

Simla Deputation (1906)

The Simla deputation proved a landmark in the history of modern India, because for the very first time the Hindu-Muslim conflict, which started with the Urdu-Hindi controversy, was lifted to the constitutional plane. The Indians were not satisfied with the Indian Council Act of 1892. Especially, the act failed to ensure the fair representation of Muslims. So, the Indians were agitating for more power. Due to the growing political pressure and increasing social unrest, the British Government decided to make constitutional reforms relating to the electoral bodies. On 20th July 1906 John Morley the Secretary of State for Indian affairs, speaking on the Indian budget in the British parliament, announced that the Government wanted to increase the number of seats for the legislative councils and also their powers.

John Morley's announcement created an anxiety among the Muslims of the sub-continent. The proposed reforms, if implemented, as was demanded by the Congress, would have suppressed the Muslims more under the Hindu Majority. Muslim leaders were of the view that neither elections nor nominations fulfilled the requirements of the Indian Muslims, and that they needed a certain number of seats in both the central and provincial councils. Their seats should be filled up by votes of their own community.

The weekly Muslim Patriot penned down this important issue to clarify the assumption that India was inhabited by one class. It stated that India consists of a heterogeneous mass of different races whose interests were often different. It although supported the extended representation in the legislature, but also wished that the extension should be based on the class recognition and each distinct community should have representatives of its own in proportion to its population.

Now, many Mohammedans drew the attention of Mohsin-ul-Mulk, the secretary of the M.A.O College, Aligarh, to John Morley's speech. So, Nawab Mohin-ul-Mulk wrote a letter on August 1906, to Archbold, Principal of the college, in which he expressed his apprehensions about the forthcoming constitutional changes. He was of the view that if combined election would be held on a more extended scale, Mohammedans will hardly get a single seat, while Hindus will carry more advantage because of their majority. He asked Archbold to advise for submit memorial from the Mohammedans to the Viceroy and to request his permission to accept a deputation for discuss the issue of forthcoming constitutional amendments. Archbold contacted to Viceroy's secretary and on 10th August 1906. He informed Mohsin-ul-Mulk that the Viceroy was ready to meet the deputation.

After receiving the letter of Archbold, Nawab Sahib started to put together a deputation for this purpose. A meeting was held in Lakhnow on 16th September 1906, in which an address, prepared by Sayyid Husain Bilgarami, was finalized by learned Muslim leaders. Finally, a deligation consisting of 35 leaders of Muslim community meet to the viceroy, under the leadership of Sir Aga Khan, in Simla on 1st October 1906. The deputation was included the members from Bengal, Punjab, U.P., Bombay, Madras, Sindh, C.P., Deccan, and Delhi. The members of deputation were drawn from the Muslim elite class, but most of the members of deputation were connected with the Aligarh movement through the AIMEC. Besides these members, others were associated with different semi-political parties like Anjuman-i-Islam, National Mohammedan Association etc.

The deputation presented the memorial in front of viceroy, which was consisting of the demands that rights of separate electorates should be given to the Muslims; Muslims should be given three more seats in central legislature; quota should be given to the Muslims in civil services; Muslims should be given representation in universities senates and syndicates; an aid should be given to the Muslims for the establishment of a Muslin university.

Lord Minto, the Viceroy, assured the Muslim delegation that as long as he is associated with the administrative affairs of the country, their national rights would be preserved.

Congress made an allegation that the deputation was engineered by the Government to resist the activities of nationalists. A newspaper, Amrita Bazar Patrika, closed to the Congress, launched the propaganda that the deputation was the part of British policy of divide and rule. It also stated that the deputation did not represent the whole of the Muslim community and self-serving British officers were involved in its formation.

In order to prove the conspiracy theory, Congress leaders had referred to a certain letter written by Archbold to an unknown person of Aligarh. There is not single solid evidence available to prove that the deputation was the part of British policy.

The deputation was purely representing the demands of the Muslim community. If it had been launched by the Government then there was no need of Mohsin-ul-Mulk to borrow a sum of four thousand rupees from King and King Company at the interest rate of 7% to meet the expenses of the Simla deputation. The company started correspondence, after the death of Mohsin-ul-Mulk, with the Muslim league for the return of loan and also threatened to get Moshin-ul-Mulk's property confiscated.

The Simla deputation was unique, because for the first time Muslims were anxious to take their share in the political activities as a separate identity. Another purpose of the delegation was to get a silent permission from the Government to make a political platform for the representation of Muslims, and also was to take the Government into confidence. The demand of separate electorates, which were presented through the deputation, was the foundation of all future constitutional amendments for India. The inevitable consequence of deputation was the partition of India and the emergence of Pakistan.