

# Mahatma Gandhi and Various Issues of the Indian National Congress: A Brief Study

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**Abstract:** *Gandhi returned for India on 9th January in 1915 from South Africa. Gandhi noticed the status of the Indians is like the South African Indians. At that moment, British Government applied their theory and politics in Indian society and a handful educated Indians were protesting against the British power in disunited. There was no communication among the Indian leaders and not in touch with the masses. As a result, Indian National Leaders were isolated from the masses. Gandhi had seen the same scenario in South Africa. He travelled in different parts in India and contacted with the local leaders and also the peoples in any level of the society. He organized different peasant and worker movements and built a relation with the Indian National Congress in various issues. Gandhi organized Non-cooperation movement during the year of 1920-22 with the Indian National Congress. At that moment, he turned as spokesman of the Indian National Congress. The Indian Congress to be led by Gandhi then. Thus he became a pioneer leader of the Indian National Congress.*

**Keywords:** *Gandhi, Father of Nation, Congress and Gandhi, various issues of Gandhi, Towards Freedom etc.*

## 1. Introduction:

The first Round Table conference took place between 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1930 and January, 1931 with the British Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald in the chair. In his presidential speech MacDonald outlined the Simon Commission scheme for a federal India, since the Princes had already expressed their willingness to join the federation, the only major hurdle was the communal representative.<sup>1</sup> Congress refused to participate in the first Table Conference. By keeping away from the first Table Conference, the Congress denied itself a golden opportunity come to some definite understanding with Muslim leaders on the communal issue.<sup>2</sup> It was soon realized that problem could not be solved in the absence of the representatives of the Congress. As a consequence, the Gandhi Irwin Pact was signed on 5<sup>th</sup> March in 1931, which paved the way for the Congress participation in the second Round Table

Conference at London. Gandhi was the sole representative of the Indian National congress.<sup>3</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi in a signed article in Young India explained why he agreed to represent the Congress at the Round Table Conference as authorized by the working committee. 'It was better to wait till the Congress has become equally popular with the Kother Committees than to make an attempt to force Swaraj', argument was put forward by him against his going to the Table Conference before the solution of the communal problem but his essentially decorated nature compelled him to submit to the working committee's decision.<sup>4</sup> At the second Round Table Conference, Gandhiji made sincere efforts to arrive at a satisfactory communal settlement. But he failed to make any headway because of the opposition of Muslim and conservative Hindus. Tendulkar observes, 'the opposition of Hindu leaders like Malavya restrained Gandhiji from conceding to the Muslim what they accepted from the British.

## The Round Table Conference and Hindu-Muslim Relation:

The Muslim historians hold Gandhiji responsible for the failure of a Hindu-Muslim settlement at the Round Table Conference which was in reality bogged down on the question of communal representation. Ispahanni, a Pakistani diplomat, offering a justification of the stand of the Muslim League, observers that 'he told the Muslim delegates that he would agree to their proposals on two conditions: i) The Muslim should not support the Scheduled Castes, demand for any kind of separate electorates of special treatment and ii) The Muslim should agree that they could never accept such humiliating conditions. However, these conditions were not acceptable to the Muslim. They could not deny to the poor depressed classes what they themselves desired. Moreover, they held that love of freedom was not Gandhi's monopoly.<sup>5</sup> It may appear a partial and subjective explanation but persons like Sir Agha Khan did feel that Gandhiji was imposing the conditions. He writes in his memoirs "The Mahatma sought to impose a first and fundamental condition that Muslim should, before they asked for any guarantees for themselves, accept the Congress interpretation of Swaraj (Self Government) as their

goal.” To this Mr. Jinnah gave the reply that since the Mahatma was not imposing this condition on Hindu members of the various delegates attending the Round Table Conference why should be imposed it on the Muslims.

The Congress in order to secure support of the Sikh in the National struggle repeatedly assured them that their interests would be duly protected in future constitutional settlements. But at the same time, Congress was convinced that 30% seats could not be given to the Sikhs without harming the interest of other communities. Moreover, the main object of the Congress was to reach some agreements with Muslims to secure their support in the National Movements. As we know, The Round Table Conference failed to solve the political tangle. In the conference Mahatma Gandhi opposed with his whole might the creation of a separate electorates for the depressed classes. On March, 1932, Gandhi wrote to sit Samuel Hoare about the impending communal Award by the Prime Minister. At first he thought that he would wait for the announcement and then take appropriate action. But in fairness to the British Government Gandhi decided to give of previous notice warning them respectfully that in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the depressed classes, “I must fast unto death.”

#### **Gandhi and Nationalist Congress Leaders:**

Mahatma Gandhi and other Congress leaders personally condemned the award calling it as anti-national. The Communal Award divided not only the communities but threatened to split the Congress itself. Two bonafide members, Malavya and Anne Besant registered from the Congress on the same ground.<sup>6</sup> Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to the creation of a separate electorate for untouchables. After the Award, Gandhi decided to commence his fast on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1932, on hearing the news of Gandhi's resolve to fast unto death, the people of the Punjab were shocked. Meetings were held all over the provinces, condemning the communal award and declaring faith in Mahatma Gandhi. The Sikhs requested the Congress to support them against the Communal Award. The Congress resolved saying, ‘judged from the national standard, the communal award is wholly unsatisfactory, obvious that only way to prevent the untoward consequences of the communal award is to explore ways and means of arriving at an agreed solution and not by any appeal on this essentially domestic question to the British Government or any other outside authority. Since, however, the different communities in the country are sharply divided on the question of communal Award it is necessary to define the Congress attitude on it. The claims to represent equally to all the communities composing the Indian nation and therefore, in view of the division of opinion can neither accept or reject the communal Award as long

as the differences of opinions last. At this stage, the Congress was seriously concerned with the Sikh grievances and demands and so was Gandhi. As a consequences Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and Dr. M.A. Ansari met Master Tara Singh, Baba Kharak Singh and other Sikh leaders, before the Congress session began at Lahore and listened to their grievances. The Congress leaders informed them that as the Congress working Committee had withdrawn the request for dominion status, the Nehru Report, therefore automatically lapsed.

He also quoted Mahatma Gandhi's speech at the convention regarding Sikh rights: “personally I think we have not done full justice to the Sikhs. Hence, it was necessary for all them to put their heads together to make suggestion and solve order out of chaos.<sup>7</sup> Also when the central; Sikh league was to meet to decide the question of co-operation with the Congress, Gandhi, M.A. Ansari, Motilal Nehru and many other Congress leaders appealed to the Akali leadership not to boycott the Lahore session. There were people who had been trying to lead the Sikhs into the bureaucratic shred. Congress leaders have risen to the occasion and acted statesmen. Mahatma Gandhi is to be congratulated, for it is he who is mainly responsible for this resolution. I am sure that Congress will gather greet and a wave of enthusiasm which sweep the Sikhs.

#### **Gandhi and Ambedkar in Harijan Issues:**

After studying the above mentioned facts we many study. While Gandhi's ideals and programmes had appeal for rural masses, the Congress was mostly confined to urban Hindus who could hardly appreciate their objective and importance. Since there was no settlement, the British Government present the communal award in 1932, Mahatma Gandhi undertook a fast unto death against the communal Award because the Award separated scheduled castes from the Hindu community which was against the ideology of Gandhi who considered Harijans a part of the Hindu Society. Ultimately, Gandhi and the Harijans leaders Dr. B.R. Ambedkar signed the Poona pact and agreed to modify the communal Award. The Congress refused to participate in the third Round Table Conference. It ultimately led to the passage of the government of India act of 1935.

The civil disobedience movement was bound to have an effect on the Punjab pleasantly which this period was undergoing economic crisis and the peasants were depressed by their inability to pay taxes. First, the catastrophic fall in prices during the world wide depression hit all the section of Punjab peasantry seriously. Rural economy showed the signs of depression thought out the year, though prices of both wheat and cotton rose slightly at the harvest time. It was realized that the burden of debt on the rural population by creation of depression had

become a serious menace. Small holders and tenants the land revenue. The provincial government in unequivocal term admitted. There was undoubtedly difficulty in paying the last Khadi in certain anticipated in regard to the impending rabbi demand. Genuine economic distress is being felt and is exercising the mind of the rural population.<sup>8</sup>It can be easily imagined how a heavy fall in their prices suddenly impoverish the major sections of rural Punjab. Even the small holders and tenants were often unable to pay even the land revenue. The political awakening of the peasantry had been stimulated by the Civil Disobedience campaign of 1930 in general and the non-tax campaign conducted by the Congress in some parts of the Punjab in particular. The anti-imperialist tendency had an indirect radicalizing influence on the peasantry as very little happened directly. In spite of that fact enough opportunities for starting the peasant struggle on the basis of immediate and pressing demands of the peasantry were present in every province.

#### **Gandhi's Ideas on Civil Disobedience Movement:**

The Punjab Congress particularly did not take seriously the non-tax campaign. The Congress started the Civil Disobedience movement without any agrarian programme, without any proper organization of the peasantry as classes. However insulation local attempts were made to instigate peasants to refuse to pay land revenue and other taxes. The police made large scale arrests in such cases and suppressed the attempts. Despite the passivity of the Congress organization in respect of a well planned non-tax campaign, the Civil Disobedience campaign evoked active response among peasants in several parts of the province not because that the Congress offered an attractive programme for the peasants because the peasants had their own pressing problems and as such they in search of a platform which the Civil Disobedience movement provided so ready to them to seek the support of peasant masses to make the political propaganda in Lahore, Amritsar and Lyallpur districts. In Lahore small batches of peasants volunteers gathered daily to defy section 144 and demonstrated before the Assembly Chamber. The Congress members of the Assembly and city riffraff openly supported the demonstration. The kissans were met.

In several villages of Lahore and Amritsar, peasants resisted extensive police repression by resorting to non-violent, non-cooperation and refusing essential supplies of food and water and any other form of service to the police. In some of the villages, the government had to employ military force to restore government authority. Through the nationalist press and other channels, popular agitation was carried on against police repression by the peasants. In south-eastern Punjab too, the

Congress agitation spread roots a large number of villages. M.L.Darling in his book, he stated, after witnessing one of the scene on 21<sup>st</sup> January, that the Congress mainly considered of the Hindus intelligentsias and traders i.e. the urban middle classes that they in the rural areas they were working in collaboration with the Sikhs while the Muslim peasantry was not influenced by the movement, reason being that they were led the Muslim landed aristocracy and that a large number of peasants are put to jails.

The impact of Civil Disobedience Movement can be seen from the meetings of the Zamindar Sabha, Lyallpur. They held a series of meeting demanding that the land revenue be paid in kind and note in cash. Since the fall in prices had raised the revenue burden manifold. Genuine economic distress was being felt and was exercising the mind rural population. As 'All Bar Zamindar Conference' was held at Lyallpur on June,20 in 1931, demanding, among other things, reduction in land revenue in the basis of income tax and abolition of land revenue on uneconomic holdings than five acres. In the districts of Punjab which constitute the peasant Haryana the second Zamindar League of Sir Chhotu Ram convened a district political conference at Rohtak in October, 1931 and called on government to remit the whole of land revenue and water-rate. During 1931, the Kirti Kissan Party I which many Communists carried on agitation through serious of meetings in Amritsar and Jalandhar districts demanded reduction of land taxation and attacked the rapacity of the money-lender. The Kirti Kissan agitation was also beginning of secure foothold in the Sheikhpura and Gurudaspur districts. While the spontaneous peasant protest did not spread to western Punjab, the deep economic crisis and the efforts of the money-leaders, to recover old debts and to restrict fresh created bitterness and social tensions among the peasants in the rural areas which tended to find communal expression for in this region the creditors were the Hindus and the debtors, the Muslims. The political organization could not stirrup any general feeling among the peasants against government despite the propaganda of the Zamindars of the villages in Lahore, Lyallpur and Sheikhpura districts and the Congress propaganda which was particulars active in districts of Sialkot, Kangra, Ambala and Karnal also failed to evoke durable response of the peasants. The spontaneous peasant activities of the early 1930s failed to grow into a tide of peasant movement. This was particular due to the weakness of the Punjab Congress which was very much reluctant to launch a non-tax campaign in the Zamindari areas for fear of raising a class issue. Jawaharlal Neheru's statement furnishes an insight into the problem and the cause of the failure of the movement. He writer: The Congress, as a whole was a purely nationalist body and included many

middling Zamindars and a few of the larger ones also. Its leaders were terribly afraid of doing anything which might raise this class issue or irritate the Zamindar elements. So right through the first six months of Civil Disobedience, they avoided calling for a general nontax campaign in the rural areas, although conditions for this seemed to be ripe.<sup>9</sup>

So, it was an ideal opportunity for a no-tax campaign as a part of general Civil Disobedience movement which the Congress could not take to the best advantages of its organization and that of the peasants. On the other hand Chowdhury Chhotu Ram, a Unionist Party member belonging to the pre-government group of landed aristocracy was of the view that only the educated people should take to the Civil Disobedience movement. He felt that the education people could take care of themselves, but the poor farmers would not be able to afford the luxury of Civil Disobedience and should not be allowed to suffer at the hands of Government.<sup>10</sup> The Civil Disobedience movement was withdrawn after the Gandhi Irwin Pact on March 5, 1931. So, it naturally gave setback to the peasant movement.

The revived Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932-34 remained feeble in Punjab especially in the villages, one reason for the weakness of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Punjab, including in the rural areas, was the factionalism within the provincial Congress Committee. The left wingers in the Congress were disappointed. They considered the Gandhian leadership thoroughly inadequate and discouraging.<sup>11</sup> However, the government gained vigour during the month of February, 1932, when 593 persons, counted arrest in a single month. While the peasant actively attended to die out, political propaganda among the peasantry. In March, 1935, various organizations had been declared illegal. They together formed the Punjab Kissan Darza Committee and organized a number of Conferences and Meetings especially small village meetings. They also organized nearly 6 branches in Jalandhar district. Similarly, the communists organized a Doaba Rural Conference at Patiala, in Jalandhar district during March, 1935, which was attended by more than 4,000 people.

The peasantry in 1930-33 began to setup their own organization independent of the Indian National Congress at a number of places which formed the basis for the establishment of an All India Peasant Organization in 1936. By 1936, peasant activity and movement of a different type were beginning to develop. The peasant movement was about to acquire a distinct of its own. Four major developments occurred after 1935, usually associated with the growing influence of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Communist Party changes its basic policies and made an attempt to link itself with the mainstream of the national movement. In decided to work towards uniting "all the forces of the National Congress, trade

unions, the peasants" struggle, the youth organization etc. On a common platform in a mighty common front. In May, 1936 the Provincial Socialist Party and the Punjab Radical League merged to form a single party, the Punjab Congress Socialist Party. The new party enabled the leftist political workers belonging to the CPI the Kirti Kissan Party, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and other leftist groups to work under its united banner. There major political conferences were organized during 1936 converging most of the province and addressing nearly 40 meetings. In his speeches, he stressed to adopt a programme of opposing the government by refusing to pay land revenue, abiana and other taxes. By now the peasants of Punjab showed signs of understanding of the wider issues of socialism and independence. Nehru's visit undoubtedly encouraged the numerous socialists and communists who were attempting to spread their programme in the rural areas. Nehru during his visit to sir hill spoke in flattering terms to his audience. He insisted that the peasantry if they acted together could achieve everything. He always tried to create revolutionary mentally and atmosphere especially in the countryside. Consequently, there had been a certain amount of agrarian agitation against settlement operation.

The political nationalist activity among the peasant by the Congress and the left wing also continued unabated in 1937 when elections to the provincial assembly added a further momentum to them. In the village the Congress workers cooperated with socialists and communities in carrying out its message. A number of meetings were held in the districts of Montgomery, Lyallpur, and Mazafargarh to support the Congress candidate in Punjab assembly by-election. Jawaharlal Nehru trice again toured Punjab before and after the elections of Punjab Assembly. In 1937, he addressed a 50,000 strong meeting at the Gadwall Conference. Nehru's visit had created further enthusiasm in the Congress circles giving a fillip to the recruiting campaign. In 1937 the Congress enrolled 94,772 members from rural areas. When the Congress tried to make an influence in a province by ant recruitment and antiwar agitation in the various districts of Punjab the unionist Party.<sup>12</sup> Tried to keep the peasantry away from the Congress before it could extend influence over a significant section of the peasantry. It introduced several places of agrarian legislation. The Punjab Legislative Assembly in July 23, 1938, passed various bills such as restitution of mortgaged lands bill, the Alienation of Land Bill and Registration and licensing of Money-lenders Bill 1938, the introduction of various agrarian Bills left the Congress in difficult situation. Again caught in a situation of duality, the Congress could not support these Bills because the commercial and trading classes were the support of the Congress. The leadership of the provincial Congress was greatly

under the pressure of the urban-lending and trading sections. Whereas on the other hand, the Unionist Party claimed that their ministry was Zamindari government, working for the welfare of peasantry and Chhotu Ram declared that he had secured all the advantages for the Zamindar in the light of the Acts passed by the Unionist Ministry. So this lowered the prestige of the Congress in the eyes of poor peasantry. On the other hand Chhotu Ram had left the Congress to expose the cause of the land owner, who could not afford to risk, the loss of their property. Moreover, the no rent campaign was calculated to harm the richer land-owner, in so far as it incited the tenant to withhold the payment of rent to land-lords. But it refused to allow the Congress or any other outside body act as an intermediary. However, inspired by the repressive politics of the imperial authorities and the hostility of the communal and pre-government parties and interests by 1937 the Congress had succeeded in consolidating the anti-government forces the people of the various began to feel that it was the only national organization which could solve their problems.<sup>13</sup>

#### **The Activities of the Nationalists and the British Government:**

Nationalists were shocked at the passage of the government of India Act of 1935. Communal election system-introduced by the Morley-Minto Reforms (1909) and strengthened by the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms (1919) was not only scheduled castes. Even through the constitution of 1935 increased the number of seats in the Provincial Legislatures and provided for provincial autonomy, yet in view of the special responsibility of the General and Governors, provincial autonomy was rightly stigmatized as a fraud with the Indian people. In fact, the Act was designed to serve vital imperial interests.<sup>14</sup> Naturally, it failed to satisfy the Indian people in general and the Indian National Congress in particular. When the Congress decided to contest the provincial election of 1936-37, it announced that the Congressmen would not work with the government in the legislatures; rather they would combat it and seek to end it.<sup>15</sup> Its election manifesto emphasized that all economic, political and social problems of the Indians such as poverty, destitution, unemployment among peasants and industrial workers were all evil consequences of British imperialism. Their ultimate solution lay in the freedom of the country and the Congress would fight for it. As an immediate step in this direction, it demanded a constituent assembly based in India's freedom. Explaining the reasons as to why the party had decided to fight the elections while the foreign rule continued, the Manifesto elaborated that the purpose was to prevent the entry of the reactionary forces into the legislatures and to help the party workers in carrying

out its programme outside the Assemblies. Other salient features of the Manifesto were: stress on the equality of women with men, removal of untouchability, uplift of Harijans and backward classes, encouragement to Khadi and village industries, humanitarian treatment of political prisoners; rejection of the proposed federation and the communal problem through the cooperation and goodwill of the concerned communities. In a short, Congress fought the elections of 1936 against the representative policy of the government and not against the programme of any other nationalist party. Through the Congress programme attracted the Punjabis, but factionalism among its leaders in the province had a damaging effect upon its electioneering. Not only did they bring out posters against each other, some of them even helped the non-Congress candidates. Consequently the Punjab Pradesh Congress committee directed Congressmen to support the official candidates only.<sup>16</sup> Similar developments were noticed in other provinces, as well. Other political parties of the province on the basis of their Election Manifestos can be classified into two categories, first, the nationalist parties such as Akalis, Communists and Socialists, who joined hands with the Congress and supported its programme and objective of complete independence. Itihad-i-Millat and the Ahrars, through their favouring a separate identity of the Muslims, yet supported the Congress and its goal of complete independence.

On going through Punjab Legislative Assembly debates, Indian Annual Registers and the files of 'The Tribune and Akali and Akali Patrika' of the contemporary period, one finds that the opposition fully utilized all available democratic methods for criticizing the loyalists, pro-landlord and ante-national policies and programmes of the Union Government in the assembly. These methods include adjournments, cut motions, non-official bills and resolutions, no confidence motions, and walk-outs through such motions were generally rejected. Yet whenever the Government refused to take note of their protest, Congressmen indulged in uproarious scenes. On the whole, Congress workers as a responsible opposition in the Assembly followed the instruction of its parent organization in its conduct. In their speeches in the Legislature, Congressmen demanded joint masses and untouchables and curbed the excesses of the police which was ruling the province de facto. They also criticized the Unionist Ministry for surrounding provincial Autonomy to the whims of the Governor. They raised a strong voice for the release of political prisoners and condemned the repressive methods of the Punjab Government against the non-violent patriots. An idea of the Government's oppression can be had from the fact that even Sardar Teja Singh Swatantra, duly elected as M.L.A., was lodged in jail, Nehru called it an insult to all Punjabis.<sup>17</sup> For

their release in collaboration with the allies, Punjab congress constituted a Political Prisoners Release Committee in 1937 which carried on a forceful struggle till 1939. In its efforts the committee was supported by a large number of Punjabis, even students did not lag behind. When the Ministry introduced in 1938, the so-called Golden Bills-The Punjab Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Bill, The Punjab Alienation of land Bill and the Punjab Registration of Money-lenders Bill Congressmen opposed them vehemently both in and outside the assembly. They argued that these were aimed at protecting the vested interest of the big landlords dominating the Unionist Party. These, they added, would not improve the lot of the poor peasants in general and tenants in particular. The real objective of the Bills was to weaken the national movement by whipping up differences between the non-agriculturists and agriculturists. If the Government felt so concerned about the lot of the poor peasantry, they asked then why did it not considerably reduce the burden of abiana and land revenue. But all the same, congress did not support the agitation of the money lending and trading against these Bills stigmatized by them as Black Bills. With the outbreak of the Second World War on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939, the British Government declared India as a belligerent country, neither had it consulted the elected Provincial Government and political parties nor did it declare its war aims about India. Such a position not being acceptable to the Congress, it protested against the exploitation to the India's resources for the war. But, nevertheless, Congress offered to help the British if they promised complete independence after the war. On government refusal to declare its war aims in unambiguous terms, Congress instructed its Ministries on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1939 to resign. In November, 1939 it also adopted a policy of non-cooperation with the Government. Consequently, Congress M.L.As stopped attending the session of the Punjab Assembly.

Thus the Congress led nationalist front played the role of an enlightened opposition in the Punjab Legislature. It showed its mettle by fighting for the political rights and civil liberties of the people in general and for the mitigation of the miseries of the down trodden in particular. As a result of its efforts, it party succeeded in giving a nationalist direction to the provincial Assembly which reminds one the similar role played by the Swarajya Party during its period of ascendancy from 1924-25. Since, the Congress believed in constructive opposition, therefore when Sir Sikandar, with a view to promoting communal harmony, convened unity conference in July, 1937, authorized Dr. Gopichand Bhargava to attend its meetings in spite of sharp differences among the provincial leaders about real motives of the conferences. However, the conference

failed to produce any fruitful results. During this time, in order to mitigate communalism, Congress took steps to strengthen its social base among all communities. In May, 1937 it launched the Muslim Mass contact programme in which nationalist Muslim, Ahrars ad Ittihad-i-Millat played prominent roles. By October, 1937 it had attracted them by thousands to its nationalist programme. Similarly it exhorted the congress-Sikh Party to be more active and made strenuous efforts to popularize its programme in the rural areas of central Punjab, the heartland of the Sikh. Alongside, Congress-Akali-Socialist collaboration was also strengthened. Akalis, Socialists and Communists not only whole heartedly supported the Congress programme, but also served on various Congress Committees in the province, Akali even worked under the discipline of the Congress in all political matters. Steadily increasing popularity of the Congress among the Muslims alarmed the Unionists, the Muslim Leaguers and the imperial authorities. Government's anxiety was the worst; it did not want any commotion in the Punjab the recruiting ground of the army. It commanded the Punjab premier to make some understanding with Jinnah.<sup>18</sup> As a result, Sikander-Jinnah pact was concluded on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1937, which exposed the loyalist and reactionary character of the Unionist Party. Consequently, the unity conference also failed. However, Sikander-Jinnah pact failed to check the growing popularity of the Congress in the Punjab during the next two years, i.e. of 1938-39, congress and its allies successfully organized a chain of political and Kissan Conference. In these largely attended meetings, they criticized the repressive policy of the government, demanded release of political prisoners and asked the premier not to work against the wishes of the people by adopting pro-British policies. Simultaneously, they asked people not to be misled by the short sighted policies of the Unionists and take part fully in country freedom struggle. Through this conference, they even attacked the strong fortress of the Unionist Party in the east Punjab; thousand of Jaat peasants, tenants and workers took active part in this conference. Hindu Mahasabha and Sir Chhotu Ram, who had been enjoying an overwhelming support among the rural Hindus also failed to check the onslaught of the Congress. For the purpose of propagating Congress programme in villages in a systematic way, President of the Punjab Congress, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew started a school for training the workers. Farewell address to the first batch of the trainees emphasized 'Go and work in village as true Congress soldiers. Tell the innocent villagers who are oppressed by officialdom that the congress stands for their rights and privileges. As a consequence of these efforts of the congress and its allied national sentiment became so widespread in the province that the Punjabis participated in a big way in the open

revolt launched by the Congress in 1939 after the outbreak of the Second World War.

#### Conclusion:

During this period of 1937-39 steps were also taken to strengthen the Congress at the grass root level by increasing its membership and revamping its organization. In spite of factionalism in the Punjab Congress, there was a remarkable progress in its primary membership: rather the rate of increase was higher than that of all India. Its membership rose by over 100 percent in 1936 over the figure of 1935; while it was 13,195 in 1935, is increased to 26,511 in 1936. In further enhanced to 1, 28,855 in 1937 and 1, 88,971 in 1938-39. During the year of 1938-39 figures were more than 14 times that of 1935 and over 7 times that of 1936. The Congress Committees at lower levels busy like ants in developing a sustained organization in the province both in urban and rural areas. In Lyallpur district, 200 Congress Committees were set up which enrolled 15,000 primary members by October, 1937. Amritsar district distinguished itself by enrolling 14,000 members from the countryside. Gurudaspur was expected to go beyond its quota alone in Batala Tehsil 2,000 members were recruited including a large number of Muslims. In the district if Sheikhpura 57 Congress Committees were formed and they enrolled 5, 8000 members; out of them 25 percent were Muslims. Vigorous propaganda was also being done to popularize the Congress in Bannu district and Ambala division. Main Iftikharuddin rendered a great service to the organization; he went to the villages on foot to spread the Congress message. During the next year of 1938 the progress was still more many district vied with each other to bag the Congress trophy to; enlisting the highest number of primary members. However, the toughest competition was between Lyallpur and Hoshiarpur. There were committees in Hoshiarpur and it was hoped that during 1938, 200 more would be set up. In Rohatak the strongest hold of Sir Chhotu Ram, Pandit Shri Ram Shurma declared to enroll at least 10,000 members. With the great spurt in primary membership in the Punjab. Its representation in the All India Congress Committee also increased from 13 in 1937 and it rose to 26 in 1938 and further to 36 in 1939. In this Sikhs and Muslim were also given their due here 4,8 and 14 Sikhs were nominated respectively in 1937, 1938 and 1939. Similarly, the number of Muslims increases to 5 in 1938 and 7 in 1939. These figures confirm the secular character of the party as well as indicate its social base among the three communities of the providers.

However, since the late twenties, Punjab Congress had been a perpetual victim of factionalism gradually the melamine percolated to the lower of the party also. To begin with, there two groups headed

respectively by Lala Lajpat Rai and Dr. Satyapal. After the death of the former Dr. Gopichand Bhargava became the leader of this faction. Besides minor ideological differences, the main reason for this divide had been power politics; each group wanted to control the provincial organization. During 1937-39 while Satyapal faction controlled the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee, Bhargava group dominated the legislative wing. In order to lower the prestige of the rival faction, members of both the groups complained against each other to the Congress high command on issues like violation of the Congress policy, forgery in elections to the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and opposition of the official candidates in the Assembly Elections. They even issued contradictory statements. Soon this bane assumed such an alarming proportion that Pandit Nehru had took remark that only a major operation could put the Punjab Congress affairs on right line, "more I look into the matter, the more it disgusts me." As a consequence of this admonition both the faction adopted a low profile, but it lasted for a few months only. In December 1937, at the time of the election of the delegates to the Haripura Congress, there were scenes of rowdies at the polling booths, at Amritsar, even blows were exchanged. Jawaharlal appointed Sri Prakash to enquire into the affairs of the Punjab Congress. On talking to the leaders and workers of both the groups, he was greatly disturbed by the fact that they were even not prepared to sit together to sort out their differences they insisted on talking to him separately.

In the light of the above inquiry the Congress High Command constituted a council of seven in June 1938 to manage the affairs of the provincial Congress. Dr. Satyapal was nominated its chairman and a member of Dr. Bhargava's groups its secretary. Even though the council was the supreme decision making body yet it failed to harmonize the relations of the two factions. Just after a month, Dr. Satyapal resigned from its president ship. The differences grew so sharp that even the Congress High Command and the Congress Working Committee failed to reconcile them. At the time of the election of the President of the Punjab Congress on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1939, an open fight with lathis and kirpans took place among the delegates of both the group, in the melee 21 votes were carried by a delegate. In this election, Dr. Saifuddin got 177 votes and his rival comrade Ram Kishan 72 between the votes of the two, Dr. Kitchlew was declared elected. Even Mahatma Gandhi felt hapless. He wrote to Lala Dunichand, M.L.A. on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1939. "It is no want of time that prevents me from going to Punjab. But I feel utterly powerless to do any good. In other words, it is lack of confidence that keep me away."

However, in the above context, it is noteworthy that in spite of factionalism, constructive work of the Congress continued to progress in the

Punjab, during the year of 1937-39, the provincial branches of the All India Spinners Association, All India Village Industries Association and All India Harijan Sewak Sangha were headed by Dr. Gopichand Bhargava. He actively promoted khadi and exhorted the youth and the students to involve themselves in the constructive of the Congress. His total involvement in the constructive work was appreciated even by Mahatma Gandhi besides providing employment to a large number of poor people in the countryside; the constructive programme gave them a feeling of involvement in the freedom struggle through their work. People of the Province were asked to serve the national cause by using only certified Khadi,<sup>19</sup> Chakki ka Atta, our bears and by practicing spinning. Exhibitions of Khadi and other village products were arranged during the national week which was observed every year in April in the memory of the Jallianwala Bagh Martyrs. A vigorous campaign was also launched for the uplift of the Harijans. Besides, clean-up campaigns were organization periodically, which raised image of the party in public eyes.

For popularizing Gandhi's ideology and constructive programme a large number of Congressmen met in Lahore on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1939 to coordinate their activities. The meeting decided to raise a task force for all the departments of Gandhian Programme. It set up a committee to assist the All India Spinning Association, All India Village Industries Association and All India Harijan Sangha, to acquaint the people with Gandhian philosophy, to foster communal harmony and to promote closer contacts among the believers in Gandhism.<sup>2021</sup>

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> .Pasad, Rajendra, At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi, p.25
- <sup>3</sup> .Mittal, J.K. Constitutional history of India, p.186.
- <sup>4</sup> Mitra, N.N.1931.The Annual Register, vol.I,p.44
- <sup>5</sup> .Dev, Maya. 1972. Round Table Conference and the Punjab Problem, M.Phil, Thesis of Punjab University, Patiala, p.76.
- <sup>6</sup> .Sharma, P.1973. Communal Award and the Indian National congress, Proceedings in the Indian History congress, Muzaffarpur, p. 569.
- <sup>7</sup> .Gulati,K.C.,1974.The Akalis Past and Present, Delhi, p.49.
- <sup>8</sup> .D.C.Letter from Sir Geoffrey De Montmorency, Government of Punjab to Mr. H.W. Emerson, Secretary, Govt. of India, 13th May, 1931. Home Department File, No.33/VIII/31, 1928., New Delhi.
- <sup>9</sup> .Neheru, J, 1980. An Autobiography, New Delhi, p232.
- <sup>10</sup> .Agnihotri,H.L.& Malik,S.N.1980.A Profile of Courage: A Biography of Chowdhury Chhotu Ram, New Delhi, p.80

Harijans with regard to temple entry, however, remained unchanged. Nevertheless, the propaganda work for their uplift was strengthened during and after Gandhi's visit to Lahore I 1935.As desired by Gandhi and other leaders, the various days such as Harijan Day, Temple Entry Day and Prayer Days was celebrate throughout the country. The doctors visited the Harijan quarters and inspected the sanitary and hygienic conditions of their Mohallas and give them instructions in personal hygiene and sanitary methods of cleaning the latrines, Harijans houses were given clean in various occasions.

From above account of the activities for the upliftment of the Harijans, it appears that the movement was started all over the country. There was some progress in this direction. But the fact remains that there was not much change of heart among the so-called upper caste Hindus. What to talk of ordinary caste Hindus, even Pandit Madan Mohan Malavya, in one of his statement at Bombay in October, 1932, disapproved inter-dining and inter-marriage between the Hindus and untouchables. Due to communal situation in this province, each community had some grievance against the Congress. Thus, an important section among the Hindus complained that, while the Muslims gained at the hands of the Congress and the Government, Hindus suffered most on account of their association with the Congress. This added that his co-religionists were not treated well by the commission simple because of their boycott of the commission in compliance with the Congress programme. Gandhi, therefore, impressed upon the Hindus, of course, through the congress, to co-operate with the British Government.

<sup>11</sup> .Garjani, S.D.1983. "Congress in Rural Punjab", "The Punjab past and present, vol.XVIII, Patiala, p.100

<sup>12</sup> . The Unionist Party was landlord party and pro-imperialist. It was closely connected with imperialist bureaucracy and army. In the Punjab, the Unionist Party and National India Congress (excluding its left wing) constitute two polarities defending the interests of the two classes of exploiters in society, the rural landlords and urban commercial money-lending section.

<sup>13</sup> .Akali Patrika, 12th june, 1937, lahore

<sup>14</sup> .Tamlinson,B.R.,1976.The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929-1942, OUP, p.31

<sup>15</sup> .Mitra, N.N.,(ed), The Indian Annual Register. "Presidential Address of Jawaharlal Nehru at Faizpur Congress Session on 27th December, 1936", Cal, IAC, vol, II, p.225.

<sup>16</sup> .Guha, A.C.1982. India's struggle Quarter of a Century 1921-1946, Part-I, Delhi, p.368.

<sup>17</sup> .Message of Nehru to the Punjab Political Prisoners Release committee, on 22nd July, 1937, SWJN, vol.8.,pp.257-58

<sup>18</sup> .Bajaj, Y.P.1985.Jinnah-Haque Pact: Genesis and motives 1937, in "Punjab past and Present vol.XIX, Patiala, pp.197-200.

<sup>19</sup> .Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi always stressed the need of using certified khadi which meant the khadi cloth approved by the All India Spinniners Association of the basis of minimum living wage scheme, i.e. the minimum wage had been paid to the spinners etc.