputation came from within rather than without.<sup>[11]</sup> It is further proved by the fact that Mohsin-ul-Mulk had borrowed money from a company to defray the expenses for the Simla Deputation. This loan was taken 7% interest on the personal security of the Nawab. He had hoped that he would be able to repay this amount from subscription but before he could do so, he died on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1907. The company entered into correspondence with the Aga Khan, Haji Musa Khan and Nawab Mulk.<sup>[12]</sup>

On the other hand, there is no dearth of historians who consider the Simla Deputation, "a command performance". In his presidential address at the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the All India Congress committee held at cocanda in 1923 Maulana Mohammad Ali Stated, "There is no harm now in saying that the Deputation was a command performance."<sup>[13]</sup> The most important evidence regarding the nature of the deputation is a letter which Archbold wrote to Mohsin-ul-Mulk on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1906. "It appears from a summary of this letter, how the principal of the Aligarh College used to guide the details of the political policy of the Mussalmans and how he occupied the position of a resident of the Government at Aligarh."<sup>[14]</sup> The letter pointed out, "But in all these matters, I want to remain behind the screen and this move should come from you. You are aware how anxious I am for the good of the Mussalmans."<sup>[15]</sup> There are many historians who suggest that the Deputation was engineered by British Officials to encourage Muslim political aspirations as a counterweight to congress.<sup>[16]</sup>

**Significance** — Buchan, Lord Minto's biographer, says—"The speech undoubtedly prevented the ranks of sedition being swollen by Muslim recruits, and an enestimable advantage in the day of trouble which is drawing."<sup>[17]</sup> He describes it "as a charter of Islamic rights."<sup>[18]</sup> Lady Minto writes in her diary of 10<sup>th</sup> October 1906 that "This has been a very eventful day, as someone said to me, an epoch in Indian history", She predicted that it would affect India and Indian history for many a long year. It is nothing less than the pulling back of sixty-two millions of people from joining the ranks of seditious Minto assured the Muslim Deputation at Simla to introduce the system of election instead of

nomination with the provisions of reservation of seats chosen by separate Muslim electorates. This was a classic example of mingling religion with politics. But to implement this assurance proved to be a very tough task for the British Government as we will see in the ensuing chapter.

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