

# The Role of the Punjab and Bengal Provincial Muslim Leagues in the Pakistan Movement: A Comparative Historical Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim of the Study:** The main objective of the study is to comparatively examine the role of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League (PPML) and the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) in the Pakistan Movement, focusing on the leadership, organisational development, political mobilisation, electoral performance, and relationship with the All-India Muslim League (AIML).

**Methodology:** The study follows the qualitative method and comparative historical approach to analyse the contributions of both provincial Muslim League branches during the Pakistan Movement.

**Findings:** The study findings show that although both Bengal and Punjab played a central role in the politics of Muslim India, the two provincial branches of the AIML followed different political trajectories. BPML achieved organisational development and showed electoral presence earlier. In contrast, the PPML remained organizationally weak because of internal leadership rivalries and the dominance of the Unionist Party. PPML's political position strengthened after the historical Sikandar-Jinnah Pact of 1937. The study also shows that both BPML and PPML faced similar opposition in the form of Krishak Praja Party and the Unionist Party in Bengal and Punjab, respectively.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that Bengal's contribution was comparatively stronger in terms of leadership, early organisation, and governmental experience, while Punjab's contribution proved decisive during the last phase of the Pakistan Movement because of its geographical, demographic and political importance.

**Keywords:** All-India Muslim League, Punjab Provincial Muslim League, Bengal Provincial Muslim League, Pakistan Movement, Fazlul Huq, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, The Unionist Party, The Krishak Praja Party

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bengal was the first region occupied by the British in the Indian Sub-continent. It had a leading role in awakening the political consciousness among the local masses. Muslims of Bengal also took the lead, and the first Muslim political organisation, called the National Mohammadan Association, was established in

1878 by prominent Bengali Muslim leader Syed Ameer Ali (Ali, 1975). A political organisation known as the Indian Association was founded in Calcutta in 1876 by prominent Bengali leader Surendranath Banerjee (Banerji, 1925). The next year, its branch was established in Lahore, Punjab (Choudhry, 2013).

The Indian National Congress (INC) was established in December 1885 as the first major all-India political organisation representing educated Indians (Afzal, 2013). It was the result of the emergence of political consciousness among the Indian middle class, mostly Hindus. At the first session of the INC in 1885, there were only two Muslim delegates among the 72 attendees. Some Muslim leaders, like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, generally viewed the Congress negatively and encouraged Muslims to focus on education and loyalty to the British Government (Shan, 1969). For this purpose, the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference was founded in 1886 (Afzal, 2013). Later, this organisation became the basis of the All India Muslim League.

Partition of Bengal was carried out in 1905. Due to this administrative decision, Muslims got a majority in East Bengal. INC and the Hindu Mahasabha strongly opposed this partition, which created deep disappointment and strengthened the belief that Muslims needed an independent political organisation (Choudhry & Zaidi, 2014). Later, the partition of Bengal was annulled in 1911. This simple administrative act had a great and everlasting impact on the future of India and the Indian Muslims (Choudhry & Zaidi, 2014).

The first reforms (Minto-Morley Reforms) in Indian legislative history were planned in 1909. Before this, Muslim leaders under the leadership of Sir Agha Khan III met the Viceroy of India at Simla in October 1906 (Afzal, 2013). The main aim of the Simla Delegation was to safeguard Muslim interests in future constitutional reforms. The Simla Deputation led to the creation of the AIML. AIML was established in December 1906 in Dacca, the capital of Eastern Bengal (Ali Uddin & Ahmed, 2025). The pioneer of the AIML from Bengal was Khwaja Salimullah, the Nawab of Dhaka, who played a significant role in the establishment of AIML (Afzal 2013). It was, in fact, the division of Bengal which convinced Muslims that they must ask for electoral reforms in the form of a separate electoral system from the British Government.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research follows Comparative Historical Research design, along with a qualitative research approach to analyse historical events (Mahoney, 2004). The nature of the research is both descriptive-analytical and explanatory. The document analysis research technique has been adopted to describe and elaborate on data from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary sources like archives, newspapers and government records are consulted to collect data. Most of the research is based on secondary data sources. There is abundant secondary data available on the topic in the form of books, research journals, theses, and YouTube vlogs, etc. While describing the subject, the comparative approach is followed to critically analyse the role of the Punjab and Bengal Provincial Muslim Leagues in the Pakistan movement in the historical context in general and during the last ten years (1937-47) in particular. Moreover, a comparison is also carried out between statistical data, like the election results and visits of Quaid e Azam of Bengal and Punjab, to draw conclusions regarding the role of the Bengal and Punjab Muslim League in the Pakistan movement.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### ***3.1 Punjab Provincial Muslim League (PPML)***

The Provincial Branch of AIML (PPML) was established in 1907 (Afzal, 2013). Mian Shah Deen and Sir Muhammad Shafi were elected as president and general secretary of the Punjab Muslim League, respectively. Before this, Sir Fazl-i-Hussain had already founded a Muslim Association by the name of the Muslim League in Punjab in February 1906. Sheikh Umar Baksh and Fazl-i-Hussain were its president and secretary, respectively (Paisha Akhbar, 1907).

Although Punjab was one of the biggest and most important provinces of India, it was not politically active. The first Punjab Legislative Council was established in 1897 (Choudhry, 2013), whereas the Bengal Legislative Council was established in 1862 (Choudhry & Jafer, 2014). The inaugural session of AIML in Dacca was attended by important leaders from Punjab, including Sir Mian Muhammad Shafi, Fazl-i-Hussain (Gandhi, 2013), Khawaja Yusuf Shah, Abdul Aziz, and Sh. Ghulam Sadiq (Zaidi, 1975). Mian Muhammad Shafi had already established the Muslim Association in early 1906. After the establishment of AIML in Dacca in December 1906, a branch of AIML was organised in Punjab in November 1907, which was known as the PPML, and the Muslim Association of Muhammad Shafi merged into it. Mian Muhammad Shafi became general secretary, and Mian Muhammad Shah Din became president of PPML (Afzal, 2013). In fact, Punjab and Assam were the first two provinces where provincial branches of AIML were established (Afzal, 2013).

Punjab under British rule was politically different from other Indian provinces. Politics was elite-driven and dominated by the landed aristocracy. Communal politics existed, but class, land, and loyalty were more important for the Raj. The British always preferred cross-communal and loyalist leadership to maintain stability and control in the Punjab. Within this structure, Muslim politics in Punjab split internally, leading to rivalry between two prominent Muslim leaders, Sir Muhammad Shafi and Sir Fazal-i Hussain (Afzal, 2013).

Sir Muhammad Shafi was an elite Muslim leader from the Urban Muslim class in Punjab. He was always concerned about Muslim political identity and their representation in the legislative council. Shafi's rival, Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, was an influential politician and administrator who later founded the Unionist Party. He belonged to the rural landed elites. He believed in cross-communal politics and the unity of all communities in Punjab (Hardy, 1972). He remained loyal to the British and always demanded provincial autonomy. Initially, two parallel branches of AIML in Punjab existed under the leadership of Sir Shafi and Sir Fazl-i-Hussain. In 1908, these two branches were merged during the Aligarh session of AIML (Choudhry, 2013). This unity didn't last long, as the Punjab Muslim League split again in 1916 into the Shafi and Fazl-i-Hussain Groups over the Lucknow Pact. Fazal-i-Hussain had earlier joined the INC (Fazal remained president of the Punjab Branch of the INC and General Secretary of PPML simultaneously) and supported the Lucknow Pact (Gandhi, 2013). At the same time, Sir Shafi strongly opposed the Lucknow Pact's clause to get less representation for Muslims of Punjab as compared to their population (Choudhry, 2013).

In 1927, Sir Mian Muhammad Shafi was elected as president, and Sir Allama Muhammad Iqbal as general secretary of the League (Hasan, 2005). PPML opposed Central AIML due to its close ties and relations with INC and differences over Delhi proposals and the Simon Commission (Choudhry, 1996). Due to the rivalry between these two Muslim leaders (Shafi and Fazal-i-Hussain), AIML failed to gain mass support in Punjab before 1940. In fact, PPML did not have a proper office till 1938. The formation of the Punjab Provincial Parliamentary Board was not so smooth. Until around 1930, its meetings were held at various people's homes, including Mian Muhammad Shafi's residence. Allama Iqbal also remained president of the PPML in 1936-37 (Dar, 2017), but the League faced leadership problems in Punjab (Ahmed, 2026). When Shafi died in 1932, Jinnah sought an alliance with the Unionist Party led by Fazl-i-Hussain. Before the 1936-37 elections, Jinnah visited Punjab. He persuaded Fazl to use the platform of AIML for the elections, but he got a very discouraging response from Fazl-i-Hussain (Gandhi, 2013). During the 1936-37 elections, PPML could not perform well and secured just 2 seats, i.e. Barkat Ali and Raja Ghazanfar Ali (Gandhi, 2013). Later, Ghazanfar deserted the PPML to join the Unionist Party (Gandhi, 2013).

The Punjab Unionist Party was founded in 1923 by Sir Fazl-i-Hussain. Its primary goal was to represent the interests of the landowning class in the Punjab province, which included Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Fazl-i-Hussain also had the support of the British Government, as well as pirs and the *sajada nasheen* of Punjab (Gilmartin, 1988). The Unionist Party held significant power in Punjab during the 1920s and 1930s. PPML supported the Unionist Government on many issues during the dyarchy system of

government in the 1920s (Qalb-i-Abid, 1989). After Fazl-i-Hussain's death in 1936, his son Sikandar Hayat became the leader of the Unionist Party. He was invited by Jinnah to attend the Lucknow session of the AIML held in 1936 (Gandhi, 2013).

The Sikandar-Jinnah Pact signed in Lucknow in 1937 was a key step towards the establishment of AIML in Punjab. According to the pact signed between AIML and the Unionist Party of Punjab, Unionist Muslim members in Punjab could join the Muslim League (Talbot, 1988), and they could have dual association. The AIML accepted the Unionist-led Punjab ministry. At the all-India level, Muslim Unionists would cooperate more closely with the AIML on the issues facing Muslims. The Sikandar-Jinnah Pact gave autonomy to the Unionist Party in provincial matters, and the Unionist Party agreed to be led by the AIML on all affairs at the national level (Qalb-i-Abid and Massarrat Abid, 1992).

In 1937, after the Sikandar-Jinnah Pact, there was a need to reorganise the party in Punjab. However, internal rivalries emerged between the provincial leadership of AIML and the Unionist Party in Punjab. Sikandar used his influence to control the PPML. Old Leaguers were annoyed by the policies of Sikandar. Resultantly, the provincial branch of AIML could not be affiliated with the Central AIML before 1940. Old Leaguers started the process of party organisation under the leadership of Shah Nawaz Mamdot. While Sikandar remained busy organising his own faction, the Zamindara League (Afzal, 2013). Before the Lahore session of AIML in 1940, the leadership of PPML was assigned to Sir Shah Nawaz Khan Mamdot, and PPML was finally affiliated with AIML (Hasan, 2005). His son, Iftikhar Hussain Khan Mamdot, also actively participated in all the affairs of PPML.

The Pakistan Resolution, also known as the Lahore Resolution, was a landmark event in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The role of PPML was important in organising such a mega event. Pakistan Resolution was adopted by the AIML at its 27<sup>th</sup> annual session in Lahore on March 23, 1940 (Afzal, 2013). The Residence of Sir Shah Nawaz Khan Mamdot, president of PPML, remained the centre of political activities during the session. Quaid-e-Azam stayed at his residence during the session (Hasan, 2005).

After the death of his father in 1942, Iftikhar Hussain Khan Mamdot became the president of PPML (Chiragh, 1990). Both Shah Nawaz Mamdot and Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot organised the League in Punjab. Other prominent leaders of the PPML were Mumtaz Daultana and Feroz Khan Noon. Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot was young and popular among the muslim youth of Punjab. At the request of the *Punjab Muslim Student Federation*, Quaid-i-Azam attended the Pakistan Conference held in Lahore in March 1941 (Kiran, 2013). Jinnah was now focusing on Punjab, which he described as the cornerstone of Pakistan (Afzal, 2013).

World War II (1939-1945) had a marked effect on the political organisation of the Punjab. Punjab was the main supplier of men and material for British war efforts (Malik, 1970). To intensify these efforts, Punjab's Premier Sikandar Hayat became a member of the Viceroy's Defence Council. This act was opposed by Jinnah and PPML, and the Premier had to resign from the Council (Gandhi, 2013). After Sikandar's death in 1942, Khizr became the head of the Unionist Party and Premier of Punjab. Khizr continued the policies of his predecessor. Both Khizr and AIML had their own interpretations of the Sikandar-Jinnah pact. Moreover, differences also emerged over organising the party in the assembly. PPML leaders wanted to name Khizr's ministry the League coalition ministry (Afzal, 2013), which Khizr resisted. Resultantly, the differences between Khizr and Jinnah reached a level that Khizr was expelled from the League in 1944 (Naureen, 2017).

As the War approached its end, the British decided to leave India by giving it independence. Support for the Unionist Party by the British Government began to decline, and the Unionists felt abandoned. As a result, desertion started in the Unionist Party in Punjab, and many electables joined AIML before the 1945-46 elections (Gandhi, 2013). Moreover, due to the support of pirs (religious guides), students and groups like the National Guards, the Muslim League ran an organised campaign in support of the Pakistan Movement in Punjab before the elections (Khalid & Anwar, 2019). The fall of the Unionist Party and the

rise of AIML in Punjab is clear from the results of the 1936-37 and 1945-46 elections of the Punjab Provincial Assembly, as shown in the following table 1: -

**Table 1:** *Performance of AIML and the Unionist Party in Punjab (1936-37 Elections & 1945-46 Elections)*

| <b>Elections</b> | <b>Total seats</b> | <b>Total Muslim Seats</b> | <b>AIML</b> | <b>The Unionist Party</b> |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 1936-37          | 175                | 86                        | 02          | 98                        |
| 1945-46          | 175                | 86                        | 75          | 21                        |

Source: Azra Asghar Ali and Sajid Mahmood Awan, "Political Development and Political Parties in Punjab," 74. (Ayesha Jalal, The Sole Spokesman, 83.)

Despite a clear-cut victory as shown in Table 1, AIML was not given a chance to form a government in Punjab and a coalition government of the Unionist Party, INC and Akali Dal was formed (Civil and Military Gazette, 1946). It resulted in agitation by the Muslim League. In November 1946, the Punjab Government promulgated the Punjab Safety Ordinance banning all public meetings and processions. As a result, the League's National Guards and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) were also banned (Gandhi, 2013). In response, the League started a civil disobedience movement against Khizar's Government.

On 24 January 1947, the police raided the National Guards Headquarters in Lahore and arrested top League leaders, including Mamdot (President of Punjab Muslim League), Daultana (Secretary), Mian Iftikhar, Shoukat Hayat, Begam Shahnawaz, Feroz Khan Noon, and Amir Hussain (Jalal, 2000). These actions further deteriorated law and order in Punjab. Despite banning all public meetings, the League arranged big gatherings and processions against Khizar's Government. Muslim Students Federation and the League's women also participated in these processions. Finally, negotiations started between the League and Khizar's Government. On February 20, 1947, the Premier of Great Britain announced that India would be free after the transfer of power by June 1948 (Gandhi, 2013). This announcement further aggravated the security situation in the Province. On 2 March 1947, Khizar resigned, and AIML celebrated Victory Day (Carter, 2006), followed by the imposition of Governor's Rule in Punjab (Gandhi, 2013). According to the 3 June Plan, partition of Punjab occurred, and West Punjab became part of Pakistan.

### **3.2 Bengal Presidency (Provincial) Muslim League (BPML)**

BPML was established in Calcutta in March 1912 (Afzal, 2013). Nawab Salimullah Khan was elected as president of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (also referred to as the Bengal Presidency Muslim League). Syed Nawab Ali (East Bengal) and Zahid Chowdhary (West Bengal) were elected as secretaries (Rashid, 1987). In Bengal, the Muslim League was established after it was established in Punjab. Fazlul Haq was the founding member of AIML in Dacca in 1906. He played a key role in improving education among Bengali Muslims (Ali, 1975).

AIML was organised in Bengal due to the efforts of leaders like Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin, and Fazlul Huq. After Nawab Salimullah Khan, A. K. Fazlul Huq became president of BPML in 1915. Hindu-Muslim Collaboration, which started in the form of the Lucknow Pact in 1916, reached its climax in Bengal in the form of the Bengal Pact in 1923. C.R. Das was its chief architect (Rashid, 1987). However, the League faced opposition in the 1930s in Bengal from the Krishak Praja Party (KPP). Established in 1929 by A.K. Fazlul Haq (Chatterji, 1994), KPP played the same role in Bengal as the Unionist Party in Punjab (The Unionist Party represented landed elites, while the KPP represented peasants and small farmers). Suhrawardy merged his United Muslim Party into AIML before the 1936-37 elections (Akram, 2026).

The League won more seats in Bengal than in Punjab during the 1936-37 provincial elections (39 in Bengal and only 2 in Punjab). After the elections, a coalition government of AIML and KPP was formed, which lasted until 1941. There were many ups and downs in the relations between KPP and BPML. It

started from a competition in the 1937 elections, then turned into a coalition and finally a conflict. BPML was a part of the coalition government in Bengal from 1937 till 1941 (Hayat, 2004).

Fazlul Haq attended the Lucknow session of AIML in 1937 at the request of Jinnah (Afzal, 2013). In 1939, Fazlul Haq was elected president of BPML, while Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and M.A.H Isphani were elected as general secretary and treasurer, respectively (Afzal, 2013). Fazlul Haq took an active part in the campaign against the Congress Ministries. He wrote a pamphlet titled Muslim Sufferings under Congress Rule (Aziz, 1978). It was a prime time for BPML as it won all the by-elections as well as eighteen out of twenty-two seats of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (Afzal, 2013). A special session of AIML was held in Calcutta in 1938, which was presided over by Quaid-i-Azam (Pirzada, 2007). Fazlul Haq took an active part in the 27<sup>th</sup> session of AIML held in Lahore and presented the Lahore Resolution on 23 March 1940 (Choudhry & Jafer, 2014). After the Lahore Resolution, differences started growing between Fazlul Haq and Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. BPML celebrated 23 March 1941 as a Pakistan Day against the wishes of Fazlul Haq (Rashid, 1987). Moreover, Fazlul Haq joined the Viceroy's Defence Council against the instructions of Jinnah. Due to pressure from the League, Fazlul Haq had to resign from the Council, but he also left the Working Committee of AIML as a protest against the alleged intervention of the Central Committee of AIML in the provincial affairs of Bengal (Afzal, 2013). Meanwhile, the coalition government of BPML and KPP ended. Fazlul Haq formed a new government of the Progressive Party in Bengal. Jinnah was disappointed with this inconsistent attitude of Fazlul Haq and expelled him from the League in 1941 (Afzal, 2013). The Moulana Akram replaced Haq as the president of BPML in 1942 (Afzal, 2013).

At this moment, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim organised the League in Bengal. The early 1940s were a period of great political turmoil and economic instability in Bengal. During World War II, Japan was knocking at the door of Bengal after occupying Burma. Fazlul Haq's ministry had lost its majority in the Bengal assembly. At this moment, BPML reluctantly formed the government in Bengal. Nazimuddin remained Prime Minister of Bengal from 1943 till 1945 (Choudhry and Jafer, 2014). Bengal Famine was the greatest human disaster, which severely affected the province of Bengal in 1943. The famine caused the death of over two million people through hunger, starvation, and disease (Talbot, 1988). Despite the fact that this famine was the result of wrong policies of the British Government, Suhrawardy worked day and night as a minister of civil supplies during the relief operation. Nazimuddin's Ministry faced the charges of corruption, nepotism and incompetence. His ministry fell in March 1945, and Governor's rule was imposed in Bengal (Talbot, 1988).

The election campaign of 1945-46 revolved around the demand for Pakistan on the basis of the *Two Nation Theory*. Both Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim worked tirelessly to reorganise AIML in Bengal. After the elections of 1945-46, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy became Prime Minister of Bengal and remained in this seat until independence in August 1947. Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim were the key figures who organised the League in Bengal and made it a mass party (Ziaullah, 2013). Suhrawardy was always dedicated to the cause of United Pakistan. He was the person who amended the text of the Lahore Resolution of 1940 and replaced the word *states* with the *state* during the 1946 AIML Delhi session of legislatures to validate the inclusion of Bengal in Pakistan (Ali, 1975). Moreover, the role of Fazlul Haq in the Pakistan Movement cannot be undermined despite the fact that he was expelled later from AIML (Afzal, 2013). Before elections, there was a mass defection of KPP members to the AIML (Talbot & Singh, 1999). The party positions of KPP and AIML in the 1936-37 elections and 1945-46 elections in the Bengal assembly are shown in the following table 2: -

**Table 2: Performance of AIML and KPP in Bengal (1936-37 Elections & 1945-46 Elections)**

| Elections | Total seats | Total Muslim Seats | AIML | KPP |
|-----------|-------------|--------------------|------|-----|
| 1936-37   | 250         | 120                | 39   | 36  |
| 1945-46   | 250         | 120                | 114  | 03  |

Source: Taylor, Indian Politics and the Elections of 1937. (Mushirul Hasan, India Partitioned, 16)

Table 2 shows the rise of the AIML and the fall of KPP during the last ten years before independence. After the failure of the Cabinet Mission plan, Jinnah called for Direct Action Day on August 16, 1946 (Gordon, 1974). BPML and the Prime Minister of Bengal, Suhrawardy, fully supported this call. However, its main objective was to show that Muslims would not accept a constitutional settlement without their political rights and involvement.

In Bengal, the day was declared a public holiday by the BPML (Choudhry and Jafer, 2014). It became controversial at a time when communal tension was already high. This decision allowed large gatherings and processions. The protest soon turned into violence in Calcutta on 16 August 1946. The riots lasted for several days in Calcutta, mainly from 16 to 19 August 1946. They were known as the *Great Calcutta Killings*. There was an estimate of around 5,000 to 10,000 deaths and about 15,000 wounded, although figures varied depending on the source (Dutta, 2025). Later, violence spread in other parts of Bengal and Assam. Suhrawardy's Government was accused of failure in controlling the violence.

When the British Government decided in February 1947 to grant India independence after the partition of Bengal and Punjab. Suhrawardy initiated a *United Bengal Movement*. It was a political movement run in April-May 1947 to keep Bengal united at the time of the partition of British India. Supporters and propagators of this movement wanted Bengal to become either an independent sovereign state or to become part of either India or Pakistan as a whole (Choudhry and Jafer, 2014). According to the supporters of United Bengal, Bengal should remain united and become an independent sovereign state, neither part of India nor Pakistan. Suhrawardy and INC leader Sarat Bose were convinced that a united Bengal could protect both Muslims and Hindus better than partition. Abul Hashim was a main architect of the United Bengal movement. According to him, the Lahore Resolution envisaged the creation of Independent States (not a single state) where constituent units would be autonomous (Ziaullah, 2013). But the INC and Hindu Mahasabha strongly opposed this movement (Talbot, 1988). Finally, Bengal was divided according to the partition plan of 1947, and East Bengal became part of Pakistan.

### 3.3 AIML Sessions Held in Bengal and Punjab: A Comparison

By comparing the AIML sessions held in Bengal and Punjab, it is known that more AIML sessions were held in Bengal than in Punjab. A total of seven sessions of AIML were held in Bengal (inaugural session in Dacca and six in Calcutta). A total of five sessions of AIML were held in Punjab (three in Lahore and two in Amritsar). The inaugural session of AIML was held in Dacca, which showed the importance of Dacca for Indian Muslims. Most importantly, the 27<sup>th</sup> session of AIML was held in Lahore in March 1940, in which the Pakistan Resolution was passed. Holding a session of AIML in Lahore and presenting the Lahore Resolution (later called the Pakistan Resolution) by the then Prime Minister of Bengal, A.K. Fazlul Haq, was a tactical move by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the President of AIML. A total of 31 routine/annual and 4 special sessions (including inaugural) of AIML were held from 1906 to 1943. According to Table 3, a total of 12 sessions were held in Bengal and Punjab, which shows their importance in AIML's politics. Details of AIML sessions held in Bengal and Punjab are as follows (Ahmed, 2006; Afzal, 2013):

**Table 3: Annual Sessions of AIML Held in Bengal and Punjab (Locations)**

| City (Location)        | Province | Year | Session                                 |
|------------------------|----------|------|-----------------------------------------|
| Dacca (now Dhaka)      | Bengal   | 1906 | Inaugural session                       |
| Amritsar               | Punjab   | 1908 | 2 <sup>nd</sup> session                 |
| Calcutta (now Kolkata) | Bengal   | 1912 | 5 <sup>th</sup> session                 |
| Calcutta               | Bengal   | 1917 | 10 <sup>th</sup> session                |
| Amritsar               | Punjab   | 1919 | 12 <sup>th</sup>                        |
| Calcutta               | Bengal   | 1920 | Extraordinary/ Special Session          |
| Lahore                 | Punjab   | 1924 | 15 <sup>th</sup>                        |
| Lahore                 | Punjab   | 1927 | 19 <sup>th</sup> session (Shafi Group)  |
| Calcutta               | Bengal   | 1927 | 19 <sup>th</sup> session (Jinnah Group) |

|          |        |      |                          |
|----------|--------|------|--------------------------|
| Calcutta | Bengal | 1928 | 20 <sup>th</sup> session |
| Calcutta | Bengal | 1938 | Special Session          |
| Lahore   | Punjab | 1940 | 27 <sup>th</sup> session |

Source: Riaz Ahmed, *All India Muslim League and the Creation of Pakistan: A Chronology, 1906–1947* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Quaid-i-Azam University, 2006)

The leadership of Bengal's League was more experienced than the leadership of the League in Punjab. Fazlul Haq served as president of AIML and as secretary of INC simultaneously in 1918-1919 (Naya Daur YouTube vlog, 2026). Despite this, the representatives of AIML from Bengal were not given due weightage in the organisation at the All India level. Members representing Bengal were mostly Non-Bengali settlers of Calcutta (Choudhry and Jafer, 2014). Mian Muhammad Shafi remained president of AIML (Shafi Group) during 1927-1929 (Afzal, 2013). In Bengal, the league was in power, and figures like Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and A.K Fazlul Haq were leaders of National stature. Bengal's League leadership adopted a more ethno-nationalist stance, and it tried to avoid the partition of Bengal in 1947.

According to Ian Talbot's study, the successes of AIML in Punjab were essential because "there could be no Pakistan without that province." In 1937, the League had won only 2 of the Muslim seats in Punjab, but in the 1946 elections, it had won 75 Muslim seats; as a result, the Punjab Muslim League had become the political voice of Punjabi Muslims (Talbot, 1988).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The comparative study shows that both the Bengal and Punjab Provincial Muslim Leagues played significant but different roles in the Pakistan Movement. The BPML developed a stronger organisational structure earlier than the PPML. Bengal also had more experienced political leadership, such as Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, A. K. Fazlul Huq, Khawaja Nazimuddin, and Abul Hashim. The League was a part of the coalition government in Bengal from 1937 to 1941 and later remained in power from 1943 until independence in 1947. Its leadership was more experienced and active at the national level.

The study also reveals that the Punjab League expanded through organisational restructuring. It gained momentum after the Sikandar-Jinnah pact in 1937 and the political mobilisation led by Nawab Iftikhar Hussain Khan of Mamdot and other League leaders. By the 1945–46 elections, the Punjab Muslim League had transformed its position and won seventy-five Muslim seats, enabling it to emerge as the principal political representative of Punjabi Muslims. Before independence, both Bengal and Punjab showed a similar pattern of provincial politics due to the presence of regional parties in the form of the Krishak Praja Party and the Unionist Party. Both KPP and the Unionist Party had deep roots in agrarian society. Moreover, both parties claimed to be non-communal and challenged the AIML's claim to represent all Muslims. Both KPP and the Unionists performed very well in the elections of 1936-37. There was a similarity between the political status of Fazlul Haq of the Krishak Praja Party and the political leadership of the Unionist Party, including Sir Sikandar Hayat and Khizr Hayat. Both Fazlul Haq and Sikandar Hayat had an alliance with AIML, but it proved to be a marriage of convenience. Both Leaders, Sikandar Hayat in Punjab and Fazlul Haq in Bengal, had differences with the leadership of AIML, and both were expelled from the League in the early 1940s. Another similarity between the PPML and the BPML is the internal rivalries and differences within the party organisation. Both PPML and BPML overcame these internal disputes successfully and showed a unified approach in the final phase of the Pakistan Movement.

A major difference between the two provincial organisations of AIML was their electoral performance before the 1940s. BPML performed better than PPML during the 1936–37 provincial elections. Before the elections of 1945-46, both PPML and BPML experienced a similar situation when a large number of members of the Legislative Assembly representing the Unionist Party and KPP deserted and joined AIML. It is also established that BPML played an important role in the ideological and organisational development of the AIML. Although the main leaders of BPML, including Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim, remained associated with the Independent Bengal Movement in 1947 before the announcement

of the 3 June Plan. The research also shows that PPML played a decisive role in the final stage of the Pakistan Movement as it launched a massive campaign against the Unionist Government and forced it to resign.

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