



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ROLE OF PUNJABI PRESS AND CRIPPS MISSION

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ABSTRACT

The war in Europe reached its peak by 1941. people expected that the British Government's view on the Indian issues would change as the war crisis deepened. The Cripps Mission of 1942 was the result of this genuine event. As a result, the British Government sent a War Cabinet Sir Stafford Cripps along with a Draft Declaration. However, the Draft Declaration he had brought did not contain much to recommend it.ⁱ All the parties rejected Cripps Proposals for various reasons. The Punjabi press looked at these proposals from the Sikh's point of view and analysed these proposals from the Sikh's point of view. The Akali (Punjabi, Daily) newspaper fully appreciated the Congress 'decision for not responding to any proposals of the British till the latter gave assurance of complete independence as and when the World War II was over. The Fateh in its editorial wrote that at this critical time too, the British policymakers did not seem to abandon their long-standing divide and conquer strategy. The Sikhs unveiled the 'Azad Punjab Scheme', as a counter-blast to the call for Pakistan and an alternative to the Cripps proposals.

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INTRODUCTION

The war in Europe progressed to a climax by 1941. Britain was now desperately anxious to have the full and active cooperation of India. To secure this cooperation, Britain felt that India had to be offered some firm promises for the future and a fuller measure of self-government for the present. The British Government accordingly sent, a member of the War Cabinet, to India with a Draft Declaration. It offered Dominion Status immediately after the war ended, but also gave India the right of secession. To implement this proposal a Constituent Assembly would be set up as soon as hostilities ceased. The members of the Assembly were to be drawn from both British India and the Native States. The British Indian members would be elected by the lower houses of the Provincial Legislatures. The representatives from the States would be nominated by the rulers. The British Government agreed to accept the constitution framed by the Assembly and negotiate a treaty arrangement with India. But there was a provision that any Province could, if it so desired, remain outside the Indian Union and negotiate direct with Britain. For the duration of the war no constitutional changes were proposed, but the hope was expressed that the Indian parties and leaders would agree to co-operate in the formation and functioning of a 'National Government'. The actual military aspects of defence would, of course, be looked after by the British Commander-in-Chief, but there would be an Indian as defence Member.

This Declaration was rejected by almost all the parties, though for different, and often for diametrically opposite reasons. The failure of the Cripps Mission plunged the country in despondency and anger.ⁱⁱ The Sikhs felt relieved that the Cripps Mission had failed but they also grew very suspicious and mistrustful of the intentions of the British because they believed that they had given up the notion of Pakistan. The Sikhs introduced their Azad Punjab Scheme against this backdrop. The Sikhs had the belief that although the Congress was adamant about unified India, despite its insistence on united India, it may ultimately cave into the Muslim League, leaving the Sikhs vulnerable to their influence. The Muslims were adamant about achieving their objectiveⁱⁱⁱ and Congress appeared to be trying to placate the Muslims.^{iv} People anticipated that the British Government's perspective on the Indian issue would shift as the war crisis worsened. The Cripps Mission of 1942 was the result of this.^v On March 11, 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India with the intention of compelling the Indians to assist in the war efforts, in his draft of proposals, Cripps promised on behalf of his government that as soon as the war ended, a group of elected Indians would be invited to draft a new constitution for India. There was a provision that any province could choose to leave the Indian Union if it so desired.^{vi} Furthermore, the authorities had started to have questions about the legitimacy of Sikander Hayat Khan and the Unionist Party. They estimated that, among the 84 Muslim members of the Assembly, not more than 12 followed

Sikander Hayat's lead while the other members inclined towards the Muslim League.^{vii} As Linlithgow observed in a letter to Amery on 7 March 1942, the "support for League is at present probably stronger outside legislature than within" in Bengal and Punjab.^{viii} *Khalsa Samachar* in its editorial suggests that the Cripps Mission was coming to India. It proposed a Panthic meeting should be convened at the time, in which there should be an open discussion on the Sikhs' rights and war. The Sikhs' demands should be put forth in written form. A big convention should be called to get them approved. A deputation of Sikh scholars should be formed to meet Sir Cripps and place before him the Sikh point of view.^{ix}

Joginder Singh was the Sikh delegate who met Sir Stafford on March 27, 1942. They immediately raised concerns about protecting the Sikh minority as well as the possibility "of redistributing some provincial power between the eastern and western Punjab to create a province where the Sikhs would have the deciding voice as a significant balancing party between" the Muslims and the Hindus after reading the Draft Declaration and asking for clarification on a few points.^x Sir Stafford presented his recommendations publicly "at a Press Conference on March 29, 1942, a week after he arrived in India."^{xi} There were two sections in the proposed declaration: a long-term proposal. The long-term plan was for the establishment of an elected body in India with the responsibility of drafting a new constitution with dominion status" as soon as hostilities ceased.^{xii} Only two requirements must be met for this constitution to be drafted: first, a province or provinces would have the ability to leave the Union; and second, His Majesty's Government and the body assigned with drafting the Constitution would sign a treaty covering "all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian Hands". Under a Short-term offer, it was agreed that all political parties would actively and effectively collaborate in the councils of their nation, of the commonwealth of the United Nations to defend India and conduct the World War effort overall until a new constitution was drafted,^{xiii}

All major parties in British India opposed the Cripps Proposals. The Indian National Congress, in addition to other defence and related issues,^{xiv} rejected it for two reasons: first, the 90 million people living in the states were not represented in the Cripps proposals;^{xv} and second, the non-accession principle might further divide India into several states^{xvi} "was a serious setback to the conception of Indian unity".^{xvii}

Khalsa Samachar in its editorial writes that the gist of the Congress demands was:

- Nothing less than full freedom would be acceptable.
- A national government must be established at the centre, which should not be under the Viceroy.
- The Indians should have full control over the defence.
- Not the Kings but the subjects should be given the right to send a fair number of lawmakers to the law-making body.

The states should be allowed to unite with or separate from The Indian Union.^{xviii} *The Akali* newspaper fully justified the Congress's stand for not responding to any proposal of the British till the latter gave assurance of complete independence as and when World War II was over. Besides, the Defence Ministry's responsibility should be vested in the Indian hands.

Far from accepting these demands, the British came up with proposals which could initiate a process of disintegration of states either to join the Indian confederation or opt out of it if 60% population wished to do that. Moreover, the doctrine of 'self-determination', the Defence Ministry's responsibility should be vested in the Indian hands. Moreover, the principle of 'self-determination' which was honoured in the case of the Muslim minority population was denied to the other communities, particularly the Sikh community. It was argued that the Sikhs demanded such a state in which they could hold a balance between the Hindu and Muslim population which meant reorganization of a province. But the British Government closed all doors to the Sikhs.^{xix} *The Akali* in its editorial of 4 May 1942 states that if the government had acted wisely, it would have handed over the defence to the Indians. It was the duty of the government to create such an atmosphere as might create confidence. It gave more importance to the question of partition than to the growing danger and did not trust the people in matters of defence. It won't be an overstatement to say that self-interests (of the British) were dearer to them than the benefits of India and Indians.^{xx}

The Fateh in its editorial (Failure of Cripps Mission), writes that at this critical time too, the British policymakers did not seem to give up their old policy. It clearly showed that they still were not ready to change in any way. It was another matter that the revolution of the day might compel them to change. But in the changing scenario, they would have to amend their present policy.^{xxi} An article (Strong Opposition to Pakistan by Sikhs) was published in *The Singh* newspaper (Weekly, Cownpore). This statement was made on behalf of the All India Sikh Conference by Master Tara Singh Ji, Sardar Joginder Singh Ji, Sardar Baldev Singh, and Sardar Ujjal Singh, after the second meeting with Sir Stafford Cripps. The All India Sikh Parties' conference rejected the proposal of the War Cabinet (Cripps Mission) because it was against the unity of India.^{xxii} *The Khalsa Samachar* in its editorial of 16 April 1942, writes that the main issues raised by the Sikhs were:

- There was an effort to lay the foundation of Pakistan in this scheme.
- Sikhs were not hopeful that they would be treated justly in Pakistan.
- No state should be allowed to separate from the Indian Union, which meant Pakistan would not be tolerated by the Sikhs.^{xxiii}

The Akali in an article (Master Tara Singh) writes that when Stafford Cripps came to India on 22 March 1942 with the proposal to accept the demand for Pakistan, the Sikhs were much disappointed. They strongly protested against the Cripps.^{xxiv} *The Singh* newspaper in its editorial of 12 April 1942, writes right from the beginning till today, they had fought in every field for England and its kingship, and the reward that they were getting was that their existence which had been extremely glorious and of which the English were trustees, was being exterminated.^{xxv} *The Akali* highlights that at the meeting held in Delhi in which the Sikhs' demands were presented to the Stafford Cripps were discussed. Cripps expresses sympathy with the Sikhs but he was helpless to find a solution to Sikh problems. However, he promised to support the case of the Sikhs in Cabinet.^{xxvi} Congress delegates tried their hardest throughout the negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps to obtain a minimum that would satisfy the National demand but to no avail. Congress saw a dismal future.

They thought if the British were unwilling to do so in an hour of crisis. There was no chance the British would cede control after the war. Gandhi was conscious of the possibility of a Japanese invasion and stronger action was required immediately to prevent India from becoming a battleground.^{xxvii} Out of the two major parties, the Congress and Muslim League, the Muslim League appeared satisfied with the plan. Congress noted that neither in the present nor in the future had its demand for complete independence been granted. Its more important objections were:

- The local option provision, which implied the acceptance of Pakistan.
- The provincial rulers' decision about the state representatives. The topic of the Executive Council's status, specifically with regard to its defence members, was the subject of discussion.^{xxviii}

Thus, for two reasons, the question of defence participation took on tremendous importance:

- All parties rejected the long-term or post-war plan, while the Muslim League on the whole supported it, the parties were willing to decide this portion of the offer without committing to the future plan as long as the interim portion of the offers could be settled to their satisfaction. They asserted that the creation of a national government at this time would ensure the long-term plan's execution following the war. In case the national government did not concur at this juncture, the promise for the future could not be trusted.
- National Defence throughout the times affected a vast area comprehending or impinging all facets of national activity. As a result, the non-transfer of Defence would leave a very limited area of authority for the management of the other departments. The Congress which desired power over all facets of the government could not be satisfied with such restricted scope of powers.^{xxix}

However, the Congress Committee did not adopt a rigid stance on defence. Raja Gopal Acharyas suggested that, legally, the Department should be transferred to an Indian member, but in reality, His Majesty's Government would retain operational responsibility over defence throughout the war.^{xxx} Jawahar Lal Nehru acknowledged that, in reality, the Chief of Staff and the War Cabinet must maintain effective control over the strategic as well as tactical disposition of fighting units, but he insisted that many other matters pertaining to the defence could be handled by Indians.^{xxxi} *The Fateh* in its editorial writes that the Cripps Mission plan was criticized by every party in the Punjab. The Congress and other progressive factions rejected this scheme, first because it undid the unity of India and second because it did not strengthen India for the time being.^{xxxii} *Khalsa Samachar* in its editorial writes that according to Congress, to give separate powers to states was a clever move. The principle of 'Divide and Rule' was working behind it.^{xxxiii} The Indian population's discontent and hopelessness increased as a result of the failure of the Cripps Mission negotiations. The idea was shelved, and Gandhi took back control of the Congress. A resolution stating that they would not cooperate with the British administration was issued by the Congress Working Committee.^{xxxiv} The recommendations for the Central Defence Department were rejected by the Congress Working Committee. It wanted the defence should be transferred to Indian authority along with

other portfolios at the centre. The Congress also criticized the post-war arrangements proposed. It advocated for the National government to be established at the centre. But Sir Stafford Cripps rejected this demand.^{xxxv} *The Fateh* reported that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said regarding the proposals of Cripps, "Cripps proposals were those which were considered and forgotten. Now they had no importance. The reason for the statement was not the non-violence of Gandhiji, but for that the British did not want the power to slip off their own hands. India would compromise today if Britain relinquished power on its own."^{xxxvi}

Sir Chhotu Ram was also opposed to the Cripps Proposals and wanted the Defence Department in the hands of the Indians. Sir Chhotu Ram also opposed the partition of India into separate sovereign states.^{xxxvii} *Khalsa Samachar* in its editorial writes that the Muslim League said that the position of the Muslim League had been as long as explained in the resolution, passed at the Lahore convention of the Muslim League, was not accepted, the Muslims won't feel satisfied.^{xxxviii} *Khalsa Samachar* in its editorial stated that the Sikhs objected that the laxity to the Muslims in the scheme was the laxity of Pakistan. But if Sikhs wanted to separate from the Pakistani provinces like Muslims, then they had not been allowed to do so.^{xxxix} *The Akali* (Lahore), a leading Punjabi daily, was the first to bring out an editorial on the failure of the Cripps Proposals. It argued that if a separate state could be carved out from the existing Punjab to give a lease to the minorities, then why had the British annoyed the Sikhs? If Sind could be split from Bombay only for the sake of 38 lakh Muslims then why not a separate province for Sikhs and Hindus from a population of 384 lakhs in the Punjab?^{xl} The Sikh reprisal alarmed the British and resulted in the strategy of appeasement. In the Minutes, dated 24 April "1942, David Taylor Monteath, the permanent Under Secretary of State for India and Burma, suggested that while there" was 'no way of putting back the clock in Punjab', there were ways to diffuse the tension. He suggested making a statement regarding the potential redrawing of province borders.^{xli} The Sikhs offered the Azad Punjab Scheme as a substitute for the Cripps Proposals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Singh, Joginder (2012), *Punjab Journalism Issues and Concerns* revolves around the socio religious and political concerns of the Sikh community during the period. The author has made use of newspapers and periodicals of the Punjabi and the English. Published literature of English in the form of Books, booklets and articles.

Tanwar, Raghuvendra (2006), *Reporting the Partition of Punjab 1947, Press, Public and Other Opinions* as given a chronicle of the partition of the Punjab as it focuses on events as they quickly happened in 1947. The work is confined itself to the limited period of 1946-1947.

The Fateh newspaper was launched by Labh Singh Narang in 1928. The paper, a weekly, was critical of anti people legislation and policies of British Government and native rulers. The paper supported national movement, appreciated the sacrifices of revolutionaries and at the same time took up the socio-political concerns of Sikh Community. *The Akali* was the mouthpiece of S.G.P.C. and Shoromani Akali Dal and carried Sikh political and religious views and their aspirations.

It throws light on the Lahore Resolution, Azad Punjab Scheme, Cripps Proposals, Sapru Committee Report, Failure and Resignation of Khizar Ministry and Mountbatten plan are main contents of the paper.

METHODOLOGY

This work is based on both primary sources as well as secondary works. To pursue this research paper, I started studying the secondary sources, i.e. books, articles in journals which are listed in references. The primary sources includes files of *Home Department (Political) and Fortnightly Reports on Punjab*, from National Archive of India, New Delhi. *The Tribune, The Akali, Khalsa Samachar, The Fateh, The Singh* newspapers from Sikh History Research Library, Amritsar and other contemporary publications.

CONCLUSION

Thus it can be said that Indians were expecting some change in the British attitude to the Indian problems and this actually happened in the form of Cripps Mission of 1942. Unfortunately every party rejected its proposals for different reasons but Indian National Congress strongly condemned it on non-representation of Indians in Cripps Proposals. The *Akali (Punjabi, Daily)* newspaper fully appreciated the Congress 'decision for not responding to any proposals of the British till the latter gave assurance of complete independence as and when the World War II was over.

Scope for Further Research: The Research paper is valuable for the scholars related to the field of Politics, History and Journalism.

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- ^{vi} Singh, Khushwant (1999), *A History of the Sikhs 1839-1988*, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 249-250. See also Nayyar, Baldev Raj (1966), *Minority Politics in the Punjab*, Princeton, New Jersey, p. 81.
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- ^{ix} *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, 19 March 1942, p.2.
- ^x Kapur Anup Chand (1985), *The Punjab Crisis an Analytical Study*, S. Chand and Company Ltd, New Delhi, p.68.
- ^{xi} Coupland, R. (1942), *The Cripps Mission*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, p. 29. quoted by Sharma, Rakesh (2009), 'The Role of Princes and Politics during the Imperial War (1935-45)', *Journal of Regional History*, Vol. XV, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p. 141.
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xiii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xiv} The Congress maintained that the Cabinet proposals, relating as they were to the future, were such as would "Imperil the development of a free and united national government. It objected to the British Government's retention of defence in its control and commented that, in a war emergency, the national defence could be effectively provided only if India had full freedom. "To take away defense," said the resolution, "from the spree of responsibility at this stage is to reduce that responsibility to a farce and nullity, and to make it clear that Indian is not going to be free in any way...during... the war."; Gwyer, M. and Appadoria, A. (1957)(ed.), *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-47*, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, London, pp. 524-526.
- ^{xv} In its resolution dated April 2, 1942, the Working Committee states thus, The complete ignoring of the 19 Million people in the Indian States and their treatment as commodities at the disposal of their rulers, is a negation both of democracy and self-determination; *Ibid.*
- ^{xvi} Gwyer, M. and Appadoria, A. (1957) (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 524-526. In a statement dated April 13, 1942, Gandhiji while commenting on the proposals as 'ill-fated' maintained "that the proposals contemplated the splitting up of India into three parts, each having different ideas of governance.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid.* See also Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, *India Wins Freedom*, *op. cit.*, p.62.
- ^{xviii} *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, 16 April, 1942, p.2.
- ^{xix} *The Akali (Punjabi, Daily)*, Lahore, 25, 28 March 1942, p.3; 1st, 2nd, 13th April 1942, p.3. ; 11 April 1942, pp.5-6.
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- ^{xxxvi} *The Fateh*, Lahore, 25 June 1942, p. 9.
- ^{xxxvii} *The Tribune*, Lahore, 30 March 1942, p.1; 11 April 1942, p.1-2.
- ^{xxxviii} *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, 16 April 1942, p.2.
- ^{xxxix} *Ibid.*, 22 April 1942, p.1.
- ^{xl} Muslims enjoyed only a narrow majority over the Hindus and Sikhs combined. The latter had the advantage over Muslims in the educational and economic fields; Bir Good Gill, 'Road to Nowhere: The *Akalis, Cripps and the Azad Punjab Scheme*,' pp.247-248.
- ^{xli} *Ibid.*, p.248.