*The Social Background and Politics of the Muslims of Tamil Nad, 1901-1937**

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In recent years there has been an increasing tendency amongst historians interested in modern India to attempt a new analysis of the nationalist movement by a more detailed examination of regional societies and cultures. This has led to a variety of studies concerning the dominant social and religious groups in India—the Hindus, in such different regions as the Punjab and Tamil Nad, but as yet little research has been devoted to the Muslim communities of modern India. Certainly we possess several excellent general surveys of Muslim society, politics and culture in India before Independence but the image of the Muslims of India as a monolithic minority group has only recently been challenged[1].

The purpose of this article is to survey briefly the political history of the Muslims of Tamil Nad during the first thirty seven years of this century. In particular the article examines the sources and nature of social tension between sub-groups within the community; their differing responses to the burgeoning nationalist movement and the eventual development of political unity within the community in the 1930s.

The Muslim community of Tamil Nad is the oldest extant Muslim community in the Indian sub-continent. Islam was introduced into southern India by Arab traders who for generations prior to, and after, the advent of Muhammad, carried on a flourishing trade with the Malayalam- and Tamil-speaking areas of India. Islam was

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1. Mujeeb, M., *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1967), p. 23.

originally confined to small Arab trading settlements along the coasts of Malabar and the Gulf of Manaar but as Arab trading influence increased under the benevolent aegis of various mercantile-based Tamil dynasties the nature of the Islamic community in the south changed.[2] Various indigenous trading and fishing groups were converted to Islam with the approval of local rulers, who were eager to encourage Arab mercantile activities by establishing a permanent nexus between the Islamic Arab world and southern India in the form of an amenable supply of local craftsmen and labourers.[3] Considerable intermarriage ensured that by the thirteenth century the indigenous language and culture had largely obscured the Arabian purity of Islam in Tamil Nad. In everything but religion the Muslims of south-east India formed an integral part of local society by this period.[4] Tamil society was extremely caste-conscious and was split into a multitude of socially exclusive but economically inter-dependent groups. It was a fractional society where group distinctions were accepted as an integral part of society. Thus the Tamil Nad Muslims, who spoke Tamil and who could by and large claim an ethnic identification with the region were able to maintain their identity as a religiously distinct group. In addition, they possessed an economic niche within local society which was maintained in succeeding centuries.

It would be incorrect, however, to view the Muslims of Tamil Nad as a homogeneous group. They were a conglomerate community which grew slowly as a result of intermarriage and conversions. This led to the formation of various exclusive sub-groups within the community defined in terms of geographical and racial or caste origin.[5] Groups of indigenous origin retained a degree of caste-consciousness to the extent of maintaining endogamy and rules of commensality while certain other groups claimed direct

2. Aiyangar, S. K., *South India and Her Muhammedan Invaders* (Madras 1921), pp. 70-73.

3. Gopal, R., *Indian Muslims: A Political History (1858-1947)* (Lucknow, 1959), p. 1; Qureshi, I.H., *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent (610-1947)* ('S-Gravenhage, 1962), pp. 12-18. See also various Madras *District Gazetteers.*

4. Hemingway, F. R., *Tanjore District Gazetteer*, vol. 1., p. 60 and other Madras *District Gazetteers.*

5. Qureshi, I.H., *op. cit.*, p. 16; see also Madras *District Gazetteers.*

Arab descent and adopted endogamy to preserve their racial purity.[6]

From the thirteenth century onwards a further element was added to Islamic society in Tamil Nad. As a result of repeated incursions by Muslim rulers from north and central India and rule of the Nizams of Hyderabad and the Nawabs of Carnatic there was a steady stream of Muslim migration from northern India.[7] These Muslims were mostly Urdu-speakers whose descendants form the present-day Muslim populations of Mysore and Andhra states but numbers of them settled in Tamil Nad as soldiers and administrators. They shared neither the language nor culture of the Tamil-speaking Muslims and had no desire to identify with any aspect of local society. They formed an exotic ruling class which maintained its minority consciousness and sense of community identity apart from local society.

The advent of British rule had a mixed effect upon the Muslims of Tamil Nad. The Urdu-speakers were dispossessed as a military and administrative group and, lacking any land-holding or mercantile background, they rapidly sank into poverty and sullen apathy. They rejected the educational and administrative innovations introduced by the British with the result that they were replaced by local non-Muslim groups,[8] particularly the Brahmins, who quickly acquired the administrative skills required by the British.[9] The Tamil-speaking[10] Muslims were better equipped to adapt to British rule. They found new avenues of economic exploitation,

6. "Indigenous groups": Labbais, Ravuttam, Jonagans, Panjuvettis; "Arab groups": Navayats, Marakayyars. At the best the claims of the latter groups are tenuous.

7. See Madras *District Gazetteers* for North Arcot, Bellary, Nellore, South Arcot, Cuddapah, Kurnool; Aiyar, R. S., *History of the Nayaks of Madura* (Madras, 1924), pp. 1-4; Mahalingam, T. V., *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar* (Madras, 1940), pp. 319-20.

8. *Selection from the Record of the Government of India, Home Dept, No. 205* (Calcutta, 1886), pp. 153-55.

9. Madras Govt. *Administration Reports* (annual) contain a selection on communal representation in the Public Service.

10. Hereinafter "Urdu-speaking Muslims" and "Tamil-speaking Muslims" are abbreviated to "Urdu Muslims" and "Tamil Muslims".

and their traditional entrepreneurial skills stood them in good stead. By the end of the nineteenth century they held a virtual monopoly of the prosperous and modern tanning industry in southern India, as well as controlling the trade in skins and hides from northern India.[11] They had a traditional interest in the village-based tanning industry and the skin and hide trade and were apparently the only entrepreneurs interested in establishing the business on a modern basis when Western techniques were introduced in the 1850s.[12] Tamil Muslims also held a disproportionate share in the import-export trade of Tamil Nad and in the coastal and Ceylon sea-trade.[13]

Demographically the Muslims formed approximately 3 per cent of the populations of the Tamil districts by 1900 with a ratio of one Urdu Muslim to three Tamil Muslims.[14] But the figure of 3 per cent gives no real indication of their position in the region. In some Tamil districts the Muslim percentage was 3 per cent or less but in others it rose as high as 5-7 per cent.[15] In addition the Muslims were more highly urbanised than any other indigenous group excepting the Indian Christians, and in the case of the largest city in the Presidency,[16] Madras City, they formed 11.26 per cent of the population in 1901.[17] In many other urban centres, especially along the Gulf of Manaar, they formed a disproportionately-large section of the population and were in some instances in a majority.[18] Despite their overall numerical insignificance, their demographic distribution was such that they were located in or near the centres of power and wealth in southern India in numbers which were sufficient to remind both their rulers and their fellow Indians constantly of their presence.

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11. Dupuis, J., *Madras et le Nord du Coromandel* (Paris, 1960), p. 220.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
13. See Madras *District Gazetteers* for Tinnevelly, Tanjore and South Arcot.
14. *Census of India*, 1901, vol. XV, part I, pp. 133, 165.
15. *Ibid.*, Ramnad (6.9 per cent), Tinnevelly (5.77 per cent), Tanjore (5.48 per cent), Nilgiris (5.21 per cent), Salem (2.36 per cent), Chingleput (2.29 per cent).
16. Tamil Nad was formerly part of the Madras Presidency which comprised Malayalam, Tamil, Kanarese and Telugu speakers.
17. *Census of India*, 1901, vol. XV, part I, pp. 23-26.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 13; *Ibid.*, 1911, vol. XII, part II, pp. 16-21.

Until the early years of the twentieth century the Madras Presidency was a political backwater when compared with other important regions in British India notably the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies. However, there was not a total absence of political activity and the foundation of the Indian National Congress did not go unmarked in the region. There is not much evidence of widespread political activity in the Tamil *mofussil* until well into the twentieth century, but in Madras City there was growing interest in the nationalist movement by 1900. It was the largest urban centre south of Bombay and was both the political and intellectual capital of southern India. Situated in the border area between the Telugu- and Tamil-speaking regions of the Presidency, the city contained the wealthiest and most articulate section of the Hindu community in the south and was also the largest urban centre of Muslim population in the Presidency. The Mahajana Sabha was the premier nationalist organisation in the city and drew its support from the westernised Hindu elite and to a limited extent from their counterparts within the Muslim population of the city.[19] However, the bias of the Aligarh school and the Nizam of Hyderabad against Congress limited Muslim support for its activities in Madras City,[20] as did the fact that the Muslim community in the city was split into two socially-exclusive groups. The major group comprised Urdu Muslims who had flocked to the city from the Telugu and Tamil *mofussil* and had their own quarter in Triplicane. The other smaller group comprised Tamil Muslims centred upon Georgetown (Blacktown). The preponderance of Urdu-speakers within the largest urban Muslim centre in the Tamil districts is not really surprising. It was due to their dispossession by the British and their need to find new avenues of employment, hence their settlement in the centre of commercial and government activity in the south. In addition the city also had the historical attraction of having been the last capital of the Nawabs of the Carnatic whose descendant, the Prince of Arcot, lived there. The Tamil Muslims, on the other hand, were

19. *Annual Congress Session Reports*, 1887, 1888, 1889.

20. Bombay Govt., *Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India* (Bombay, 1958), pp. 31, 73, 81, 86.

not subject to the same economic dislocation, and fewer of them migrated from the *mofussil.*

Although the Madras City Muslims were not an affluent community, a small core of wealthy merchants and entrepreneurs had emerged during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Their commercial contacts with northern India, the medium of the press and improved communications, slowly drew these more prominent Muslims in Madras City into the mainstream of modern Muslim social, cultural and political activity centred upon northern India. Certainly the Urdu Muslims of Madras City were courted by north Indian Muslim organisations such as the All-India Muhammedan Educational Conference and the Nadvath-ul-Ulema, both of which were attempting to weld the Indian Muslim community into a whole as a result of increasing social and political activity amongst non-Muslims and growing Muslim self-consciousness.

The Urdu Muslims of Madras City responded readily to such stimulus and in 1901 established the first major Muslim communal organisation in southern India, the Southern Indian Muhammedan Educational Association, following the Madras City session of the annual All-India Muhammedan Educational Conference.[21] Likewise in 1901 a branch of the Nadvath-ul-Ulema was established after that organisation held its annual session in the city.[22] The Urdu Muslims possessed social and economic grievances which were not shared by the more secure Tamil Muslims, who readily identified with the region they inhabited. Having lost their former status which depended upon political and administrative control, as did their economic position, the Urdu Muslims, in Madras City at least, were awakening to the need to secure educational and employment concesssions from the Government if they were to regain some of their former social status *vis-a-vis* the dominant sections within the Hindu community.[23]

Both organisations were primarily concerned with articulating

21. Southern Indian Muhammedan Educational Association, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1902-52* (Madras, 1954), pp. 25-28, also *Diamond Jubilee Souvenir 1902-62* (Madras, 1964), pp. 101-103.

22. *New India,* 1917, 24 Feb., p. 5.

23. Madras Govt., Public Dept., G.O. 1172 (Press), 19 Sept. 1912.

the grievances and aspirations of the Urdu Muslims, particularly in relation to Muslim employment in the public service where they were grossly unrepresented except at the lowest levels,[24] and the preservation of the Urdu language which was "regarded by many Muhammedans as an indication of social and even of religious status".[25] There was no overt concern for Tamil Muslim problems, indeed, there was no interaction between Tamil and Urdu Muslims in this awakening of communal consciousness which was a purely Urdu Muslim phenomenon. The existing divisions within the Muslim community were exacerbated by the growth of such Urdu Muslim social and educational organisations which were conceived in an all-India rather than a regional setting.

Between 1901 and 1914 Urdu Muslim self-consciousness in Tamil Nad was heightened by the foundation of the All-India Muslim League in 1906 and its provincial branch, the Madras Presidency Muslim League, in 1908, and also by growing Pan-Islamic sentiment.[26] Local Urdu Muslim political activity, especially after the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 and the "Cawnpore affair [which] aroused the Mahommedans of the Presidency to a more active political interest than is usual in this part of India",[27] faithfully mirrored Urdu Muslim political activity elsewhere in India. Urdu Muslim organisational leadership was provided by Madras City merchant families such as the Badshas, and by members of the princely Arcot family. Merchant leadership was reinforced by the role they played in the successful Educational Association[28] and by the absence of any Muslim landholding class such as the *zamindars* of northern India who exerted both a historical and financial leadership. The Muslim merchants of Madras City approximated in wealth if not in historical prestige to the *zamindars* of the north, while the Arcot family had some claim to historical prestige.

The First World War was the turning point in Muslim political

24. *Ibid.*, G.O. 263 (Ms), 3 Apr. 1907.

25. *Ibid.*, G.O. 1172 (Press), 19 Sept. 1912, enclosed letter from the Educational Association dated 20 Oct. 1909.

26. Madras C.I.D. Reports on Native Owned Newspapers, 1908-14, *passim.*

27. Govt. of India, Home Dept. Political, A, Nov. 1914, nos. 33-38.

28, Southern Indian Muhammedan Educational Association, *op. cit.*, *passim.*

activity in Tamil Nad. Tamil Muslims were, for the first time, drawn into the maelstrom of nationalist and communal politics. The bulk of the Tamil Muslims had proved impervious to the growth of Pan-Islamism in India prior to the War as they had no emotional attachment to the temporal power of Islam. However, economic and political grievances during the War finally stirred many of them into overt political activity.

This did not become evident until after the Lucknow Pact in 1916. Until then Muslim politics in Tamil Nad had been dominated by two Urdu Muslim groups. The best organised of these was the Presidency Muslim League which consisted of two factions; one comprised aristocrats and political conservatives under the leadership of the Prince of Arcot and his kinsman, Muhammad Usman, and the other comprised young western-educated nationalist sympathisers and merchants led by Yakub Hasan. Arcot and Usman, a traditionally-educated medical practitioner, were social and political conservatives, intensely loyal to the British and convinced that neither the Muslims nor Hindus were capable of any degree of self-government. As such they were against any Muslim involvement in the nationalist movement and were more interested in securing education and employment concessions from the British, rather than political concessions, to improve the lot of their community. Yakub Hasan on the other hand had received a western-education at Aligarh and since settling in Madras City as a merchant in 1901[29] had become increasingly sympathetic towards the nationalist struggle and believed that although his community still needed certain safeguards because of the educational and economic backwardness they were "an important part of the Indian nation and must have equal opportunities with the other component part to serve the motherland".[30] The second major group comprised fervent Pan-Islamists whose spokesman was Abdul Majid Sharar, editor of a popular Madras City Urdu language daily, the *Qaumi Report*. Sharar's family was strictly orthodox and he received a classical education in Urdu, Arabic, Persian and theological subjects. A brilliant student he received the honorific "maulvi" while still a

29. His family was originally in the service of Bikaner.
30. Hasan, Y., *Hindu-Muslim Problem* (Madras, 1917), p. 5.

youth and was the foremost exponent of Pan-Islamism in the Presidency. He viewed both sections of the Muslim League with equal scorn : Arcot for his pro-British sympathies and Hasan for his western-education and support of the Lucknow Pact which Sharar rejected on the grounds that "our mode of living is entirely different [from that of the Hindus] and nowhere has there been any contact between the two communities".[31]

The Lucknow Pact further split the Urdu Muslims. Arcot and his followers rejected the concept of close co-operation with Congress and denied the necessity or advisability of wringing further concessions from the British.[32] Under the leadership of the energetic Usman this dissident faction formed the ultra-loyalist Islamic League[33] and established contact with various politically-conservative and loyalist Muslim leaders in northern India.[34] The remaining Leaguers, led by Hasan, closely followed the pattern established by Jinnah in the north and drew closer to local Congress organisations.[35]

This three-fold split in the most articulate section of the Tamil Nad Muslim community was further complicated in 1918 and following years by the development of the Khilafat movement. In the period immediately following the Lucknow Pact most Tamil Muslims had been apathetic regarding the Congress-League *rapprochement*. Annie Besant raised scant Tamil or Urdu Muslim support for her Home Rule League despite occasional success at various peaks of unrest over the Ali brothers.[36] With the deve-

31. *Qaumi Report*, 5 Mar. 1917, Madras C.I.D. Reports on Native Owned Newspapers, 1917.

32. Madras Presidency Muslim League, Minutes, 30 Nov. 1917; *House of Commons Papers*, 1918, vol. XVIII, Cd. 9178, pp. 61, 62-63; Madras Govt. Public Dept., G.O. 885-86 (Ms), 27 Sept. 1918.

33. Govt. of India, Home Dept. Political, Deposit, Jan. 1918, no. 2; *Hindu*, 1917, 24 Nov., p. 3, 5 Dec., p. 5.

34. *New India*, 1918, 2 Jan., p. 8; Govt. of India, Home Dept. Political, Deposit, Mar., 1918, no. 38.

35. *Ibid.*, Aug. 1917, no. 3; *Ibid.*, Nov. 1917, no. 6; *Ibid.*, Nov. 1917, no. 29 *et al.*

36. E.g. Govt. of India, Home Dept. Political, Deposit, Aug. 1917, no. 3; *ibid.*, May 1918, no. 22.

lopment of the Khilafat movement and the emergence of Gandhi as champion of Muslim sentiment, the pace of Muslim political activity in Tamil Nad rapidly increased. Between the Lucknow Pact and the emergence of the Khilafat agitation as a definite political movement, however, several important developments had occurred in the sphere of Muslim political activity in the south. In particular as a result of wartime taxation and trade restrictions[37] which had affected adversely the Tamil Muslim-dominated tanning industry there had been an upsurge in Tamil Muslim support for the Madras Presidency Muslim League which, albeit unsuccessfully, championed Tamil Muslim economic grievances by establishing the Southern Indian Skin and Hide Merchants' Association.[38] In addition religious agitation from 1917 on by north Indian and local *ulema* roused the religious susceptibilities of the Tamil Muslims by relating the fate of Islam with the fate of the Khalif.[39] The result of these developments was increasing Tamil Muslim support for the Presidency League and the eclipse of the Islamia League. For the first time Tamil Muslims were initiated into communal and later nationalist politics.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Proposals were warmly welcomed by the Muslims of Tamil Nad.[40] They had the effect of temporarily weakening their links with Congress and overshadowed their concern for the Khilafat. The majority of local Muslim leaders were prepared to accept the Proposals and were disappointed by the negative attitude of the Special Session of Congress at Bombay in 1918.[41] However, this breach was healed by the publication of the Treaty of Sevres in 1920. The severity of the treatment meted out to Turkey pushed the constitutional reforms into the

37. *Hindu*, 1917, 20 Oct., p. 5; *Pioneer*, 1917, 12 Jan., p. 6; Imperial Institute, *Indian Trade Enquiry Report on Hides and Skins* (London, 1920), p. 87; Madras Govt., *Administration Report*, 1915-16 to 1917-18.

38. Perumal, N., *Jamal Mahomed* (Madras, Pushpam, 1936), p. 39; *Hindu*, 1917, 25 Oct., p. 7.

39. Govt. of India, Home Dept. Political, Deposit, March 1917, no. 26 and K.W.

40. Madras Govt. Public Dept., G.O. 327 (Ms), 7 June 1919.

41. *First Annual Report of the Madras Liberal League* (Madras, 1919), pp. 1, 4, 32.

background and there was an upsurge in support for the Khilafat movement amongst the Muslims of Tamil Nad.[42]

Between 1920 and 1923 Hasan, Sharar and C. Rajagopalachariar led the Congress-Khilafat agitation in Tamil Nad. Pan-Islamist and pro-nationalist Muslims sank their differences and worked with Congress in defence of the Khilafat. Rajagopalachariar was an avid admirer of Gandhi with the result that he introduced Non-Co-operation into southern India where it became the practical expression of the Congress-Khilafat alliance.[43]

The introduction of Non-Co-operation revealed the weaknesses in the post-Sevres alliance. The Presidency Muslim League dissolved in a spate of internal quarrels concerning the programme and the politically-conservative Muslim faction emerged once more: in alliance with the Justice Party in the first Reformed Council of 1921-23. Non-Co-operation was too extreme for many of the older Muslim leaders; they were essentially cautious merchants possessing a long-term view of the progress to be made by their community and they withdrew their support from the Presidency League.[44]

Most of them were conscious of the justice of Muslim grievances but as one of them, Mir Asad Ali, wrote in his letter of resignation,

> while fully aware of the incompetence of the present bureaucratic administration to cope with the growing political situation in the country, I should certainly hesitate to advise the adoption of any unconstitutional or impracticable programme of public action to make the deep resentment felt . . . However excellent the principle of non-co-operation may be it cannot be adopted as a practical measure unless the country [is] prepared to carry it out in spite of all anticipated obstruction. I believe such a programme both inadvisable and inexpedient besides being calculated to do more

42. Govt. of India, Home Dept. Political, Deposit, nos. 19-31; *Ibid.*, July 1920, no. 97.

43. *Ibid.*, Nov. 1920, nos. 19-31; *Indian Annual Register*, 1921, p. 289.

44. Madras Presidency Muslim League, Minutes of meetings, 29 Sept. 1920, 15 Dec. 1920; Sastri to Venkatarama Aiyar, 13 Aug. 1920, Servants of India Society Papers, Madras City.

> harm than good to the people in the present condition of Indian society.[45]

The majority of such men remained on the sidelines of the political agitation committing themselves to neither side. A few, however, decided to make use of the reforms and in 1921 they entered the Legislative Council, where under the leadership of Usman they allied themselves with the politically moderate, non-Brahmin Justice Party. This party appeared to be dedicated to a moderate process of constitutional evolution towards self-government and offered the Muslims tangible education and employment concession as well as a means of undermining the Brahmin stranglehold on these areas.[46]

The collapse of Muslim political unity in Tamil Nad heralded a re-emergence of the Urdu-Tamil Muslim cleavage. Members of both groups were scattered throughout the political spectrum but, in general leading Tamil Muslims were opposed to the non-co-operation programmes as were the more prominent Urdu Muslim merchants, although conversely few of them supported the Justice Party.

By 1923 the inter-communal Khilafat Committee, which had superseded the Presidency Muslim League, had foundered. Gandhi's "calling off" of Non-Co-operation, the abolition of the dual role of the Khalif as spiritual and temporal ruler by Attaturk, the secession of Sharar and the Pan-Islamists from the Committee and improving economic conditions[47] tempered the urgency of Muslim political interest. Sharar had never been comfortable in the Hindu-Muslim alliance, and by late 1920 was in conflict with Hasan and Rajagopalachariar who attempted to curb his religious fanaticism and stressed the secular nature of the movement as the only means of maintaining the inter-communal alliance.[48] The Muslim-Justice Party alliance collapsed with the failure of the Justice Party to fulfil the demands of its Muslim supporters and to include any

45. Madras Presidency Muslim League, enclosed letter dated 29 Sept., 1920.

46. *Madras Legislative Council Debates*, vol. XV, 27 Nov. 1923, p. 50.

47. Madras Govt., *Administration Reports*, 1919-20 to 1924-25; Southern Indian Chamber of Commerce, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1910-60* (Madras, 1960), pp. 14-16.

48. Govt. of India, Home Dept. Political, Deposit, July, 1920, no. 94.

Muslims, apart from the ubiquitous Usman, in the inner councils of the Party. One of the former supporters of the alliance summed up the spirit of Muslim disillusionment when he stated:

> we entrusted our destiny into their hands . . . . What have they done to that trust ? Their record is summed up in one word 'cipher', so far as the Muhammedan interests are concerned [and] for three years we have been ignored and neglected.[49]

There was in any case a basic lack of popular Muslim support for the conservative alliance: few Muslims identified with the non-Brahmins at a social level, and the most capable Muslim leaders were actively opposed to the Justice Party.

Between 1923 and 1934 the Muslims of Tamil Nad drifted in a political vacuum. They had been alienated from the Justice Party, which in any case was rent by factional rivalry.[50] The attempt at intercommunal co-operation failed with the collapse of the Khilafat agitation and the Non-Co-operation movement. Despite this there was no great rise in Hindu-Muslim antipathy but rather an alienation occasioned by a lack of effective Muslim leadership and a re-orientation of Muslim objectives which led to apathy towards overt political activity.

The Muslim community of Tamil Nad became more introspective during these years. In the absence of divisive political movements there was a slow merging of Urdu and Tamil Muslim interests. The Presidency Muslim League was defunct, and leading Tamil and Urdu Muslims turned their energies towards the social and economic amelioration of the community. The Southern Indian Muhammedan Educational Association lost its purely Urdu Muslim bias and there was an increase in its *mofussil* activities where it provided a means of communication between Madras City and the scattered Tamil

49. *Madras Legislative Council Debates*, vol. XV, Nov. 1923, pp. 50-51.

50. See Irschick, E.F., "Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separation, 1916 to 1929" (Ph. D. thesis, Chicago University, 1964), *passim*.

Muslim communities.[51]

There was not of course a complete absence of Muslim political activity in Tamil Nad. The 1920 reforms had increased the elected Muslim representation in the Madras Legislative Council from two to 12, of whom seven were from Madras City and the Tamil-speaking districts.[52] Consequently there was a constant representation of Muslim interests in the government; however, this representation was diverse in character. There was no specific Muslim political party or bloc in the Council apart from a very nebulous party formed in 1926;[53] some Muslim MLCs supported the Swaraj Party, some were independents, and a few were "Muslim Justicites". Most Muslim MLCs were vaguely pro-nationalist although wary of Congress leadership, with the result that they tended to follow in the wake of the nationalist opposition in the Council although they refused to join in the walk-out and election boycott of the Swaraj Party during the period.[54]

There were various attempts by some Urdu Muslims to introduce north Indian-inspired aggressively communalist organisations into Tamil Nad but these met with little success.[55] There was no popular Urdu Muslim leadership, Sharar had died in 1923 and Hasan retired from political activities between 1923 and 1930, and virtually no communal conflict in the south. In addition Tamil Muslims held aloof from such organisations. The economic position improved considerably between 1923-30 with the revival of trade and industry,[56] and their parochial interests were still strong despite the close

51. Southern Indian Muhammedan Educational Association. *Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1902-62* (Madras 1964), pp. 104-107; *ibid., Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1902-52* (Madras, 1954), pp. 51-59.

52. *House of Commons Papers*, 1921, vol. XXVI, Cmd. 1261.

53. Hasan, U., *Party Politics* (Madras, 1930), p. 8; *Hindu*, 1926, 28 Jan., p. 5, 23 Sept., p. 4.

54. *Memo. of the Madras Govt. on the Working of the Reformed Govt. Submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission* (Madras 1930), p. 348; *Indian Statutory Comission* (London, 1930), vol. VI, p. 195.

55. *Hindu*, 1926, 15 Mar., p. 5, 5 Apr., p. 8; Govt. of India, Home Dept. B, Dec. 1925, no. 112; *ibid.*, May 1926, no. 112.

56. Madras Govt., *Administration Reports*, 1923-24 to 1928-29; *Indian Quarterly Register*, 1930, vol. I, pp. 420-23.

alliance with the Urdu Muslims during the Khilafat agitation.

By the early 1930s, however, certain events precipitated the Muslims of Tamil Nad into a search for political unity and a definite political identity. The failure of Jinnah's overtures to Congress in the late 1920s, renewed communal strife in northern India, the visit of the Simon Commission, and the failure of the Round Table Conferences all contributed to Muslim nervousness regarding their political future in India. With the prospect of constitutional reforms in the immediate future and with the world trade depression undermining Tamil Muslim economic interests[57] a feeling of insecurity began to permeate the Muslim community in Tamil Nad. Muslims in the region, both pro- and anti-nationalist,[58] had little faith in Congress leaders and began to cast around in an attempt to strengthen their community on a political basis. Evidence of this can be found in the statement issued by ten of the twelve Muslim MLCs in 1927 condemning Congress proposals for joint electorates. Several of the signatories had formerly been strongly pro-Congress but they subscribed to the statement that:

> under the present circumstances, joint-electorates for Muslims in this Presidency . . . will not only prove detrimental to the political advancement of the Muslim community but will also jeopardise the interests of Muslims and to a very great extent hamper the friendly relationship that exists between Hindus and Muslims.[59]

The growing political unity amongst rival Muslim factions in northern India[60] stimulated the search for unity in the south by offering Muslims throughout India a concrete focus for their diffuse and sublimated political energies which had first been roused on a national basis during the Khilafat agitation.

Between 1932 and 1934 both the All-India Muslim League and

57. Madras Govt., *Administration Report*, 1929-30, pp. 118, 138, 144; *ibid.*, 1930-31, pp. 103, 117.

58. Hasan, U., *op. cit.*, p. 5; Govt. of India, Reforms Dept., 35/31-R, 1931.

59. *Indian Annual Register*, 1927, vol. I, p. 37.

60. Waheed-uz-Zaman, *Towards Pakistan* (Lahore, 1964), pp. 62, 75.

the Madras Presidency Muslim League were re-established.[61] In Tamil Nad the League received the support of most Muslim MLCs and prominent Urdu and Tamil Muslim merchant leaders in Madras City and the *mofussil*.[62] However, the leadership of the revived League was radically different from that of its predecessor: Tamil Muslims, led by Jamal Mahomed, were its main organisers and its strongest support came from the Tamil *mofussil* areas.[63] This was due to several factors, namely Tamil Muslim disillusionment with Urdu Muslim politics and leadership, and also to changes within the Tamil Muslim group. The Khilafat agitation had sharpened the group's sense of Muslim identity and blunted its parochial outlook, while during the 1920s the increasing activities of Tamil Muslims in the Educational Association, Tamil Muslim settlement in Madras City, and the experiences of Tamil Muslim MLCs had all combined to break down the barriers between subgroups in the Tamil Muslim community. Amongst Tamil Muslims the concept of themselves as a regional minority group had subsumed their previous tendency to think of themselves as members of a village or district quasi-caste. To a limited extent they were attaining the larger sense of community identity that the Urdu Muslims had always possessed, and yet there were differences. The Urdu Muslims were confined by a romantic political outlook that sought no regional outlet and had singularly failed to satisfy the group, with the result that it was split into rival antagonistic factions, none of which had clear political objectives.

The Muslim political outlook was largely negative; it was based on a sense of political and economic grievance, and a lack of social integration with non-Muslims and was coloured by their romantic concept of themselves as part of the predominantly Urdu-speaking north Indian Muslim cultural community. The Tamil Muslim political outlook, too, was compounded by political and economic grievances, but it was modified by a strong regional identification

61. Madras Govt., Public Dept. G.O. 254 (Ms), 15 Feb. 1932; *Indian Annual Register*, 1932, vol. I, p. 301; *ibid.*, 1932, vol. II, pp. 286-7, 298; *ibid.*, 1934, vol. I, pp. 316-19.

62. *Hindu*, 1936, 3 Aug., p. 10.

63. *The Deccan Times Muslim League Special (1940)*, p. 83.

and a leadership which for all practical purposes wished the group to continue as a functional part of Tamil society. In this respect their political outlook was positive—it was essentially sympathetic towards nationalist goals and concerned that the Muslims of Tamil Nad should participate in the government of an independent and multi-communal India.

The problem was, how to maintain this Tamil Muslim outlook, the unity of Tamil and Urdu Muslims and how to organise a provincial Muslim political party affiliated to the Urdu Muslim-dominated All-India Muslim League ? Essentially the problem was one of identity: how was this peculiar Tamil Muslim view of themselves to be reconciled to the dominant Urdu Muslim concept of Indian Muslims ?

The credit for reconciling these diffuse objectives must go to the Tamil Muslim leadership and in particular to Jamal Mahomed. He was one of the wealthiest Muslim merchants in the Presidency and although he lived in Madras City he maintained extensive personal and business contacts with the Tamil *mofussil*. Between 1917 and 1920 he had supported Yakub Hasan and the Madras Presidency Muslim League but retired from politics when the Non-Co-operation programme was adopted. His family had founded and supported many of the more active and flourishing Muslim educational, charitable and religious institutions in Tamil Nad, and socially represented a balanced meeting of Urdu and Tamil Muslim cultures. Jamal Mahomed was respected by both groups while his wealth and activities in mercantile circles[64] throughout India assured him of considerable personal following and he was able to establish the Presidency League with a wider base of support than it ever had before. The former Presidency League had failed to extend its activities into the *mofussil*, whereas Jamal Mahomed established branches in all the Presidency's districts and parcticularly in Tamil Nad.[65] Instead of attempting to force unanimity of political opinion upon the Muslims

64. Permal, N., *Jamal Mahomed* (Madras, 1936), *passim*; Dupis J., *Madras et le Nord Coromandel* (Paris, 1960), p. 219; 1931 he was Pres. of the All-India Federatton of Chambers of Commerce and Industry; 1929-34, Pres. of the Southern Indian Chamber of Commerce

65. *The Deccan Times Muslim League Special 1940* , p. 83.

of Tamil Nad Jamal Mahomed organised a compromise political front, The Muslim Parliamentary Board, specifically designed to contest the 1937 elections which were due as a result of the constitutional reforms embodied in the Government of India Act in 1935. The Board comprised representatives of the Presidency League, stalwart pro-nationalists who had held aloof from the League, independent Muslims and politically-conservative Muslims.[66] It was an amazing conglomeration of antagonistic factions with little in common apart from a desire to see the the Muslims fight the election as a united community. Support for the Board was induced by the vague and widespread sense of political insecurity amongst the Muslims of Tamil Nad and by the communal but conciliatory political outlook of Jamal Mahomed: that was characteristically Tamil Muslim.

Jamal Mohamed's first accomplishment once the Board had been established was to reach an electoral agreement with the local Congress leader, C. Rajagopalachariar.[67] The essence of the agreement was an understanding that neither organisation would nominate rival candidates to Muslim electorates, and Congress was apparently allocated Muslim electorates where the local leadership was firmly pro-Congress. The Board was in fact an adjunct of the Presidency Muslim League as Jamal Mahomed was President of both and the majority of candidates were *mofussil* members of the League;[68] nevertheless some Board candidates were nationalists in all but membership of Congress and had not joined the League. These men were elected with the support of Congress and the Board.[69]

The Board was soon faced with some local Muslim opposition, particularly from Urdu Muslims. There were three main opposition groups: extreme communalists; "Muslim Justicites"; and

66. *Hindu*, 1936, 3 Aug., p. 10.

67. This was confirmed in an interview with Jamal Mahomed's nephew, Mahomed Ismail Sahib M.P. Pres. of the Indian Union Muslim League, 1 Dec. 1967 but denied by C. Rajagopalachariar in an interview, 19 Jan. 1968. The available evidence supports the statement of Mahomed Ismail.

68. *Directory of the Madras Legislature* (Madras, 1938), *passim*.

69. *Ibid.*; *Hindu*, 1937, 25 Jan., p. 15.

active members of Congress led by Yakub Hasan who had re-emerged in the early 1930s as an exponent of communal *rapprochement*. The extreme communalists were led by two former Khilafatists and Congressmen: Abdul Hamid Khan, a wealthy North Arcot merchant and an ex-employer of Hasan, and Abdul Latef Farookhi, a former protege of Abdul Majid Sharar and editor of the proscribed Madras City Urdu language daily, the *Azad Hind*. Neither of these men were effective leaders. Both were respected for their religious orthodoxy but Hamid Khan was old and ill while Farookhi was too erratic in his actions and too inconsistent in his statements to inspire a large personal following—during this period his statements veered without apparent consistency from violent diatribes against Hindus to effusive praise for Congress! Originally these men supported the Board[70] but later they resigned in protest against the understanding with Congress and formed the Muslim Progressive Party,[71] They denounced the supposed Congress bias of the Board, appealed for communal harmony, attacked all inter-communal political organisations and claimed that they alone represented the political policy of Jinnah.[72] This was a vain attempt to re-establish the former dominance of the communalist element within the community as opposed to the Tamil Muslim spirit of compromise. In sentiment the Muslim Progressive Party was compounded of a variety of political outlooks previously articulated by Pan-Islamists, the Islamia League and the Muslim communal movements of the mid-1920s which Farookhi had attempted to implant in the south.

The Muslim Congressmen acquiesced in the Congress-Board pact, but the majority of prominent "Muslim Justicites" under the leadership of Usman were never reconciled to the Board. Some defected from the effete and disorganised Justice Party to form the inter-communal Peoples' Party[73] but most remained faithful to their old party. Both the Muslim Progressive Party and the Peoples' Party contested Muslim seats but only the former gained a seat—in the

70. *Ibid.*, 1936, 3 Aug., p. 10.

71. *Ibid.*, 1936, 8 Aug., p. 9, 4 Sept., p. 15, 24 Sept., p. 16.

72. *Ibid.*, 1936, 16 Oct., p. 24.

73. *Directory of the Madras Legislature* (Madras, 1938), *passim*; *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, vol. I, p. 298.

orthodox Urdu Muslim center of North Arcot. Out of 29 Muslim seats in the new Madras Legislative Assembly the Board contested 14 and gained 13, Congress contested 12 and gained five, and the rest went to "Justicites" and independents.[74] The Board contested and gained six of the nine Muslim seats in Tamil Nad; Congress contested and gained two and one went to an independent.[75]

After the elections relations between the Board—or rather the League which soon discarded the facade—and the triumphant Congress grew increasingly strained. Congress refused the League any of the fruits of victory and the members of the League in the Assembly sat in the opposition benches while the more pronationalist members of the defunct Board sat as a neutral bloc committed to neither side.[76] The resignation of the Congress ministry in November 1939 finally wrecked Congress-League relations in Tamil Nad and gave rise to increasing support within the Muslim community for the communalist politics of the All-India Muslim League. The resignation of the Congress ministry was regarded by Muslims as irresponsible and obstructive of the course of constitutional evolution towards self-government. The Muslims had no desire to precipitate a rapid devolution of power by the British as they wished to secure a constitutional settlement including measures for the protection of Muslim political interests. Congress tactics throughout the Second World War, especially the "Quit India" movement, only served to confirm Muslim suspicions throughout India and undermined the basis for *rapprochement*. Rajagopalachariar was undoubtedly sympathetic towards Muslim grievances, particularly in Tamil Nad where he was on friendly terms with Jamal Mahomed,[77] but the death of the latter in 1943 and the intransigence of the national leadership of Congress weakened his position *vis-a-vis* the Muslims of Tamil Nad.

Within the Presidency Muslim League Jamal Mahomed's influence

74. *Directory of the Madras Legislature* (Madras, 1938), *passim.*

75. *Ibid.*

76. Those elected on the Congress ticket joined that party in the Assembly. Yakub Hasan became Minister for Health in the ministry.

77. Interviews with Mahomed Ismail Sahib M.P. and C. Rajagopalachariar, *op. cit.*

waned in direct proportion to the activities of Congress and the increasing organisational strength of the All-India Muslim League which tightened its control over the provincial branches in the years immediately following the 1937 elections. The more intransigent and all-India oriented Urdu Muslim political outlook eclipsed the regionally oriented and conciliatory Tamil Muslim political outlook. Both Tamil and Urdu Muslims were carried along by the irrational political outlook, for Tamil Nad at least, of the All-India Muslim League which eventually led to Partition and Pakistan.

Partition provoked a re-evaluation in 1948 of the policies of Jamal Mahomed. Bereft of an all-India political organisation and of national leadership, the Muslims of India were thrown upon their own resources. Some solved the dilemma by leaving for Pakistan but this alternative held small attraction for the Muslims of Tamil Nad, especially the Tamil Muslims, whose culture and language had no place in the new Urdu-dominated nation.

The Muslims of Tamil Nad had two political alternatives: either complete integration with intercommunal political organisations, or the revival of a distinct communal political organisation. This latter alternative was made more difficult by the abolition of separate electorates and the unfortunate reputation surrounding the defunct Muslim League. However, there was little overt communal tension in the south where leaders of the non-Muslim communities were favourably disposed towards Muslims, and this helped remove Muslim fears of a Hindu reaction if they supported a revived Muslim League. The League was revived in Tamil Nad and has successfully put up candidates for State and Central legislative bodies by means of electoral alliances with various non-Muslim political factions[78]—a policy first implemented by Jamal Mahomed.

The history of Muslim politics in Tamil Nad has been the history of the conflict between a national and a regional political outlook on the part of a communal minority group. Specifically it has been the conflict between the Tamil and Urdu Muslim political outlooks occasioned by differing concepts of their position and role

78. For a detailed account see: Wright, T.P., "The Muslim League in South India since Independence: A Study in Minority Group Political Strategies", *The American Political Science Review* vol. LX, no. 3, Sept. 1966, pp. 579-99.

within the communal society of India. Politically the Muslims have been most successful when the regional outlook has prevailed, for at the regional level the spirit of accommodation has been strongest and hence it has been easier to conciliate diverse elements within the community and to seek electoral alliance with non-Muslim groups. At the regional level Muslims have been able to recognise the diversity of non-Muslim grievances and aspirations and the fact that the majority Hindu community was neither monolithic nor united in political or economic interests in relation to the Muslims. In what was essentially a pluralistic-communal society the minority Muslim group was strongest when it identified with regional rather than national interests and weakest when it attempted to see itself as part of a monolithic national minority group : a view which denied the very real social, linguistic and historical differences amongst the Muslims of India.