



RESEARCH PAPER

Punjab Muslim League and its Victory of Elections 1945-46: An Analysis of Internal Party Organization

Samia Khalid ¹ Muhammad Fiaz Anwar²

1. Assistant Professor, Department of History, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

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Corresponding

Author:
Samia.Khalid@
iub.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The victory of Punjab Muslim League in elections of 1945-46 represented a turning point in the political history of India. Since that time a scholarly debate started about the causes of this swiping victory of the Muslim League. In this regard, most of the scholars focused on external factors like that it was not the Muslim League, but its opponents that failed to perform well and they gave the chance to Muslim League to win the elections. In the same way, some scholars presented that slogan 'Islam in danger', support of landlords, or weaknesses of Unionists or support from the salaried class made Muslim League popular in Punjab; while they ignored the internal cohesiveness of the Punjab Muslim League in that election. So in this context, this paper contends that along with external factors, the internal party organizational strength like its leadership, manifesto, organization, electoral campaign also contributed in the victory of Punjab Muslim League in the elections. In this regard, in order to advance the argument this paper is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the Punjab Muslim League's internal party strengths while the second part is about the counter arguments of other writers

Introduction

Punjab is located in the northwest of the Indian sub-continent. Due to its Muslim majority population, this province acquired the position of cornerstone in the struggle of the All India Muslim League (AIML) to establish Pakistan, a separate sovereign Muslim state. In 1936-37 elections PML secured only 2 out of 81 Muslim seats in this Muslim majority province. Both the AIML and the Indian National Congress (INC) failed to successfully challenge the power of the Unionists, non-communal political party of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain. This party was the King's party of the Punjab from its birth to elections of 1945-46. Nevertheless,

within a decade of its defeat in 1937 the Punjab Muslim League was able to win 79 out of 86 Muslim and defeated the Unionists in their backyard. With this background following is the analysis of internal factors of Muslim League as a political party which played major role in determining the victory of Muslim League in campaign for elections in 1945-46.

Political Leadership

For the victory in elections of 1945-46 party leadership played a vital role at the national, provincial and local levels. Jinnah prepared the field for war as Amarjit Singh tell us about his attention towards the Punjab, in the light of Shamsul Hasan collection: "These documents [*Shamsul Hasan* collection] suggest to the readers that Jinnah virtually emerged as an able organizer of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League and if required would like to answer even a small query from any section of the Muslim Punjab" (Singh, 91).

The provincial leaders were also there to fight with their lives and money and local leaders helped their high command. For the elections of 1945-46, the Punjab Muslim League had the support of many prominent provincial and local leaders. Indeed, its candidates for different constituencies included a number of former Unionists.

Manifesto: The second internal factor which also played a major role in sweeping the elections was manifesto of Punjab Muslim League. The manifesto of the Punjab Muslim League was published in the *Eastern Times* (Lahore) under the title: "Punjab Provincial Muslim League Manifesto." The Working Committee of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League adopted the manifest unanimously on 31 October, 1944. This manifesto was the comprehensive program outline of the Punjab Muslim League for the elections and beyond. In this manifesto, the Punjab Muslim League divided its program into several headings. Under each heading, the manifesto discussed one problem and its solution for the future in detail. Some of the major points of the manifesto were as follows:

The manifesto started with the assertion that the Pakistan demand was the focal point of its program. The manifesto appealed to the Muslims to stand behind the League in the pursuit of this goal. The Punjab Muslim League would work for the promotion of religious, spiritual and cultural traditions and rights of the Muslims. In this context, the manifesto suggested the idea of the "Bait-ul-mal" for the economic support of the Muslims. It also demanded full civil liberties for the common man explaining that without civil liberties no democratic system could work. Therefore it supported liberty of press, abolishment of old "vicious relic" of Frontier Crimes Regulation and *Jirgah* system and their replacement by "Civilized Law". Moreover it also criticized the Unionists for their failure to introduce "Schemes of Public Amelioration" and put forwarded the "pledged to restore self-respect and dignity to the village people, particularly to the village headmen who have been reduced to helpless vehicles of corruption." It also noted the low pay of

public servants and suggested that "...all recruitment and promotion in the services must be by merit and not by favour." The manifesto announced "a plan for Industrial Development balanced and coordinated with agricultural development" for the welfare of the masses. This will help the agricultural classes as well. It also supported the "nationalization" of industries. (*Working Committee, 1944, November, 9*).

The manifesto highlighted the rights and problems of the labour and its solutions. It saw "... the working population as the real producers of the wealth of the country." It proposed that, in order to improve the conditions of labour, "International conventions and agreements for welfare of the workers" should be honored and implemented, including lowering of the working hours, fixation of the minimum wages with allowances, etc. In this context, the manifesto highlighted the need for an efficient Labour Department to look after the welfare of labor. To facilitate peasants the manifesto suggested the establishment of an "Agricultural Credit Bank with branches in all rural areas". It criticized the "Land Alienation Act" which was primarily geared to the interests of the landlords. The manifesto further demanded good sources of irrigation, land reclamation, road construction, common granaries and electrification. and suggested necessary amendments in the "Land Reforms". The manifesto assured the people that the League would "reverse the policy of the present administration which in an antidemocratic manner has nullified local self- Government in this province". The manifesto emphasized that the League stood for "universal adult franchise for all elected bodies.

This Manifesto of All India Muslim League was prepared by Communist leaders and among them most prominent was Danial Latifi. Therefore, the rights of locals' especially economic rights are especially protected in this program. Like this manifesto gave a plan of *Bait-ul-Mal*, education for all because it is necessary for industrialization, protects the rights of lower class of village, welfare of soldiers. It highlighted the problems of corruption, nepotism, and government policies that favored landlords' interests. In a nutshell this was a manifesto for a common man.

Organizational Structure

Organization of a political party is based on various characteristics as number of members, local branches, elected officials, and formal rules. Moreover, relationship among the various actors, leaders and factions are also equally important, which is discussed in detail as under.

The structure of the PML was a replica of the organizational structure of AIML, well defined with the posts of president, vice president, general secretary, joint secretary, propaganda secretary, finance secretary, organizing secretary on provincial level and local level, and these seats filled through elections. To get the common people's support there were district, city, ward, and village Muslim Leagues. Moreover, The Punjab Provincial Muslim Women's League, Muslim

National Guard, Muslim Girls' National Guards, The Punjab Muslim Students' Federation, were also working even at the grassroots level in the Punjab. The constitution of PML used to be passing in a meeting of members of PML who were representatives of all districts. As needed, subcommittees were also formed to nominate Muslim League candidates to contest elections or by-elections, or to allocate the ticket to different members. Some details are here:

President

At AIML level the powers of president were gradually increasing from 1940 to 1944 but at provincial level president of PML was not as powerful. First of all, he was under the tight control of center of the party that once in a month he had to visit center to receive instructions. For the most part, the provincial president was elected by PML but could also be nominated by Jinnah.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee consisted of the President, Vice President, three regular and three ordinary members and they had to contest elections to come to these seats. Moreover, at the center, the 1940 constitution of the League provided a working Committee comprising 21 members, nominated each year by the president among the members of the Council. It was totally under the control of the president who nominated its member from League Council. All provincial branches were controlled by central working committee. It was the most powerful body at the center after the president. At the same time, the working committee of the PML was formed in 1940 and its meetings were called whenever it was necessary. It also had the representatives of different districts of the Punjab as its members, but sometimes Jinnah selected the representatives of the PML on the Working Committee of AIML.

Muslim National Guard

At a meeting of the Working Committee of the Punjab Muslim League held in May 1943 It was decided that the Muslim National Guard should be organized wherever League branches existed in the province. *Salar-i-Azam* (Commander-in-Chief) was in-charge of the All Indian Muslim League National Guards. At the provincial level *Salar-i-Suba*; (Commander of province) had authority while *Salar-i-Alas* i/c divisions, *Salar-i-Zilas* i/c district, and *Salar-i-Shehrs* i/c city and village branches, commanded the lower tiers. Nawab Saddiq Ali Khan, *Salar-i-Azam* of the All Indian Muslim League National Guards, arrived in Lahore on May the 29th [1944] and explained the constitution and rules of the *Salars* (National Guards) He informed them that:

...there would be three types of volunteers- active volunteers, reservists and a juvenile crop for boys under eighteen... the Muslim Students National Guards would be dissolved and incorporated in the All Indian National Guards.

He stated that all members of the Guards had to provide their own uniform which would consist of Gray or *Khaki* coats or shirts, trousers and caps or turbans. He said that functions of the Guards to train and discipline Muslim for the purposes of social and physical uplift, to maintain law and order in the country and to foster a spirit of service and sacrifice among Muslims. The headquarters of the Provincial National Guards will be at the office of the Provincial Muslim League. (Ahmad, 2008, p. 160)

The Punjab Muslim Students' Federation: This wing consisted of students of Punjab from various institutions. This Federation had a Working Committee and President as well as Vice President to organize this wing. Students' Federation got together annually. The Punjab Muslim Student Federation meeting was reported from Lahore on 9th May 1943. They assisted all organs of Punjab Muslim League (Ahmad, 2008, p.128).

The Punjab Provincial Muslim Women's League

This wing consisted of women all over the Punjab but most active were the women of Lahore. This branch of League had a Working Committee and President as well as Vice President to organize this wing. It met annually, though these meetings were *Purdah* meetings but still Women's Muslim League had branches at district, city and village levels. Both of these bodies had their own working committees as well as branches at district, and city levels. Girls' Muslim National Guard was also its part and some time these female guards had uniforms: The annual conference of the Punjab Provincial Muslim Women's League was held in *Parda* in Lahore on the 19th of Feb. 200 women attended including 16 Muslim girls wearing a kind of uniform consisting of white clothing with green cross belts (Ahmad, 2008, pp. 145-146).

The Punjab Provincial Muslim League Defence Committee: First time the Civil Defence Committee of the All-India Muslim League visited Lahore on 22nd June 1942 and appointed, "The Punjab Provincial Muslim League Defence Committee, consisted of Nawab Iftikhar Hussain of Mamdot, Professor Malik Inayat Ullah, Sheikh Karamat Ali, Nawabzada Rashid Ali Khan and Mian Feroze-ud-din Ahmed. In addition, Abu Said Anwar was appointed as Secretary and its main object was to organize District Defence Committees in all districts of the Punjab." (Ahmad, 2008, p. 105). The duties of these Defence Committees were to manage and organize all functions and guard the members and participants of meetings, so later on this committee was renamed as The Provincial Muslim League National Guards near 1944 and then the Muslim League Volunteers. Its uniform and structure is well explained below: ... the Punjab Muslim League National Guard which is to be organized under the direct supervision of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League is to consist of : Active members; Reserve members; Minors; A uniform consisting of a khaki coat, trousers, and turban is

provided for. In view of the ban on drill it has however been decided that no parades, with or without arms will be held in the Punjab (Ahmad, 2008, p. 79).

District Muslim Leagues: These Leagues comprised an Executive Committee, Working Committee, to organize themselves a District Muslim League Defence Committee, Muslim League National Guards, Volunteer Corps, and a Publicity Board. The elections of office bearers were annual and held in most of District Muslim Leagues.

Part Two: Arguments of other Scholars:

In this section, an analysis of the already existing arguments of Ayesha Jalal and David Gilmartin, in the light of above given hypothesis has been presented.

Firstly, Ayesha Jalal claims that in the 1945-46 elections, "...it was not what the League did, but what its opponents – the Unionist and their British allies – failed to do that gave Jinnah his chance." (Jalal, 1999, p. 138). In reality, from 1942 the Unionist continued to suffer under the leadership of Khizar Hayat Khan, sandwiched between the demand of masses during the war years and their incapacity to solve the problems, mostly, the food problem of the Punjab during 1944. The British, of course, had their own problems but still they tried to help out their loyal friends. The main problem with the Unionists was their dependence on the British. In the end, as Khizar Hayat Khan's letter to Grigg and Wavell's letters to Amery showed, there was very little the British could do for them in the changed circumstances. It said:

I have told Glancy that the real problem is how the classes to which Khizar refers can express their views. The soldiers, quite rightly, have no political organization: the rural population, quite inexcusably, has none of their own either. This is mainly the fault of the landlords and country gentlemen, the natural leaders of the people, who have never seriously attempted, except perhaps to limited extent in some parts of the Punjab, to organize a party of their own. They have made no use of the opportunities offered by the eclipse of the Congress and as long as the Congress and the Muslim League can sweep the polls at any General Election, it is impossible for His Majesty's Government to say they do not represent the people (Jalal, 1999, pp. 44, 45).

During the 1936-37 elections, the Unionists had the upper hand. They were mostly rich and influential landlords of the Punjab, enjoyed good relations with the bureaucracy, and also had the support of the poor peasants who were ready to do anything for them. But the situation was different in 1946. Most of the landlords and *pirs* in the Punjab who were initially in Unionist Party had moved towards the Muslim League, resulting in the weakness of the Unionists' ranks. According to one writer, "If the Manifesto was a landmark in the history of the Punjab League, the recent organizational tours of League leaders like Mumtaz Daultana has also opened a new chapter of activity for the League" (*People's War*, 1945, June 17).

Daultana was a landlord and Jahania was a *pir*. In the Punjab only *pirs* and landlords were the leaders of the Muslims. The two social groups played important role in the campaign for the League. Indeed, they were the ones who contributed the most to success of the League in the elections of 1945-46. But the point is that these landlords and *Pirs* were not fools they were politicians and just to serve their own political aims so they gauged the trend of the Muslims of India, so they decided to be part of PML.

In 1937, the League had neither media nor money at its disposal. But, in the elections of 1945-46, the League was able to utilize the money of the landlords. Some writers, of course, criticized Jinnah's policy, even at that time, to depend on these landlords for the victory of the League in the Punjab. According to Sajid Zaheer:

... the League sent to the Central Assembly Sher Shah Gilani of Multan. Who was an old paralytic gentleman of a powerful landlord clan, one of the few feudal families who rule western Punjab. The League here could well have given its ticket the young and progressive Leaguer Ali Hasan Shah Gardezi, one of the builders of the new League in the Punjab. But he was denied because he did not belong to a landlord family. (Zaheer, 1945, December 2)

But, if we keep in mind the importance of money for a successful election campaign, clearly Jinnah was being pragmatic. He knew they could help the League to win the elections which would pave the way for Pakistan. These landlords not only put their resources at the disposal of the League but also toured the length and breadth of the Punjab to win over the support of masses. They campaigned in their own peculiar ways as reporter recorded: "Except in the speeches of Daultana, Gazanfar Ali and Iftikharudin, I have not heard any notable League leaders stating the League position in a democratic manner. Noon and Shaukat Hayat start their speeches by reciting Arabic religious hymns...." (Zaheer, 1945, December 2)

It was not the case that Unionist failed to do gave chance to Muslim League but in reality the Unionists did whatsoever they could do but still they couldn't stop Muslim League because till the elections of 1945-46 Muslim League had become a mass moment from a political party. The Unionists used their money, police and bureaucracy against PML. But actually another advantage of having these landlords was that, they, having worked with the bureaucracy in the past, were not afraid of challenging them now. As one of the publicity posters claimed, they had the guts to say "Brothers of the countryside remember that the Government official cannot compel you. Give your vote to whomsoever you wish." (Chandra, 1946, February 10).

The second Argument of Ayesha Jalal, is that the League was successful only because of the conversion of the Unionists and the support of the *pirs* in the elections. Jalal claims, those who saw the League victory "as the result of a

coordinated effort by the Punjab League to organize an election campaign face a sad disappointment if they study the facts." (Jalal, 1999, pp. 145,146). The only thing going for the League, she concedes, was the "superhuman" leadership of the Jinnah. Although there is no denying that Jinnah's leadership was crucial for the victory of the League in the elections, and landlords and the *pirs* played an important role, but it is not correct to dismiss the organization and the manifesto of the League so lightly. Indeed, a close study of the case would suggest that the leadership of the League, its organization and the manifesto it offered to the people, all worked together, reinforcing each other.

Before 1944 there was no proper structure of the League in the Punjab. There were mostly ghost branches of the League, but things began to change steadily but surely. The League started a new chapter. Primary League branches were established in such far-flung and rural areas as Kahut, (Rawalpindi District), Rawari (Gurgaon District), Shahkot (Jullundur), Pathankot (Gurdaspur), Kamalia (Lyallpur), Panipat (Karnal) and in Campbellpur. Muslim League even established its branches in Sikh and Hindu majority districts as Rohtak, Gurgaon, Karnal, Ambala, Kangra, Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Gurdaspur.

Moreover, Ayesha wrote "just before the elections, most League branches in district, rural and urban alike were still on the drawing boards. One or two district 'headquarters were haphazardly opened (and some time closed); batches of Aligarh students did make a run into the country hardly evidence of a well-laid plan to organize an electoral campaign." (Jalal, 1999, pp. 143-145). Jalal elaborates her stance by saying that except Sargodah "...in other districts in the division [Rawalpindi], there was no activity..." to prove this she gave the example of "Mianwali, the district organizer [claimed] that there were seventeen primary Leagues with nearly two thousand members by July 1944, but eighteen months later all had gone, and not a League organization was left in the district." (Jalal, 1999, p. 146).

In Rawalpindi Division, which had Gujrat, Shahpur, Jhelum, Rawalpindi, and Attock districts, branches of the Muslim League were continually holding meeting, opening new branches, and gathering funds for Muslim League. In fact, there was plenty of evidence to suggest that increasingly there was greater enthusiasm and support for the League than the Unionists, in many parts of the Punjab.

Although the Muslim League was not strong enough in 1944 but there was a visible structure of the Muslim League as was evident in a report published by the *Nawa-i-Waqat* suggesting that in a gathering to celebrate Pakistan Day in March, the leaders of the Provincial Muslim League, City Muslim League, Civil Muslim League, *Misaree Shah* Muslim League, *Ichra* Muslim League, *Ganje* Muslim League, *Bagbanpura* Muslim League, and Punjab Students Muslim Federation had participated (*Nawa-i-Waqat*, 25 March, 1944). In fact, there was a steady growth in the enrollment of members. In 1944, 3,000 members had enrolled compared to less

than 2,000 in the previous year. In Gujranwala, 2,000 had been enrolled while there were not more than some 500 last year. There were 1,500 women enrolled as members of the League (Chandra, 1945, June 17). According to one estimate, in June 1945, Lyallpur had 15,000 members and Multan had 11,000. These were the districts which were controlled by the *Zamindara* League, and had all the support of government, money and official media. Gujranwala had 1000 members with 5 Primary Committees, while in Lahore there were 59 Primary Committees (Chandra, 1945). The Rawalpindi Muslim League, according to Jalal herself "was an exception; here the League happened to have an energetic local man, Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah Gilani, General Secretary Rawalpindi Muslim League, who actually set up a dozen or so primary branches and enrolled four and half thousand members in Sargodha District" (Jalal, 1999, p.146).

Although students from all over India worked hard for the League, the Punjab Muslim Students' Federation in particular contributed the most under the leadership of such enthusiastic leaders as Mian Bashir Ahmad, Hamid Nizami and Zahur Alam Shaheed. Their support made a critical difference to the fortunes of the League in the Punjab. As Jinnah exclaimed, "Perhaps the students do not know that by organising this successful movement, they have changed the course of the history of India" (Hayat, 1998, pp. 242-245).

Women also worked hard to strengthen the organization of the Muslim League in the Punjab. Prominent women's leaders like Begam Salma Tasadduque Husain, Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, and Begum Bashir Ahmad, contributed the most. Some other important leaders who were aligned with other parties, such as the Congress and the Unionists, decided to switch their loyalties and join the League. Begum Shah Nawaz played an important role in this regard (Hayat, 1998, pp. 247, 248).

Gilmartin's argument is that slogan Islam in danger made Muslim League popular in Punjab. In fact, the Muslim League demanded a separate sovereign state for the Muslims of India, in the Lahore Resolution in March 1940, but in the Punjab, this demand could not rapidly mobilize the Muslims. First, the Punjabis were not under non-Muslim rule so they could not raise the cry of "Islam in danger" as Gilmartin claimed in *Empire and Islam* (Gilmartin, 1988, p. 199-213). Second, they did not have the political organization which could explain to them the imminent threat of Hindu Raj after the end of British rule in India. Third, the Muslim League was virtually non-existent in the Punjab in spite of the so-called Jinnah-Sikandar Pact. Ironically, it was only after the breakup of this Pact that League began to gain ground in the Punjab. In particular, its manifesto was a great help.

Gilmartin argued, "...the manifesto's contribution was far more theoretical than practical. In its call for a radical transformation, it served, ironically, more to highlight than to resolve the immediate political dilemmas the League faced as it

organized to defeat the Unionist Party.” (Gilmartin, 1988, p. 199). Obviously the manifestos are meant both to highlight and resolve the problems. But, then, the problems cannot be resolved unless they are identified and highlighted first. Theory leads to practice. This manifesto was the comprehensive program outline of the Punjab Muslim League for the elections and beyond. Hence, one writer described the League’s manifesto “like a search-light slashing out the Unionist-imposed political black-out.” (Chandra, 19 November, 1944). There was no denying, as an editorial in *Nawa-i-Waqt* put it, that for the first time a political party in the Punjab had given “such a clear-cut and comprehensive Manifesto”. More importantly, the “League did not give false promises but it highlighted the problems and comprehensive plans to solve them.” And above all, “League was no longer the party of some elites but it is branch of a well organized national party” (Editorial, 1944, November 14)

Gilmartin quoted a member of the *Zamindara* League to explain the Muslims’ increasing membership of the Muslim League. “It is common practice these days” he says that “father and son intentionally join different parties in order to gain advantage from the party in power” (Gilmartin, 1988, pp.199-203). But on other hand communist papers which gave greater coverage to the elections than any other group of newspapers, says a father disowned his son because his son went to attend meeting of the Unionist party (Chandra, 1944). If this instance was any guide, clearly the Muslim League had great public support. In addition the women of the Muslim League in their every-day lives worked for PML. As one reporter claimed, “I have it on reliable authority that the wife of one of the Muslim M.L.A.s who attended the *Jat Mahasabh* Conference at Lyallpur, refused to give him his meals, on the ground that she would not have anything to do with a traitor.” (Chandra, 1944). If this instance was any guide, clearly the women had taken it upon themselves to promote and pursue the League cause.

The truth of the matter was that, in the 1945-46 elections, the League was able to offer a better leadership, organization and manifesto as compared to the Unionists or any other political party in the Punjab for that matter and the difference was clearly reflected in the overwhelming victory of the League in the elections.

Conclusion

Existing literature on this issue ascribes the League’s victory in 1945-46 either to religious backing, or support of landlords, or weaknesses of Unionists or support from the salaried class, while ignoring the internal cohesiveness of the PML. A host of communal and non-communal parties were actively participating and competing with each other in the said elections. At the same time, national political parties from these two categories also organized their branches in the province of Punjab. In spite of these odds and obstacles, the PML exhibited determination and perseverance in its struggle. PML used its time and resources strategically, and seized all opportunities arising from binding religious force,

weakness of Unionists, winning over members of other parties and salaried class, etc., thanks to its leadership, manifesto and organization that had together become strong enough to ensure victory by the time Muslim League took part in the elections of 1945-46.

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