



Simla Deputation 1906: A Historical Analysis of the Organized Muslim Political Representation in British India

Dr. Adnan Mehr¹, Dr. Abdul Zahoor Khan²

¹Visiting Lecturer, Department of History & Pakistan Studies International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan, Email: adnan.phdhis38@iiu.edu.pk

²Associate Professor/Chairperson, Department of History & Pakistan Studies International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan, Email: dr.zahoorkhan@iiu.edu.pk

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Corresponding Author:

Dr. Adnan Mehr

Email:

adnan.phdhis38@iiu.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to explore the Simla Deputation of 1906 as an important milestone in the evolution of concerted Muslim political organization in British India. It examines the political climate which gave rise to the deputation, the goals and demands of its Muslim leaders, Lord Minto's response, and the implications of the deputation for the subsequent evolution of Muslim constitutional politics. The design of the study is qualitative historical research using primary and secondary sources. These sources consist of primary documents, such as the original address delivered by Muslim delegation to Lord Minto, Lord Minto's reply, letters from the time, government records and archival documents. Whereas secondary sources are scholarly books, journal articles, historical research and studies on the Muslim political entity and constitutional reforms in British India. The analysis has been both historical and analytical that places the deputation into the context of Muslim political mobilization and the British colonial policy. The study concludes that the Simla Deputation had its origins in the long-time Muslim worries about political representation and the shifting constitutional and political realities of 1906. Muslims demanded separate electorates, proper representation in legislative councils and public institutions, more employment opportunities in the government and formal recognition of Muslims as a political community. These demands received greater political validity and had a significant impact on the constitutional changes that led to the separate electorates introduced under the Morley–Minto Reforms of 1909 with Lord Minto's receptive response. The study also shows that the deputation was not simply a British “divide and rule” policy, but was also not a purely Muslim effort. But it was not about the Muslim political agency versus the British imperial interests; it was about the interaction between these two. The Study relates the Simla Deputation to the wider history of representation in colonial India's constitutional politics to add to the more complex picture of Muslim political mobilization. It shows how the deputation contributed to the formalization of discussions on the safeguards for minorities, their representation, and the sharing of political power; and how indigenous political agency and colonial strategy were intertwined. This view offers a more nuanced account of political dynamics that informed the trajectory that followed of Muslim politics in South Asia and, ultimately, the constitutional history of the region.

Historical Background of the Study

Muslims in British India were increasingly concerned with the issue of political representation as the colonial constitutional regime had expanded its political processes over the last few decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The development of representative institutions did not, however, give rise to a consistent understanding of the nature of political representation. Muslim political leaders faced a basic dilemma: how could Muslim political interest be safeguarded in a constitutional framework where representation increasingly came into the equation in terms of numbers? In this shifting political and constitutional context, the Simla Deputation of 1906 sprang up. The deputation was, then, more than just a meeting between Muslim leaders and the Viceroy, it also marked an important stage in the evolution of Muslim political concerns into organized constitutional demands.

The Simla Deputation of 1906 is an important event in the evolution of the political history of Muslims in British India. On 1st October 1906, the prominent Muslim leaders headed by Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III went to Simla to present a list of political, constitutional, educational and administrative demands to the Viceroy of India, Lord Minto, on behalf of the Muslims of India. The deputation is of special importance because it marked the shift of a developing unease of some members of the Muslim leadership about representation in politics to a direct and coordinated constitutional demand on the colonial government. This was later to become one of the most significant aspects of the constitutional changes of the early twentieth century in India, in which it demanded independent electorates for the Muslim community.¹

The significance of the Simla Deputation is much greater than the demands put before Lord Minto. It was a significant step in the evolution of Muslim political efforts from educational and social reform to the organized constitutional politics. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Muslim leaders became more and more concerned with their political status within a colonial state that was beginning to establish representative institutions. A new problem emerged when some Muslims started to be represented in the electoral chamber: how could the interests of a politically and educationally underprivileged Muslim community be safeguarded when the political system began to be determined by numerical strength? The situation became more critical as Muslims were a minority in British India and were spread out and isolated in various provinces.²

The political awakening which culminated in the Simla Deputation had its roots much earlier than 1906. Following the uprising of 1857, the loss of old political structures for the Muslims, alteration of the educational and administrative system and the rise of new political participation modes had a crucial impact on Muslim political thinking. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh Movement were particularly instrumental in stimulating the Muslims to learn modern education and in devising political tactics suitable to the new circumstances of British India. While Sir Syed was more at ease with educational than confrontational politics overall, the intellectual

¹ Syed Razi Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement, with Special Reference to the Political Activities of the Indian Muslims, 1905-1910* (PhD diss., SOAS University of London, 1962), 59-76. The aim of Wasti's research is specifically focused on the causes and evolution of the Simla Deputation and Muslim attempts to secure separate representation.

² Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), especially the chapters dealing with Muslim political community and the development of an all-India political identity. Hardy places the Simla Deputation within the broader development of Muslim political consciousness.

atmosphere that emerged at Aligarh eventually proved to be a strong source for the formation of the political consciousness of the Muslim community.³

The Simla Deputation has also triggered an important historiographical debate. Previous interpretations often saw the event as a part of the British “divide and rule” policy, that is, a conscious attempt by the colonial government to divide the people of India along religious lines to weaken the Indian National Congress and the wider national movement. That is not a plausible explanation which can be wholly ruled out, as the British administration sought to establish political connections with a variety of communities and political factions. Meanwhile, research into the archives has created difficulties for the thesis that the deputation was a British invention. Syed Razi Wasti followed the evolution of the deputation movement to political programme within the Muslim leadership by analyzing the private papers of Minto and Morley, official documents, parliamentary debates, newspapers and other contemporary sources, between 1905 and 1910.⁴

This is a key point to understand the history and importance of Simla. It should not merely be a question of Muslims or British creating the deputation. Instead, it needs to be considered as an encounter between Muslim political agency and colonial constitutional politics. Muslim leaders had their fears about representation, employment, education, and political security, and the colonial state had its calculations to make about a burgeoning nationalist movement. This deputation was thus a declaration of collective political interests on behalf of Muslims as well as a chance for the British government to control the more disputed political situation in India. The significance of the deputation was emphasized by events later in 1906. The All-India Muslim League was founded on 30 December at Dacca, thus giving the Muslims a more permanent political body on the all-India level. The Muslim League should not be considered to be a logical or formulaic result of the Simla Deputation, but rather it was part of the same larger movement toward Muslim political organization. The deputation showed how demands of the Muslims could be made together to the colonial state, and the formation of the Muslim League was an institutional structure for making the demands.⁵

The present study thus focuses on the Simla Deputation as a significant step in the process of the formation of organized Muslim political representation in British India. It emphasizes not only the historical context that led up to the deputation and its goals but also the pivotal Muslim leaders who participated, the key demands made to Lord Minto, and the Viceroy's reply. It also reflects on the historical significance of the deputation and reviews the differing interpretations of the nature of Muslim political agency and British colonial policy. The main premise of this study is not that the Simla Deputation is a British-sponsored “divide and rule” operation but rather that it was not a wholly separate political movement among the Muslims. It, however, was

³ Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India, by David Lelyveld (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978). On the relationship between Aligarh and Muslim educational reform and the development of Muslim political organization, see the discussion of the Simla delegation in scholarship on the Aligarh movement.

⁴ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 77–95. Wasti's research utilized the private papers of Minto and Morley, official government documents, parliamentary debates, and newspaper articles and other contemporary sources.

⁵ On the Simla Deputation and the birth of the Muslim League see Matiur Rahman, *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics, 1906–1912* (London: Luzac, 1970), 28–34. Modern and subsequent scholarship has focused on the larger picture, with the Muslim League being the result of a series of political movements rather than the Simla Deputation.

born out of the political concerns of the Muslims and functioned under the colonial constitutional framework in which Muslim leaders and the British were engaged in their political agendas.

The Simla Deputation should be seen in the context of the changes in Muslim society and politics brought about by the establishment of British political dominance in India. The 1857 rebellion and suppressing it was a turning point. The Mughal political system came to an end, in 1858 the British Crown took direct control of the Indian archipelago, and parts of the Muslim ruling elite felt the impact of the end of the old political system. The Muslims, who had had considerable political and administrative influence before, were finding themselves increasingly embedded in new institutions, that were based on British law, education, administration and political authority.⁶

The significance of this change was the rising importance of modern education. The colonial government became more appreciative of English education and western style institutions and many Muslims at first were not keen to entertain the new education system. One of the most powerful Muslim reformers who tried to respond to this situation was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. The result of his educational program was the founding of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875. The institution was to become an important focus of Muslim intellectual and political life, and also gave Muslims a network to communicate and organize through.⁷

It was also a change in Muslim thinking on representation, brought about by Sir Syed's political thinking, that had a major impact on the political development of the Muslim world. He was very mindful of the implications of representative government in a society riven by religious, social, linguistic and economic divisions. He pointed out that the numerical majority might pose difficulties for minorities where political institutions are not built with proper safeguards. The opposition to the early politics of the Indian National Congress, therefore, had some relation to his fear that given the demographic situation and educational status of Muslims, they might be politically dominated in a representative institution led by a Hindu majority.⁸

A gradual development of representative institutions under the British rule gave these concerns increasing importance. The Indian Councils Act of 1861 provided parliamentary representation and the Indian Councils Act of 1892 brought both an indirect and a parliamentary form of representation. However, the system, though extremely limited, did introduce Indian political leaders to election, representation, legislative councils and constitutional demands, which raised the question of how the interests of Muslims could be safeguarded in an increasingly representative political system.⁹

By this time, then, Muslim political activity was thus growing beyond the educational goal of Aligarh. Muslim leaders began to talk more about employment by the government, education,

⁶ For longer-term development of Muslim political representation and constitutional politics, see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5-12.

⁷ Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*.

⁸ Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*.

⁹ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, for the constitutional developments leading to the reforms of 1909. His study discusses the origins, development, enactment, and implementation of the Indian Councils Act of 1909.

political representation and access to legislative institutions. It was not just a religious concern. It also included the social and economic status of the Muslim minorities in various parts of India. The issue of political representation seemed to be especially pressing in such provinces as were Muslim minorities. In areas where Muslims made up a significant or even predominant population, regional disparities and the unequal development of Muslim education resulted in further political issues. But political debate was further fueled when Bengal was divided in 1905.

The new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam changed the political landscape of Bengal, and was favorably received by numerous Muslim leaders, as it seemed to offer more opportunities for a Muslim-dominated eastern region. Meanwhile, the anti-partition movement, especially in Bengal, helped to spread a general atmosphere of political mobilization. The controversy led many Muslim leaders to believe that they required a more coherent political voice that would advocate for Muslim interests with the colonial authority.¹⁰

In 1905, Lord Minto became the Viceroy of India and in 1910 John Morley became Secretary of State for India and this gave a new constitutional context. The liberal success in Britain in 1906 created hopes for political reform, and debates about reform of Indian legislative institutions stimulated political organizations in India to state their demands. Muslim leaders realized that constitutional change would provide opportunities for Muslims to participate more fully in politics or it would put Muslims at risk of being a permanent minority in what would otherwise be a system of numerical representation.¹¹

Muslim leaders understood that constitutional change could be beneficial for Muslim participation or it could be harmful because they saw that this would put them at risk of being permanently disadvantaged in a system that is largely based on numerical representation. It was in this context that Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh, started taking steps towards a straight path of Muslim appeal to the Viceroy. Muslim leaders themselves were also thinking about a deputation to Lord Minto at this time as revealed from the correspondence during August 1906. The evidence is significant because it renders the more traditional view, which held that the entire operation was a British government move, much more complicated.¹² This evidence is particularly important because it complicates the older interpretation that the entire initiative originated within British official circles. Preparations were still being made in September 1906. The Muslim leaders held a meeting at Lucknow to discuss and finalize the address to be delivered to the Viceroy.

The memorial emerged as the result of meetings among Muslim leaders and expressed a wide variety of political and administrative demands. The last deputation was made up of prominent

¹⁰ For the political environment surrounding the deputation and the Muslim response to contemporary developments, see Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

¹¹ Ibid. Wasti's study specifically examines Minto's policy toward Indian nationalism, the Muslim political movement, and the development of constitutional reforms between 1905 and 1910.

¹² The correspondence between Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Archbold in August 1906 is important evidence concerning the initiative behind the deputation. See Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76. A later scholarly discussion also identifies Mohsin-ul-Mulk's initiative and the subsequent communication with Minto's secretary.

Muslims from across India, led by Aga Khan III. The delegation presented their case before Lord Minto at Simla on 1st October 1906.¹³

Therefore, the Simla Deputation was not born on 1 October. The result of a number of decades of social change, educational reforms, political discussion and the emerging Muslim awareness of the nature of representative government. It had immediate roots in the constitutional context of 1906, but its intellectual and political roots reached back to the changes in the Muslim society of India that had taken place since the late 1850s.

A Review of the Literature

The Historian has been viewed Simla Deputation from different angles. According to Razi Wasti, the deputation is a major representation of Muslim demands for constitutional protections, who is intent on the rising Muslim political awareness.¹⁴ While these understandings have transported important visions to the deputation from different viewpoints, a more productive line of question has been to study the deputation through the lens of Muslim political agency and British imperial politics by Francis Robinson within the same theoretical framework.¹⁵ Thus the question is the Muslims launched a deputation and presented her political demands to the British, or forming the new political system of representation in constitutional means.¹⁶

The understanding of the Simla Deputation can be seen broadly in the backdrop of the different perceptions of the political agency of the Muslims, colonial strategies and the constitution-making process. The latter is based on the rise of a Muslim elite that is politically aware and its efforts to secure its institutionalization in an expanding representative system. It is important because of the elaborate interpretation of the deputation given by Syed Razi Wasti that puts the episode in a wider perspective of the political activity of Muslims in the years before the Morley–Minto reforms. A second thread looks more at the British policy of colonization and the imperial context of the rise of communal political representation. Then the deputation is a sign of the changing perceptions of colonial government about political representation and a method for dealing with political tensions. The third option is to talk about the episode in the context of the

¹³ Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). For the composition and preparation of the delegation, scholarship also identifies Aga Khan as its leader, Mohsin-ul-Mulk as a central organizer, and Syed Husain Bilgrami as involved in drafting the address.

¹⁴ Syed Razi Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement, with Special Reference to the Political Activities of the Indian Muslims, 1905–1910* (PhD diss., SOAS University of London, 1962), 59–76. Wasti's study specifically examines the origin and growth of the Simla Deputation, Muslim political awakening, efforts to secure separate representation, and the development of the 1909 reforms.

¹⁵ Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 1–15; Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), especially the discussion of Muslims acquiring a constitutional identity and entering all-India politics. Hardy's work explicitly connects the Simla Deputation with the development of Muslim constitutional identity.

¹⁶ For the primary evidence concerning the deputation's demands and Minto's response, see the *Address presented to His Excellency Lord Minto by a Deputation of the Muslim Community of India*, 1 October 1906, and Lord Minto's response. Minto's own memoir describes the deputation's demand for Muslim electorates and his government's subsequent approach to separate representation.

wider constitutional development and the demands that emerged at Simla in that context and were associated with institutional changes enacted in 1909.

All of these studies show the importance of the deputation, but each has a double-meaning – one that sees it as evidence of Muslim political agency, and the other that sees it as part of British imperial strategy. This is not the end of the article, however, as it looks at the deputation in relation to the demands of the Muslims and colonial interest as a political process which resulted in the emergence of a new mode of constitutional representation.

Objectives of the Simla Deputation

During this period, the issue of political representation was gaining traction in British India, and the Simla Deputation of 1906 was a reflection of this sentiment. The expansion of representation through institutions was accompanied with considerable anxiety among the Muslim political groups because they felt that if it was predominantly based on numbers, then the Muslims will be poorly represented. The aim of the deputation was thus not only to ask for more political seats but to create a constitutional rule that would enable Muslims to become a part of the new representative institutions of India as a political community.¹⁷

One of the main goals was to ensure proper representation for the Muslims in the legislative councils. Muslim leaders felt it was not sufficient to have a numerical representation, as it could not adequately safeguard Muslim political interests. Their discussions with Lord Minto focused on the need to look beyond simply numbers and consider the historical role of Muslims in India, their political status, and how they fit into the British Indian state. The deputation then called for representation to stop the Muslims from being an insignificant minority in the legislative bodies.¹⁸

A second major goal was the creation of the separate electorates of Muslims. This demand was to become the most important part of the deputation's political agenda. Because under a joint electorate Muslim candidates would be relying on the votes of the larger Hindu population Muslim leaders were concerned about this in provinces where Muslims were a minority. In their opinion, separate electorates would allow Muslims to choose representatives who would be specifically responsible to Muslim voters because they would be more likely to look after Muslim political interests.¹⁹

The need for separate electorates should be seen in the context of the constitutional issues of the time. The deputation was not against representative government per se. To the contrary, its members embraced the concept of electoral institutions but insisted that a minority community needed protection in a politically and religiously diverse society. So how to reconcile representative government with the communal diversity of India became the central problem.²⁰

¹⁷ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*.

¹⁸ "Address Presented to H. E. Lord Minto, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, by a Deputation of the Muslim Community of India on 1st October 1906 at Simla," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 8, Appendix XII.

¹⁹ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*.

²⁰ The original deputation address presented electoral representation as compatible with Muslim communal representation rather than rejecting the electoral principle itself. See "Address Presented to H. E. Lord Minto."

A third goal was to increase the proportion of Muslims in government services. The delegates expressed their worry over the relative weakness of the Muslims in the civil administration, judiciary and other government institutions. In this regard, they asked that Muslims be given good opportunities in the public service and that the current methods of recruitment not exclude Muslim people from higher administrative positions.²¹

This demand was an expression of the overall Muslim concern that there should be no continuation of the lack of representation of Muslims in the administrative apparatus of the state. The deputation also demanded more Muslim participation in the local government institutions such as municipal and district boards. These institutions were becoming more central to colonial administration and were sources of participation in public affairs. In this way, the Muslim leaders showed that their political demands went beyond the Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils to representative local government in general.²²

The other objective was to include Muslims in educational institutions, especially the universities and their governing bodies. The delegates demanded the participation of Muslims in the university senates and syndicates and desired more support by the government in the development of Muslims' education. This need was a continuation of the Aligarh educational movement that saw the importance of modern education in the social and political upliftment of Indian Muslims.²³

The other objective of the deputation was to press for the recognition of the Muslims as a separate political interest in the constitution of British India. It didn't necessarily mean that the delegates were calling for a separate Muslim state or political independence. They sought constitutional protection in the existing colonial system as their immediate goal. The speech in which showed that the delegates were trying to convince British government that Muslims were a politically significant community with historical importance in need of institutional recognition.²⁴

One of the most prominent points of these objectives was thus an effort to institutionalize political issues of the Muslims. Muslim leaders were not about to take anything on faith; they wished for political representation to be formally established in the evolving constitutional framework of India. This was a radical shift in Muslim political sentiment and a shift in Muslim political language, as community issues began to be articulated in terms of constitutional language, elections, representation, public offices, legislative councils and institutional protections. The structure of the deputation itself was also indicative of this newly gained political awareness. Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, via W. A. J. Archbold, wrote to the Viceroy requesting the opportunity to see a Muslim deputation. Lord Minto accepted it and Muslim leaders later convened at Lucknow in September, 1906 to draft a memorandum of demands. The

²¹ "Simla Deputation," *Banglapedia*. The demands included adequate Muslim employment in the civil administration, military, and judiciary and opposition to arrangements that would unnecessarily restrict access to higher posts.

²² *Ibid.* The deputation sought Muslim representation in municipal and district boards as well as university senates and syndicates.

²³ *Ibid.* The educational demands included representation in university institutions and assistance toward Muslim higher education.

²⁴ "Address Presented to H. E. Lord Minto." The delegates described themselves as representing Muslim subjects from different parts of India and presented their demands as constitutional claims within British India.

evidence with regard to these preparations is noteworthy because it shows that the Muslim leadership was not only actively involved in the framing and organization of the deputation before it was presented in Simla, but that it was a deputation which was presented to their own government.²⁵

The goal of the Simla Deputation can thus be considered at two levels of interconnection. In the immediate sphere, the delegates wanted separate electorates, representation in the legislative and local institutions, employment in government services, and the safeguarding of their educational interests. At a more general political level they wanted Muslims to be recognized as a political community with special political interests which might not be safely adjudicated on the basis of numerical majority. The deputation was thus a significant shift from social and educational reform among the Muslims to organized constitutional politics.

Important Leaders and Composition of the Simla Deputation

The Simla Deputation was the culmination of Muslims' growing political organization among significant Muslim leaders, especially the Aligarh movements and the political networks of the United Provinces among Muslims. The delegation to see Lord Minto at Simla on 1st October 1906 comprised some of the leading Muslims of various regions of British India. It was designed to show that the demands being advanced were not confined to one locality, but extended to Muslims' political concerns on a wider scale. The social make-up of the deputation also suggests that in 1906 Muslim politics was still predominantly dominated by the educated and politically powerful Muslim elite.²⁶

The leader of the deputation was Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III. His choice was of political importance. He had a respectable standing among other Muslims and used to have contacts with the influential Muslim leaders and British administration. His leadership lent a sense of authority and visibility to the deputation, which may not have happened if it had been only a regional delegation. The role of Aga Khan was of special significance since the deputation was trying to define a united political community of Muslims which can articulate constitutional demands. When he led, it gave the impression of an all-India Muslim political movement and not a protest by a single province. His next connection with the development of the All-India Muslim League further reinforced his significance in the early organized Muslim politics.²⁷

One of the most important behind the deputation was Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk. He is especially important in the preparatory stage. He was a close associate of the Aligarh political network as a secretary of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh. He began to communicate with them during the month of August 1906, regarding a Muslim deputation to the Viceroy.²⁸

Mohsin-ul-Mulk's involvement puts an end to the perception that Simla Deputation was a forgery. The Muslim leaders were themselves feverishly debating the necessity of a collective constitutional appeal, as is evident in the correspondence in the process of its organization. His

²⁵ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*; "Simla Deputation," *Banglapedia*.

²⁶ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

²⁷ Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims*, 193–98.

²⁸ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

appointment to Aligarh also serves as an example of the linkages between the educational reform of the Muslims and the budding political organization of the Muslims.

Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk Another important figure in the early political organization of the Muslims was Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk. He was closely connected with the Aligarh movement and took part in discussions on the political interests of the Muslims, and later became one of the prominent personalities who were associated with the Muslim League. His significance was not in the personal. He, along with Mohsin-ul-Mulk and others from Aligarh, was a part of a generation of Muslim leaders who felt that even education would not be enough to bring about Muslim interests in the ever-changing political landscape of British India. The importance of political organization and constitutional protection was growing.

A second prominent figure in the deputation was Syed Husain Bilgrami, who was also a Muslim intellectual and administrator. He had experience in administration and education in the government and he played a role in formulating the political demands of the Muslims. Bilgrami's involvement conveyed the administrative and intellectual nature of the early Muslim political leadership. Most of the deputation consisted of people familiar with the workings of the colonial administrative system and who could state Muslim issues in constitutional terms. Their demands, therefore, were not for a radical change in the political order, but were expressed in terms of representation, government jobs, education, elections, and institutional protections.²⁹

The part played by W. A. J. Archbold, principal of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, is of special interest because it has given rise to the historical controversy regarding the source of the deputation. Archbold was English and had many ties with Aligarh leadership. He helped with the communication between the Muslim leaders and the colonial government in preparation of the deputation. His involvement has led some to believe that the whole movement was organized or manipulated by the British government. This is a conclusion, though, that should be taken with a grain of salt. It is apparent from the correspondence that Muslim leaders such as Mohsin-ul-Mulk were already thinking of a deputation when the final preparations were put in place. Archbold's involvement thus suggests participation in the process by the British, but does not necessarily make it a British invention.³⁰

This distinction is significant in the context of 1906's political history. The British administration was clearly motivated by strategic goals in fostering political representation by Muslims. But Muslim leaders had political issues as well. Thus, the Simla Deputation should be analyzed through the interplay of these two aspects and not through a rather simplistic dichotomy between 'British conspiracy' and 'Muslim initiative'.

The deputation comprised about 35 Muslim leaders of the country, from various parts of British India. It was a matter of politics that leaders from various parts of the world were included since this would give the delegation a wider constituency of Muslims. Its membership included the nobles, landlords, professionals, educationalists, administrators and others of the Muslim elite.³¹

²⁹ Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 109–18.

³⁰ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

³¹ Simla Deputation," *Banglapedia*, which identifies the delegation as consisting of thirty-five prominent Muslim leaders and discusses its major demands and organization.

But the lineup of the delegation also shows one of the drawbacks of the event. No deputation can be considered as a true democratic representation of all Indian Muslims in the modern sense. There was no direct representation of peasants, workers, women, lower income Muslims and many ordinary Muslims. At this point, political involvement was mostly restricted to the educated and socially influential elite. This does not detract from the historical significance of the deputation. Rather, it demonstrates the nature of early constitutional politics in colonial India. Firstly, petitions, deputations, associations, educated elites, landlords, and influential community leaders have been the means of political representation.

The Simla Deputation was thus an elite organization of political representation, but was still a model that could be replicated to voice Muslim political demands at the all-India level. The region and its political dimension are critical. The political impact and the region are key factors. That the delegation was so diverse regionally was especially significant. The political issues facing the Muslims were quite different in Bengal, the United Provinces, Punjab, Bombay and other parts of the country. Muslims were a majority in some provinces, and more or less a minority in others. Their educational, economic and administrative statuses were also varied.

The deputation sought to address these regional differences by making some demands Muslim ones, on the grounds that there were common demands. The most important of these was political representation. The deputation helped to create an all-India idea of the Muslim political concerns through the presence of different area representatives under a common constitutional programme.

In this regard, the impact of the delegation is not only in the individuals that took part in it, but also in its substance. It was a proof of the fact that the Muslim leadership could cooperate and act together across the provinces to voice a joint political demand against the colonial administration. This was a significant move in the process of creation of permanent all-India Muslim political organization later in 1906. Analytical Assessment The leadership and membership of the Simla Deputation highlights the following three aspects of early twentieth century Muslim politics.

The first was the elite leadership of the movement, which involved the leading landowners, the intellectuals, the administrators and the educational leaders. Second, it was more and more institutionalized in the arena of constitutional politics, not in the opposition to British rule. Third, it was turning toward being all-India oriented, although differences between regions were still quite large.

In view of the traditional interpretation of deputation, it is crucial that the evidence related to Mohsin-ul-Mulk's initiative and the participation of Aligarh leaders is brought into the picture. British officials played a part in arranging the meeting and there was a political agenda among the colonial government. However, the leaders of the Muslim community played an active part in organizing the delegation, drawing up its demands, and making political claims they deemed essential for the Muslim community.

The deputation must then be read as a manifestation of the political agency of Muslims in the context of the opportunities and limitations of British colonial constitutionalism. The demands of the Simla Deputation were of great importance. The political impact of the Simla Deputation was largely in the demands made before Lord Minto by the Muslim leaders. These demands were a

response to the new political realities of British India, and the increasing awareness of the Muslim elite that the establishment of representative institutions had the potential to significantly change the nature of power relationships. The delegates were not against devising a new constitution or representative government. Rather, they wanted guarantees that they would be able to engage in the new political order without being permanently dominated by a numerical majority. The demands thus marked an effort to articulate the political issues of the Muslims in a coherent constitutional programme.³²

Discussion

The demand of the Simla Deputation had the greatest impact and was the most significant historically, namely the establishment of separate electorates for Muslims. In this model, Muslims would have their own legislators to represent them in the democratic structures. The delegates felt that this was essential as if the elections were based on a majority based on numerical majority, Muslims may be unable to elect representatives true to their political preferences. The deputation did not just state that the Muslims were religious minorities. The delegates highlighted the special historical, political, educational and social status of Muslims in India. They said that the political significance of the Muslim community should be considered as well as its numbers. This was a key step in the constitutional evolution of British India. The demand was the first to bring up the idea that political representation was legitimately possible according to community identity.³³

The separate-electorate system was to be a flash point for controversy and it would help to communalize electoral politics, but in 1906 Muslim leaders saw it as a way of guaranteeing political security in a diverse colonial society. The demand was also based on the firsthand experience of the Muslim leaders in operating representative institutions. They felt that the idea of creating a joint electorate would in the weaker provinces lead to the Muslim candidates relying on the majority community's assistance. In contrast to separate electorates, the latter would see Muslim representatives having their electoral legitimacy largely from Muslim voters.

A second big demand was adequate representation of the Muslims in legislative councils. The delegates had demanded that the Muslims be given representation based on their population, as well as based on their historic and political significance. The argument of the deputation was primarily over the difference between numerical and political representation. Muslim leaders felt that only a mere formula would be able to capture the past contributions by the Muslims to the political life of the country. For them, it was therefore essential to ensure that the new legislatures would include Muslims. This demand was especially relevant given that the colonial government was already mulling on constitutional changes. The Muslim leaders realized that the decisions made in 1906 would have an impact on the future form of representative government. The deputation thus wanted to create the Muslim political protections prior to the wider extension of the electoral system.³⁴

³² Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

³³ “Address Presented to H. E. Lord Minto, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, by a Deputation of the Muslim Community of India on 1st October 1906 at Simla,” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 8, Appendix XII. The text of the address is reproduced in full online.

³⁴ Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims*, 193–202.

The deputation also protested against the lack of advancement of Muslims in government services. The Muslim leaders felt there was a lack of representation for Muslims in the upper echelons of the civil administration and other government institutions. The delegates thus sought adequate avenues for appointments of qualified Muslims to government jobs. This demand was closely linked with the educational and socio-economic issues which constituted the political thinking of Muslims since the nineteenth century. The Aligarh movement had already made an attempt to motivate Muslims to get modern education because getting modern education was thought to be necessary for entering into government service and other modern professions. Political representation was therefore seen as merely a component of a wider agenda of Muslim development. An increase in the number of government jobs would empower the community economically and give Muslims a voice in the institutions that ruled over British India.³⁵

The deputation also demanded sufficient representation of the Muslims in municipalities and district boards and other local bodies. These bodies became significant in the functioning of British India and became a vital forum for political engagement. Muslim leaders feared a simple proportionate and on-the-poll basis representation would be detrimental to the Muslim majority in certain regions where they are a minority. They thus, desired that a Muslim element be safeguarded locally as well as in the legislative councils. This demand, which extended beyond the question of the Imperial Legislative Council, showed the political agenda of the deputation. Administrative system thinking process regarding representation of Muslim leaders. Local representation was also a demand, so Muslims were becoming more familiar with the mechanisms of modern representative politics.³⁶

Another significant item on the agenda of the deputation was education. Muslim leaders wanted to see proper representation in universities, senates, syndicates, and other educational institutions. The demand was a continuation of the age-old concern of Aligarh leadership over the backwardness of Muslims education. With the establishment of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College the importance attached to modern education had been shown, and Muslim leaders felt that more opportunities should be given for Muslim advancement through educational institutions. The delegates thus demanded political representation as well as institutional involvement in decision making in the institutions that determine higher education. The demand points to the relationship between the Muslim political movement and the educational reform movement of Aligarh.³⁷

One of the other key issues in the deputation's programme was the demand for fairness in public appointments and administration of public affairs towards the Muslims. The delegates felt that the interests of various communities should be taken into consideration in the making of decisions. This was part of a general attitude during the entire deputation that Muslims should not be regarded simply as individuals in a numerical majority-minority context but also as a politically viable minority. The delegates believed that this recognition was essential for the stability and fairness of India's constitutional development.

³⁵ Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, 109–18.

³⁶ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

³⁷ Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*.

The various demands of the deputation were finally brought around to a generalized political demand that the Muslims be recognized as a political community in British India. This was perhaps the most significant concept breakthrough which the deputation was, by itself, a part of. Muslim leaders are not just asking for government benefits for a religion. They had started building an argument for the political framework of India to acknowledge India's communal diversity. The need for separate electorates was thus linked to the wider idea of political representation. The Muslim community cannot simply be represented by a numerical formula if they are recognized as a political community. The right to design the institutions of the Constitution was to be given to their historical situation, political interests, and social conditions. Weightage is a function of demand.

The concept of political weightage was closely related to separation of electorates. Muslim leaders made the argument that representation should at times be greater than the proportion to which they could be represented on the basis of a simple population formula, especially when they felt that their historical and political significance required more than the simple formula. This demand was controversial considering it was in opposition to the recent liberal democratic principle of representation based on population. However, it reflected the particular situation of colonial India when political institutions were being introduced in a society that was being divided on religious, linguistic, regional, caste and social lines. Muslim leaders did not always equate political equality with equal numbers. Rather, they felt that institutional safeguards for minorities were at times needed to provide substantive political protection.

One significant aspect of the demands put forward by the Simla Deputation was that they were also constitutional. The delegates did not ask for the independence from Britain or immediate self-government. Rather, they called for that Muslim protection to be part of a developing constitution within the colonial government. This is historically important since it shows how early political consolidation in Islam occurred in the context of colonial constitutionalism. Muslim leaders tried to persuade British government by means of Petitions, deputations, negotiations, and constitutional demands. The Simla Deputation was thus a significant shift from social and educational reform amongst the Muslims to organized constitutional politics. The demands included a political programme that enabled Muslim leaders to pool their resources and negotiate their status with the colonial state.

The requirements of the Simla Deputation must be interpreted in the context of the political situation in early 20th-century in India. The Muslim leaders were reacting to a growing vision of representative government which was taking shape when politics was increasingly being debated in terms of elections and numerical majority. Their demands were consequently defensive as well as constructive. They wished to be part of this new political process but did not want to see a free-for-all majoritarian system that would continually diminish the Muslims into a minority. Meanwhile, the demands imposed the concept that would have far-reaching implications over the long term: communal identity as a basis for political representation. The principle of separate electorates for Muslims was included in constitutional changes of 1909.³⁸

The reasons why the demands were made historical are not only because they were what Muslim leaders asked for in 1906, but because they ultimately led to what. The deputation played a pivotal role in shifting the Muslim political agenda from a policy one to an institutional

³⁸ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*.

constitutional programme. It set the tone for subsequent debates on representation, safeguards for minorities, communal electorates, and political status of Muslims in British India.

Reaction of Lord Minto

One of the most significant elements of the episode was Lord Minto's reply to the Simla Deputation. It was not just a formality for the Viceroy to accept the Muslim representatives but he also showed that he took them seriously in the political issues they were raising. This is especially relevant as it was a first glimpse at the trajectory of British constitutional policy regarding Muslim representation. Meanwhile, Minto's response has been a focus for the historiographical dispute over the nature of the deputation as a Muslim political initiative or a British imperial ploy. Aga Khan III, as their leader, the thirty-five Muslim representatives reached the Viceregal Lodge at Simla on 1 October 1906. The delegation presented a detailed address explaining its concerns about the future constitutional development of India. The speech highlighted that Muslims were important community members with their representation not being decided by considering only the size of the community. The delegates were particularly interested in ensuring proper representation in legislative councils and other public forums, and wanted to put in place a mechanism for electing Muslim representatives by Muslim voters.³⁹

Minto's reply was very accommodating. He welcomed the delegation and noted the significance of the issues raised in the address given by the delegation. His response implied that he was ready to embrace a key premise of the political agenda of the Muslim groups, which was that the political agenda of Muslims had to be taken into account in the construction of the constitutional system in India. At the time, Minto was well aware of the importance of the deputation and what it was raising concerns about.⁴⁰

It is clear how important Minto's response is when viewed in light of the political context of 1906. The British government was thinking over constitutional changes, and political agitation of the Indian National Congress was gaining more importance. Thus, Minto was faced with a situation of having to appease competing demands from political and communal groups. The Muslim leadership got a major political opening because he was willing to accommodate the Muslim demands.

The Minto quote & the Demand for Separate Representation Minto's response was most important in terms of the idea of separate Muslim representation. The exact constitutional structure was not to be determined but Minto was sympathetic with the Muslim demand that they should be represented in a manner which would not expose them to the threat of being swamped by a numerical majority. The very response was significant because it brought to the fore a demand previously expressed mainly by Muslim political leaders and made it official. The deputation had been asking for the recognition of Muslims as a distinct political interest and

³⁹ "Address Presented to H. E. Lord Minto, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, by a Deputation of the Muslim Community of India on 1st October 1906 at Simla," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 8, Appendix XII.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* The contemporary text preserves both the address of the deputation and Lord Minto's reply, providing an important primary source for examining the exchange.

Minto's reply had essentially recognized that a Muslim's representation could not always be dealt with exactly as would be territorial representation.⁴¹

This exchange was significant in the evolution of the Morley-Minto reforms. Eventually, the Indian Councils Act of 1909 enacted separate electorates for Muslims, allowing Muslims to elect Muslim representatives. Muslim representation in a non-proportional manner also was included in the reform in some instances. In the few years that ensued, therefore, the political argument that was presented at Simla in 1906 was converted into an institutional constitutional arrangement.⁴²

However, Minto's positive reception of his gift must not be taken as altruistic. The actions of the Viceroy were in the context of the overall political agenda of the British Empire. Management of the Indian political organizations had become an important issue for the colonial administration as a result of the growth of the Indian National Congress and the rising nationalist movement. Minto understood that the Muslims constituted an important political factor and that there were benefits in catering to their demands. The study of Syed Razi Wasti of the private letters of Minto and John Morley shows that the issue of Muslim representation in politics was part of Minto's overall strategy of Indian politics. The other significance of Wasti's work in the archives is that it highlights the intricate process in which the development of the Simla Deputation and the eventual reforms were not one-sided events, but involved both the political activity of the Muslims and the policies of the British government.⁴³

This is an important consideration in the interpretation of the deputation. The British government had good reason to be pleased with the divisions within Indian groups. But, the British interest in Muslim representation cannot be equated with the notion that Muslim leaders were mere pawns in British policy. The proof of the deputation's preparation is that the Muslim leaders themselves were worried about the representation in the constitution and they made every effort to put their grievances before the Viceroy.⁴⁴

The favorable response of Minto subsequently became the basis for the argument that the Simla Divide and rule is the "misguided" interpretation. This positive reply from Minto was later used as a proof of the 'divide and rule' policy of the British. This interpretation holds that the British government actively fostered Muslim political separatism in order to divide the Congress and disenfranchise the creation of a national movement for Indians to counter the British. This view suggests that the British government deliberately promoted Muslim political separatism to destabilize the Congress and to prevent the emergence of a unifying Indian nationalist movement. This is a line of inquiry that has some historical justification.

The colonial government had definite ideas about the importance of keeping the political peace and controlling the conflicting political parties. The notion of communal interests could undermine the demand for a single representative system. But this is a thumbnail sketch of British manipulation is an oversimplification of the historical facts. The Muslim leadership had its own political agenda, and the demands of the deputation had been molded by Muslim political and educational organizations before it met Minto. The letters of Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk to W.

⁴¹ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

A. J. Archbold, the principal of Aligarh, dated August, 1906, are of special importance in this regard. It meant that Muslim leaders were making every effort to meet with the Viceroy before the final arrangements were made.⁴⁵

Minto's positive response, however, resonated in a highly psychological and political way with the leadership of the Muslims. The highlighting of the deputation was that organized Muslim political demands can be addressed directly by the top official of the British government in India. This experience helped to spur Muslim leaders to strive for a more lasting political structure. This current trend of organized Muslim politics was reflected in the formation of a new organization, the All-India Muslim League at Dacca on 30 December 1906, just three months after the Simla Deputation. The deputation was not the sole cause of the formation of Muslim League but it did help show how the coordinated political activity on the all-India level could prove useful.⁴⁶

The ultimate impact of Minto's reaction may be viewed in the context of the subsequent constitutional changes. In discussions between the Government of India and the British government in London, the question of Muslim representation was once again brought to the forefront in 1906-09. Initially, there was some hesitation on the part of the Secretary of State for India, John Morley, to accept communal electorates and he was more open to the idea of a joint electorate with reserved representation. Minto, however, gave a greater stress to catering to Muslim demands. The last reform settlement led to the introduction of separate Muslim electorates in the Indian Councils Act of 1909.⁴⁷

This development gave ceremonial significance to the Simla Deputation, which was much more serious than its apparent nature. This became linked up with a deep shift in the constitutional arrangement of British India after thirty-five Muslim leaders signed a petition.

Minto's answer should, therefore, be read on two levels. As a direct response, it was manifestation of recognition of the political issues of the Muslims and encouragement to those who organized the deputation. Imperially it also played a significant role in facilitating relations between the colonial state and the "Muslim leadership" of the time, a group that was important for British political agendas and was the target of growing nationalist mobilization. The history thus lends itself to a more nuanced reading. Minto was not responsible for the creation of Muslim political consciousness and he was not merely a passive recipient of an independent Muslim movement. Instead, the Simla Deputation set up a political nexus where the Muslim leaders made legitimate constitutional demands and the colonial government acted on its political score-sheet.

This interaction may turn out to be the most crucial part of Minto's reaction. It shows how colonial constitutional politics could serve as the basis for representation of the minorities while also helping to institutionalize the divisions among the communities. The separate-electorate

⁴⁵ "Simla Deputation," *Banglapedia*. The account records Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk's initiative through W. A. J. Archbold and the subsequent agreement of Minto to receive the deputation.

⁴⁶ Rahman, *From Consultation to Confrontation*, 28-40.

⁴⁷ "Constructing Nation and History," drawing on Lord Minto's correspondence with John Morley and the Morley Papers.

principle which resulted from this process would shape Indian constitutional politics and have far-reaching implications on future history of Hindu-Muslim relations and Pakistan Movement.

The Simla Deputation of 1906 was very important in the political history of British India as it marked a crucial shift from fragmentary Muslim political interest to a more organized and constitutional representation. Lord Minto's meeting with a group of Muslim leaders can only be comprehended in the context of its importance. Its deeper meaning was the political principle it tried to articulate: Muslims have an effective voice in representative institutions as a political community. The deputation thus became an important milestone in the evolution of organized Muslim political politics and played a significant role in the constitutional discussions that led to the constitution of India. The immediate impact of this deputation was recognition of Muslims as a separate political block. The Muslim political activity was basically confined to educational institutions, associations, newspapers, local political institutions and Aligarh movement until the year 1906.⁴⁸

The Simla Deputation presented these concerns before the top official of the British government in India. Muslim leaders made a joint memorandum on representation, employment, education and protection under the constitution, showing their ability to develop and articulate an All-India political position.⁴⁹

The deputation was significant for two reasons: it questioned the idea of representation based solely on numbers and it was the first time in the history of the United States that the concept of proportional representation was introduced. The Muslim leaders contended that the significance of the Muslim community in terms of the history, politics, education and administration was not simply being captured by majority representation. Later it became linked with this demand for representation based on political significance instead of the number of people to the idea known as "weightage." This principle was an important aspect of later constitutional deliberations.⁵⁰

The states introduced the concept of Separate Electorates. The most lasting constitutional impact of the Simla Deputation was the eventual implementation of separate electorates for the Muslims. It was a request the delegation made in 1906 that didn't immediately result in such a system. Instead, it began a political and administrative dialogue in which the British government considered the issue of representation for Muslims in constitutional reform. The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 or the Indian Councils Act, in principle, gave separate electorates to Muslims. In this practice, Muslim voters would vote for Muslim candidates to fill specific legislative seats. It was an important break with the idea of representation on a strictly territorial basis. In the electoral system of British India, political identity was now officially linked to communal identity.⁵¹

This was important not just for the constitutional changes but for far more. As a result of the establishment of communal electorates, political parties and other political organizations were more inclined to mobilize voters on communal lines. The pact offered the Muslims a means of

⁴⁸ Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, 140–55.

⁴⁹ Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 280–305.

⁵⁰ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 59–76.

⁵¹ Government of India, *The Indian Councils Act, 1909*, 9 Edward VII, c. 4; see also Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*.

political representation outside the Hindu majority constituencies. Meanwhile, it helped to institutionalize the differences of the community in the politics of the colonies.⁵²

The Simla Deputation also helped in the evolution of organized Muslim political activity on an all-India basis. The deputation proved that Muslim leaders from various regions were able to work together on common constitutional demands. This experience was significant in the political atmosphere which led to the formation of the All-India Muslim League at Dacca in December, 1906. However, the relationship between deputation and Muslim League should be taken with a pinch of salt. To say that the Simla Deputation, in itself, automatically or mechanically produced the Muslim League would be historically incorrect. Muslim political organization had much firmer foundations in the Aligarh movement, regional associations of Muslims, educational activities and discussions on representation. The deputation, however, marked a significant example of the political benefits of group mobilization and paved the way for a conducive atmosphere in which a nation-wide Muslim political body might develop.⁵³

What had just occurred was a Muslim League was formed just a few months after the deputation, which was an indicator of the overall change. The Muslim political leaders increasingly went beyond the focus on education and social reform and organized political participation. There was a crystallization of political language too: issues of education, employment, representation and communal protection were becoming more closely linked in an emerging Muslim political agenda. The evolution of the idea of a Muslim political consciousness.

The other significant historical achievement of the Simla Deputation was the creation of the political awareness of the Muslims. This consciousness is not the same as the latter demand for Pakistan. This was the year 1906, when the leaders of the deputation were not asking for the partition of the Indian sub-continent or an independent Muslim state. They wanted mostly a constitutional change; and their demands were set within the framework of the British imperial system.

The deputation, however, helped to lay the foundations of an important political principle - that Muslims were capable of organizing and advancing the cause of the Muslim community as such. This notion went from being minor to being more important as political parties became more competitive and political participation grew in the wake of constitutional changes. The development was thus a gradual one and not predetermined. The political consciousness which was declared at Simla in 1906 was far from having a fixed blueprint for the Pakistan Movement. Instead, it was a part of a larger series of debates and redefinitions of the issues of representation, minority protections, provincial autonomy, communal identity and political power.

The deputation also has a significant role in the history of the constitutional politics of British India. The demands proved that it was not a simple majority principle that could be applied in the design of representative institutions in a diverse society in a socially and religiously divided society. The British government thus found itself with a problem of constitution: how to give political representation to more people without giving one community an unfair advantage over another? The colonial state reacted by making communal representation a part of its constitution. The reforms of 1909 were thus a compromise between the political demands of the Muslims and

⁵² Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 5–15.

⁵³ Mantiur Rahman, *From Consultation to Confrontation*, 28–40.

the continuation of British attempts to control the development of rival political forces. This double aspect is crucial in the comprehension of the historical value of the deputation. The reforms failed to deal with the communal tensions. Rather, they established a formal constitutional process which allowed the development of a political organization of communal identity. Muslims in majority Hindu provinces were shielded from the total political marginalization by the separate electorates, and the separate political constituencies among them were also nurtured. This paradox continued to permeate Indian politics over the next few decades.⁵⁴

The significance of the Simla Deputation is also related to the ongoing struggle over Muslim political agency. One-time reading was that the deputation was mostly a case of British “divide and rule,” as the British authorities sought to promote Muslim separatism to undermine Indian nationalism. This is an accurate description of a true part of colonial political strategy, but this is not enough of an explanation. All this is confirmed by the documentary evidence which shows that the leaders of the Muslims organized the deputation, formulated their political demands and looked for direct access to the Viceroy. Syed Razi Wasti's archival research is significant because it refutes interpretations which view the whole episode as a British creation. His study of private letters and official documents shows the role which Muslim initiative played in the organization of the deputation and the growth of the demand for separate representation.⁵⁵

However, political agency for Muslims is not the same as neutrality on the part of British officials. Minto's reaction was positive because of his own perception of Indian politics. The British government understood that the cooperation of the Muslims in politics was a major force which could serve as a counterweight to Congress nationalism. Thus, for a while the Muslim political agenda and that of the colonial government coincided, but with distinct ends. The Simla Deputation, then, must be read as a dialogue between Muslim political agency and British colonial strategy. Muslim leaders relied on the colonial constitutional system to get political protection, and the colonial government leveraged Muslim representation as a tool in its larger policies for Indian politics. Both sides did not have full control over the results of this interaction.

In the twentieth century, the importance of the Simla Deputation became more and more apparent. From 1909 separate electorates were permanently introduced into the constitutional process and were retained in subsequent constitutions (with changes). They had an impact on the political tactics used by the Muslim League, the Indian National Congress, the political parties in the provinces and the British government. The constitutional changes in 1909 were also a foundation that allowed subsequent discussions on the political rights of the Muslims. The ongoing issue of Muslim representation in a growingly competitive constitutional system was expressed in various ways in the Lucknow Pact of 1916, the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, the Nehru Report of 1928, Jinnah's Fourteen Points of 1929, the Round Table Conferences, and the Government of India Act of 1935.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 180–220.

⁵⁵ Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement*. in particular, Wasti's archival study debunks the view that the Simla Deputation was a British ploy, and casts light on who initiated it: the Muslim political leaders.

⁵⁶ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 5–20; Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, 150–75.

To say that the Pakistan Movement was directly caused by the Simla Deputation is an exaggeration. The political environment of the 1930s/40s was significantly different from that of 1906. However, the deputation set a precedent for Muslims being considered as a separate political community from a constitutional point of view. This precedent was used later in political discourse by Muslim leaders to make claims for protection, power sharing, provincial autonomy, and even nationhood.

The significance of the Simla Deputation can therefore be summarized in three interrelated aspects. Firstly, it symbolized the beginning of a well-organized Muslim political representation at the all-India level. Second, it helped pave the way for the institutionalization of communal representation in the constitution, which came about in 1909 through separate electorates. Thirdly, it laid the groundwork for the following formation and expansion of organized Muslim political politics, especially the formation and growth of the Muslim league. So was its historical heritage. Separate electorates provided a constitutional protection to Muslims from the domination by numerical majority on one hand, and on other hand it ensured that Muslims could vote freely and independently.

Conversely, the same set up strengthened the notion of communal politics in elections and helped to further divide Hindu and Muslim voters. The Simla Deputation thus amounted to a demand for minority protection as well as an important step in the institutionalization of communal politics. The most even interpretation is that the deputation was not a British colonial conspiracy, nor a singular manifestation of political separatism by the Muslims. It grew out of a transitional political climate in which Muslim political leadership began to take seriously the need for collective political organization, and British rulers tried to deal with the demands for representative government. The rationale, of course, for its importance is that point of community, constitutionalism, political representation, and colonial power.⁵⁷

Key Findings and Value of the Study

This study reveals that there are a political dimension and political will of Muslim leaders which was being rebounded in the Simla Deputation. The demands of the delegation, such as separate electorates, adequate representation in legislative councils and public institutions, access to work in the government and recognition of Muslims as a distinct political community are indicative of the political strategies being developed by Muslim leaders in the constitutions. In thus contradicting the reductionist concept of the deputation as a British colonial experience, the evidence has become a subject of debate. The evidence, therefore, challenges the reductionist idea of the deputation as a purely British colonial experience and has become a subject of debate. The study further reveals the significance of the deputation in terms of the process of shifting the political issues of Muslims to constitutional demands.

The Muslim demand Lord Minto were not only words of political nervousness but also provided a scheme of institutes to safeguard Muslim representation. It is prior to mention here that the deputation was a gateway to mobilize political awareness and organized constitutional

⁵⁷ See “Address Presented to H. E. Lord Minto, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, by a Deputation of the Muslim Community of India on 1st October 1906 at Simla” and his reply in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 8, Appendix XII.

negotiation. The main conclusion of the study is that the Simla Deputation came up as a picture of the political agency of Muslims vs the interests of the British imperial.

The Muslim leaders took action on the political agenda, while colonial government was absorbed in its constitutional and imperial thoughts. This was answered by Lord Minto who was tolerant, but this was not an example of the British authorities establishing Muslim political organization. It does not prove that there is no convergence, but that it might be convergence, but not quite the same, between indigenous political claims and colonial political interests. Finally, it demonstrates that the Simla Deputation did help to lay the foundations of a constitutional framework where communal representation was not only tolerated but was even embedded in the political reform in the colony.

The deputation consisted of arguments for the political action which resulted in the passing of the Indian Councils Act, 1909, which led to the establishment of separate electorates for Muslims. Its medium to long term value lies with its contribution to the institutionalization of minority safeguards, communal representation and political power sharing discussions. The study is a reconstruction of the political history of Muslims in British India as it looks at the Simla Deputation of 1906 against the backdrop of this broader political constitutional history. The study is not just about the political demands of the Muslims during the deputation, rather it is about the deputation itself as well as political demands.

The greatest value of this is an early indication of the Muslim political agency and its relationship to the colonial constitutional system that resulted in the development of organized constitutional demands. The association of the deputation with the subsequent establishment of separate electorate and the more general debates on representation of minorities provide a more understanding of the institutionalization of communal politics in colonial India. It also makes a valuable contribution to the grant on the subject of Muslim political mobilization, for it focuses on a question that has not been addressed from the top down: constitutional politics did not emerge of itself, but was produced as the result of a negotiation between the colonial authorities and politically organized Indian communities. In this context the study is an accurate account of the Simla Deputation, and a valuable background of the development of the constitutional politics of the Muslims in the early 20th century.

Conclusion

The Simla Deputation of 1906 was an important event in the development of organized political representation of Muslims in British India. Of course, its significance was not just in the presence of thirty-five Muslim leaders and Viceroy Lord Minto, but in the political principles which were put forward during the meeting. The deputation focused Muslim issue of political representation, education, government job and constitutional safeguards into an organized, all-India political demand.

It proved that Muslim leaders were getting ready to join together in the constitutional politics of colonial India and also to discuss matters directly with the top official of the British. A history of the deputation reveals that the deputation did not appear out of nowhere in 1906. It dates back to the political and social consequences of the Revolt of 1857, the new configuration of British administration, the educative programme of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Aligarh Movement and

the realization of parts of the Muslim leadership that representative institutions, pure on numerical majority lines, might place Muslims at a political disadvantage.

As the number of legislatures grew in the nineteenth century and the issue of representative government came into dispute, questions of communal representation became more salient. The aims of the deputation were in line with these concerns. Its leaders wanted the proper representation of Muslims in the legislative councils, governmental services, local institutions and educational institutions. Their most significant demands were that each religion be given a separate electorate, and that political and historical considerations be given greater weight in determining the representation of the Muslim community than would the population. These demands were a major leap in the Muslim political thinking, as they turned the issue of minorities' security into constitutional proposals.

The deputation was added to by the reply of Lord Minto. His response is a positive one, but not an unconditional one, to all demands, and his willingness to accept the idea of Muslim political representation offered a critical opportunity for further constitutional talks. The separation of voters by caste which was to follow under the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 showed that the politics of Simla had gained institutional form. The deputation thus played a crucial role in the process of establishing the formal political voice of Muslims from the informal political lobbying. It is important, however, that the Simla Deputation be seen not only from the viewpoint of British "divide and rule." British policy-makers clearly had political motives for appeasing Muslim leaders and for controlling the increasing strength of the Indian National Congress.

Notwithstanding, the evidence shows that the Muslim political leaders themselves took an active role in the organization of the deputation, in the formulation of its demands, and in having direct access to the Viceroy. It was thus not entirely a British product or initiative, nor was it entirely free of colonial political considerations. It was a product of the relationship between the Muslim political agency and the British imperial strategy. Later in 1906, the activities of the All-India Muslim League further revealed the transformation of the nature of Muslim political work. The Muslim League may not be considered as an institutional product of the Simla Deputation but both the events showed the same trend of the Muslim leaders in further organized, all-India and collective political action. Political discourse of the time was more and more focused on representation, matters of constitutional protection, communal interests and engagement with government.

By 1909 separate electorates had been set up and were an integral part of constitutional politics in British India which informed later discussions on minority rights and power sharing. Subsequent events like the Lucknow Pact, the constitutional changes of 1919, the Nehru Report, Jinnah's Fourteen Points, the Round Table Conferences and the Government of India Act, 1935, kept raising the issue of Muslim representation. The Simla Deputation was not responsible for these later events, but it was a precedent of great constitutional importance that went to form the political vocabulary of later generations.

Equally, the politics of 1906 are not to be subjected to the later demand for Pakistan. The Muslim leadership which went on the Simla Deputation were not asking for a separate Muslim state. Their first concern was protection and effective representation in the prevailing colonial constitutional system. The shift from demand for safeguards and representation to the demand

for Pakistan was a much longer and more complex political process. However, the notion of Muslims forming a separate political community grew in significance in later Muslim political philosophy.

Finally, the Simla Deputation has left a double heritage. It not only offered a formal institutional structure to defend the political interests of Muslims but also helped to strengthen the institutionalization of communal polarization in representative politics. This was, therefore, a period of political protection for the minorities as well as an important moment of institutionalization of communal politics. It is therefore important to see the Simla Deputation as a moment of transition and not as an end unto itself. It was a precursor to a more organized form of Muslim political representation, reinforced the constitutional recognition of Muslim political interests and contributed to the grounding of a political framework in which subsequent discussions on the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations, safeguards for minorities, constitutional reform and the Muslim nationhood were developed. Its history reveals that it is not enough to understand British Indian politics as a matter of colonial manipulation and nationalist resistance. It also needs to be interpreted via the political process of communities trying to position themselves in a new constitutional landscape. The Simla Deputation of 1906 thus represents one of the basic episodes in the evolution of modern Muslim political politics in South Asia.

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