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Role of the Central Committee of Action in Organization of the Provincial Muslim Leagues

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Headings

- [Introduction](#)
- [Need of Monitoring Mechanism for the League](#)
- [Formation of Central Committee of Action](#)
- [Powers of the Central Committee of Action](#)
- [The Committee and Punjab Muslim League](#)
- [Organizational Affairs of NWFP League](#)
- [Case of UP Provincial Muslim League](#)
- [Settling Disputes in Baluchistan](#)
- [Ajmir-Marwara Muslim League](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract

All India Muslim League lost 1936 elections which propelled Jinnah to re-organize the party on modern grounds. But the re-organization was not that much efficacious due to the absence of effective checks and balances overworking of provincial branches. Initial endeavors to keep check overworking and organization of the provincial Leagues were short successes on the part of the Central League. The working of the Central Civil Defence Committee accentuated the need for a separate body for such tasks. Jinnah brought his idea to life in 1944 by establishing the Central Committee of Action. This was the most authoritative body after Jinnah having powers to affiliate and disaffiliate provincial branches. Moreover, this body not only re-organized the provincial branches but also settled their intra-party disputes effectively. The working of branches improves substantially due to the committee's initiatives for grassroots level activities. The 1946 elections testified logic behind the formation and its result-oriented working to improve Provincial Leagues.

Key Words: League, Organization, Provincial Leagues, Central Committee, Check and Balance, Expansion, Records, Elections, Sindh, Punjab, NWFP, Baluchistan, UP, Ajmir-Marwara

Introduction

All India Muslim League contested 1936 elections under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah as President of the party. The league could secure only one-fourth of reserved seats for the Muslims in the elections. One of the reasons behind this poor performance was the weak and less organized overall structure of the central and provincial Muslim Leagues. After the electoral defeat, Jinnah realized flaws in the previous structure of the party organization, which had superficial roots in the masses. Jinnah's efforts brought forth significant

structural changes into AIML at the historic Lucknow Annual Session in 1937 that was a step ahead aimed to re-organize the party at the productive pattern. This session was memorable due to the representation of all significant provincial League representatives. The constitution of the league was also revamped during this session which led to the restructuring of the organization and its organizational framework. According to the amended Constitution, Provincial Leagues were to be formed in all the provinces of British India and

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were supposed to share 10% of their annual income with the central League (Constitution, 1937). The rules provided the formation of district branches of the league and their affiliation with the provincial League (Constitution, 1937). Provincial Leagues were autonomous in terms of the nomination of members for central bodies of the league along with other provisions of the rules and regulations (Constitution, 1937). The only check over league was the Central Council of AIML which had the power to affiliate and disaffiliate provincial Leagues over failure to establish district Leagues (Constitution, 1937).

In the post-Lucknow session period, Jinnah paid more attention to the re-organization of the Provincial Leagues to ensure the formation of provincial League branches and their internal organs. But up till then, there was no proper mechanism to keep check and balance overworking of the provincial Muslim Leagues. The only available source of information about the working of the Leagues was the periodic reports sent from provincial offices about their activities (AFM, Archives of Freedom Movement n.d.). The other way was correspondence between Jinnah and the provincial League leaders about their political activities, working and growth of their respective provincial Leagues. In 1938, Jinnah proposed a meeting of a minimum of two representatives of the provincial Leagues every year to align and coordinate working patterns of the provincial Leagues, but the idea could not be pursued due to various reasons (Jinnah to Liaqat Ali Khan 1938). In 1939, the Central Council of the League appointed a sub-committee under the chair of Moulana Akram Khan to monitor the working of the provincial Leagues and report back to the central office (AIML 1939). This move also remained in papers without any significant tangible outcome.

Need of Monitoring Mechanism for the League

The situation became more demanding in the context of the start of World War II, the resignation of Congress ministries, and after the passage of the Lahore Resolution. The August Offer of 1940 was the first indication of the expected post-war political scenario of India. Jinnah had to focus more on organizational issues of the Provincial branches of

the league to make it more deep-rooted among the public. It was time to re-design organizational matters of the party, which was endeavouring to enhance its footprints in provinces. Jinnah called a meeting of all the presidents of the provincial Leagues to Delhi on October 28, 1941 (AFM, Meeting of Provincial Presidents of AIML 1941). The office-bearers of the provincial Leagues provided formal presentations over organizational matters of their branches. All issues such as membership, finances, donations, auditing of accounts, propaganda and maintenance of the offices. Jinnah issued instructions through the office of the honorary secretary of the league to enrol 10% of the Muslim population as members of each provincial branch of the league while minimum of 1% members must be recruited for Muslim League National Guards (L. A. Khan 1941). Next year, Jinnah again called a meeting of provincial League presidents in February 1942 to discuss and analyze organizational issues. The situation was not up to the mark as most of the provincial Leagues were still far behind the target of enrollment, fund collection and establishment of primary Leagues at the district level (Dawn 1942).

At Allahabad annual session in 1942, The League working Committee authorized Jinnah "to take necessary steps for protection of life, property and uplift of the Muslims in consultation with the provincial Muslim Leagues" (AFM, Annual Session of League 1942). Jinnah wanted a body to monitor the working and expansion of the provincial Leagues along with war relief activities to further enhance the league's roots among the masses as a mass party. He appointed Central Civil Defence Committee with Nawab Muhammad Ismail as chairman to take up both of the tasks (AFM, Jinnah's announcement 1942). The purpose of this committee was to conduct "relief activities, assist the administration, rationing, distribution of food and licensing of shops in the war-affected provinces in Eastern zone and to take necessary measures for the general uplift of the Muslims in other provinces" (AFM, Objectives of CDC 1942). Jinnah assigned additional responsibility to Civil Defence Committee to monitor the working of Bengal, Assam, Bihar and U.P Muslim Leagues (Jinnah 1943). Nawab Muhammad Ismail, The Chairman, coordinated

with the provincial Leagues to launch relief work in the Eastern zone provinces and to strengthen provincial Leagues in terms of organization_(N. Ismail 1942).

Formation of Central Committee of Action

The Civil Defence Committee initiated the process of re-organization of the provincial Leagues but found it a gigantic task with innumerable hurdles. Jinnah wanted working patterns of the Leagues in more efficient and uniform in terms of "procedure for renewal and registration of new members, working and organization of district Leagues and other organizational matters". Karachi Annual Session (1943) of League authorized Jinnah to appoint "Central Committee of Action not less than five and not more than seven members to be nominated by the president" to "resist the imposition of an All India Federation or any other constitution for a united India and prepare them for the struggle for Pakistan_(Pamphlet 1943).

Subsequently, Jinnah appointed a six-member Central Committee of Action with Nawab Ismail as Chairman, Liaqat Ali Khan as Convener. Nawab Iftakhar Hussain Mamdot, Qazi Isa, G.M. Sayed, and Haji Abdus Sattar Essak Saith were members of the committee_(AFM, [Central Committee of Action 1943](#)). The objectives of the committee were to "immediately undertake the work of organizing, coordinating, and unifying the various branches of League under the entire Muslim League organization in consonance with the constitution, rules, policy and programme of the All India Muslim League"_(AFM, [Central Committee of Action 1943](#)). The committee was assigned immense powers after the Working Committee and Council of League. The right of appeal against its decisions was vested only on the Central Council of League that shows Jinnah's trust and confidence overworking of the committee_(AFM, [Central Committee of Action 1943](#)).

Powers of the Central Committee of Action

The Constitution and Rules of League (1937) provided "powers of affiliation, disaffiliation, and disciplinary action against individuals, office bearers, and provincial League on violation of policy, rules, and on charges of misconduct" (Constitution,

1937). Moreover, the committee could form itself into sub-committees to perform various functions like other higher bodies_([Constitution 1937](#)).

The committee had the power to "control, direct and regulate activities of the provincial Leagues in consonance with aims, objectives and rules of the League"_(AFM, [CCA Powers 1944](#)). The committee was empowered to "dissolve, suspend, disaffiliate, and take disciplinary action against any League or office bearer upon violation of rules, negligence to carry out duties and assigned functions". It could also take "disciplinary action against individuals overacting in contravention of League policy and programme"_(AFM, [CCA Powers 1944](#)). In terms of authority, the Committee of Action was at par with the Central Council of All India Muslim League and more assertive than many other organs of the league.

The Central Committee of Action took over previous responsibilities of the Central Civil Defence Committee mainly to monitor the growth and working of the Provincial Muslim Leagues along with other relief and assistance works. Jinnah directed Nawab Ismail to submit "all previous reports and documents to the Honorary Secretary Liaqat and return all details of accounts to the office of the President, Jinnah"_(N. M. Ismail, [Nawab Muhammad Ismail to Jinnah 1944](#)). The committee divided its working into three different dimensions, particularly with reference to organizational issues of the "provincial Leagues, formation or reformation of existing League bodies, and planning and coordination with other bodies to assist them ([AFM, Vol. 202, 28-33 1944](#)). Moreover, it chalked out proposals for economic development, education, human development, and the overall uplift of the Muslims. The committee also draft and model, a constitution for the provincial Leagues to invoke uniform working of all organs_([AFM, Vol. 202, 28-33 1944](#)).

The Central Committee of Action and Organization of Provincial Leagues

The working of this committee was inclusive of all organizational affairs ranging from monitoring of the Provincial Muslim Leagues, preparation of reports regarding their compliance with the league's constitution, organizational matters and assurance

of efficacious working of all primary branches (AFM, Vol. 202, 28-33 1944). Its chairman, Nawab Muhammad Ismail, sent directive all provincial Leagues to monitor activities of their workers' camps, initiate zonal conferences to propagate Pakistan, maintain records of everything like civil defence work, and assistance to the Muslim populace in the rationing system (N. M. Ismail, Chairman Central Committee of Action to Presidents provincial Muslim Leagues 1944). Ismail also appointed Zakir Ali to visit provincial branch offices for inspection of records to get first-hand information of their working (N. M. Ismail, Chairman Central Committee of Action to Presidents provincial Muslim Leagues 1944). The Committee members constituted themselves into groups, i.e. Qazi Muhammad Isa and Nawab Iftexhar Mamdot to visit Assam and Bengal, Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan for Bihar Provincial Muslim League, Nawab Ismail and Essak Saith for Delhi Provincial Muslim League to review organization and structural issues (Afzal 2013). It observed violations of the league's policy, constitution and informed Jinnah over policy failures on the part of the Provincial Muslim Leagues (N. M. Ismail, To Jinnah 1944). In most of such cases, Jinnah analyzed the situation and used it to direct Nawab Ismail to take appropriate policy measures in consultation with the Provincial League Council (N. M. Ismail, To Jinnah (Telegram) 1945).

The Committee and Punjab Muslim League

The committee took up issues raising in the provincial Leagues and provided room for Jinnah to pay heed to national-level politics. For instance, in the case of Punjab, Khizer Hayat Tiwana spoke against the league and its demand for Pakistan and its "claim for being the sole representative of the Indian Muslims" (Ahmad 2002). The committee held three meetings in Lahore to investigate the matter thoroughly. It analyzed transcripts of the speech and press clippings to conclude whether it was a violation of the league's constitution or not? In the end, the committee concluded that Khizer's statement as opposed to the league's constitution and subsequently terminated his membership from the party (N. M. Ismail, Statement 1945). Nawab Ismail informed Jinnah about the decision, who put

the matter in front of the Working Committee of League, which endorsed the expulsion of Khizer on July 31, 1944 (Pirzada 2008).

Punjab Muslim League faced a financial crunch due to a less organized mechanism for the collection of funds and donations. The rules of the central league required each provincial league to achieve an enrollment level of a minimum of 10% of the Muslim population as members (Consitution 1937). The committee issued a directive to all provincial branches to compile an official record of all the activities and financial matters (N. M. Ismail, Chairman Central Committee of Action to Presidents provincial Muslim Leagues 1944). Furthermore, they were required to ensure annual subscription of the existing members and were supposed to pay 10% of the income to the account for the Central League (Afzal 2013).

Moreover, Nawab Ismail established a sub-office of the committee at Lahore to handle financial matters of the branch and to espouse the organization of Muslim League National Guards along with other organs of the League (Afzal 2013). The demand for Pakistan was propagated by instructing the district Leagues to send a noticeable number of participants to attend Muslim League Conferences (N. M. Ismail, To district Muslim League 1945). Pakistan conferences were aimed to counter Unionist propaganda against the demand for Pakistan and to elaborate the need of Pakistan the Punjabi Muslims. Jinnah himself attended one of the conferences at Lyallpur, which demonstrated the unity and strength of the League in Punjab (SHC 1945).

The Punjab provincial League initiated expansion work under guidelines from the committee and reported back within a few months. The provincial league was achieved targets regarding district branches, propaganda work, press and publicity, tours of the remote areas of the province, League conferences, Muslim Students Federation, National Guards and enrollment of new members (Doulana 1944).

Organizational Affairs of NWFP League

NWFP Provincial League was one of the most challenging and turbulent in organizational affairs

due to the emergence of intraparty factions. League's position was already fragile in the province due to strong-rooted Khudai Khidmatgars. Jinnah wanted the provincial league to organize itself on an emergency basis and to end up in factional tussles. The committee took up the task in June 1944; it toured six districts of the province to assess the actual situation and position of the Frontier League among masses_(N. M. Ismail, AFM 1944). Frontier League was in total disarray with a shabby organizational base and recurrent factional disputes that undermined the working and popularity of the league. Nawab Ismail deputed Qazi Muhammad Isa to settle internal disputes and to re-organize the league, particularly selection of office bearers, maintenance of records, and reinvigorate financial assets of the party. Qazi Isa realized the need for the entire restructuring of the league and presented his report to Nawab Ismail for endorsement. Jinnah was informed by Nawab Ismail about the proposed changes in the Frontier League along with his personal observations_(N. M. Ismail, Report of The Central Committee of Action for Period of February to July 1944 1944). Jinnah endorsed the appointment of Qazi Isa and structural replacements in the provincial League_(AFM, 188 1944). The committee dissolved the entire structure of the Frontier League and conducted fresh elections for office-bearers of the league just before general elections.

The Committee and Bengal Provincial League

Bengal Provincial Muslim League was facing a decline in its popularity and censured over its response during famine and bit mishandling of the situation effectively. Despite the provincial league's endeavours to provide relief by direct feeding of the victims and efforts for rehabilitation, the opponents criticized and blamed for incompetence by the opponents. This league was reconstituted by the Central Civil Defence Committee in 1943 by revamping new enrolment of the members and reformation of primary Leagues with relevant organs. In 1946, Jinnah assigned the committee to initiate consolidation of the organization, member enrolment, election of the office bearers, and to re-arrange financial matters_(M. A. Khan 1946). The committee did commendable work in the province

and re-organized scattered resources of the league to make it performable in the upcoming general elections.

Case of UP Provincial Muslim League

Like Frontier League, Assam Provincial Muslim League was also facing similar intraparty conflicts between "Saadullah Khan and other Leaguers over the re-election of office bearers and separation of official portfolio holders from the party offices" (Dhulpala 2015). The committee toured the provincial party offices and assessed the situation after ascertaining points of view from both sides. At first, an organizing committee was appointed with Moulana Bhashani as convener. The members of the committee Ch. Khaleeqzaman, Qazi Isa and Iftekhar Mamdot met to sort out the feasible solution to the conflict. Finally, they concluded to conduct fresh elections for the office bearers under the auspices of the committee. The members of the Assam League elected "Moulana Bhashani as president and Dewan Abdul Basit was elected as general secretary of the party"_(Dhulpala 2015).

Settling Disputes in Baluchistan

In Baluchistan, Qazi Isa and Mir Jaffer Khan Jamli developed differences over certain minor issues. Qazi was part of re-organization work in NWFP, which could further escalate and question the Committee's impartiality. Nawab Ismail himself intervened in the matter along with Nawabzada Liaqat to settle the dispute. Both of them inquired about the dispute between Qazi Isa and Jaffer Khan Jamali and mediated an amicable conflict dissolution (N. M. Ismail 1944).

Zakir Ali was assigned to visit party offices in the province to gauge the ground situation. He visited Bihar to assess the working and available resources of the Bihar Provincial Muslim League. He found the party offices in total disarray with no proper record management and poor details of accounts. The record was not updated since November 1941, while monthly details of income were not available (Ali, Report by Zakir Secretary CCA 1944). Moreover, the league had neither taken tours for propaganda and enrollment of the members nor made 10% mandatory registration of the population. The civil defence work was also

unsatisfactory while mushrooming of small-town Leagues was not registered with any district of provincial League office_(Ali, Report by Zakir Secretary CCA 1944). Subsequently, Nawab Ismail sent the report to the provincial league for suitable answers over the mismanagement on the part of the Bihar League_(N. M. Ismail, President Bihar Muslim League 1944).

Ajmir-Marwara Muslim League

Zakir visited the Ajmir-Marwara Muslim League office and found it in a more pathetic condition where registered members were only 1844 while the office had no proper workers and records of the activities_(Ali, Inspection Report of Ajmir Marwara Muslim League 1944). The league required funding for propaganda work, the hiring of regular staff, and further activities. There was no existence of National Guards, Civil Defence Committee and National Guards_(Ali 1944).

Contrary to Ajmir League, the U.P Muslim League was properly organized in 48 districts and 25 towns with registered membership of 271817 (Ali, Inspection Report by Zakir Ali over Working of U.P Muslim League 1944). Zakir found league popular among the local Muslim population while its branches were expanding to remaining districts and town of the province_(Ali 1944). The members for party offices were properly elected, and nominations for the Council of League were finalized after due scrutiny_(Ali 1944). The accounts were verified without anomaly in sources of income, membership subscriptions and donations. The annual contribution under rule 40 to account of Central League was being made regularly_(Ali 1944). Despite the smooth functioning of the League, Zakir found that there was neither arrangement for the organization of National Guards nor any effort was made to launch constructive works except one district. Dawn and Manshoor, the propaganda organs of the league, were less popular, while the provincial league did publicize both newspapers__(Ali 1944) . The leadership focused more on touring for propaganda, and the only positive was an “admirable system of check over the provincial Leagues”_(Ali 1944).

Ending Factionalism in Sindh

Sindh Provincial Muslim League remained a constant matter of worry for Jinnah due to factional tussles and changing of loyalties by the Sindhi Leaders. G.M Sayed maintained a report on the working of Sindh League, which indicated poor and illiterate masses and exploitation of the Hindu landlords as major impediments in way popularization of League message_(Sayed 1944). Moreover, the report focused on the expansion of Hindu business which dominated the trade and commerce of the province. It recommended more focus on the organization of the party to counter other groups like Khaksars and to handle intrigues of the Hindu landlords to shatter the unity of the Muslims_(Sayed 1944). According to the report, league had 177118 members with 547 branches with an income of around 13922_(Sayed 1944). But the Confidential Report on Working of Sindh Assembly revealed that most of the progress was fake as its actual membership was 156097, and there were only 441 primary branches in the province_(Report 1945). The enrollment was much below the standard requirement of a minimum of 10% of the Muslim population. The only fact endorsed in the report was the increasing Hindu influence economy and politics of the province.

Conclusion

The Central Committee of Action not only brought messy affairs to notice of Jinnah but also endeavored to organize the provincial branches to enable them to contest the upcoming general elections. At some places, it decided and executed measures by itself, and in some cases, it acted upon direction from the president of the league, Jinnah. But overall, the efficient check and balance over the working of the provincial Leagues improved the efficacy of the party working and increased its organizational base. Mass popularity got deep roots in the Muslim majority provinces, which ultimately favor league in the upcoming elections. The election results were tangible proof of its effective working and management of the League branches. AIML won a significant number of seats in the 1946 election in all the Muslim majority provinces, which put the league into a bargain position to negotiate for a political settlement of communal problems of the Subcontinent.

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