

Against Partition: The Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind and the Politics of Composite Nationalism, 1940–1947.

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Abstract:

The Partition of India is predominantly narrated through the rise of the All-India Muslim League and its demand for Pakistan, often obscuring the diversity of Muslim political responses to the question of India's constitutional future. This paper examines the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind (JUH) and its sustained political and ideological opposition to Partition between 1940 and 1947. It argues that the JUH articulated a coherent Muslim alternative to the Two-Nation Theory through the concept of *muttahida qaumiyat* (composite nationalism), which distinguished religious identity from territorial nationality and affirmed the possibility of a united Indian polity. Drawing on organisational resolutions, political speeches, contemporary accounts, documentary sources, and existing historiography, the study examines the JUH's participation in the All India Azad Muslim Conference, its rejection of separate electorates, attempts to challenge the Muslim League's claim to represent all Indian Muslims, engagement with the Cabinet Mission, and anti-Partition mobilisation during the Sylhet referendum. The paper demonstrates that Muslim political opinion was neither homogeneous nor inevitably separatist. It concludes that the JUH's failure to prevent Partition reflected the growing organisational dominance of the Muslim League, communal polarisation, and the collapse of constitutional alternatives, rather than the absence of a viable Muslim intellectual and political alternative to Pakistan..

Keywords: Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind; Composite Nationalism; Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani; Two-Nation Theory; Opposition to Partition; Azad Muslim Conference; Cabinet Mission Plan; Sylhet Referendum; Deobandi Ulema; Hindu-Muslim Unity

INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of British colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent in the mid-19th century, culminating in the establishment of direct Crown authority after the Revolt of 1857, set the stage for a protracted struggle for independence. This movement, which gained momentum in the early 20th century, was not merely a quest for political sovereignty but also a profound contest over the very idea of India as a nation. Amid a society marked by profound religious, linguistic, caste, and cultural diversity, the Indian National Congress and its allies envisioned a unified, secular nation-state where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and others could coexist as equal citizens in a composite national fabric. However, this vision faced a formidable challenge from the All-India Muslim League's advocacy of the two-nation theory, which posited that Hindus and Muslims constituted irreconcilably distinct nations, necessitating territorial separation on religious lines.

The pivotal moment in this ideological confrontation came with the adoption of the Lahore Resolution (later known as the Pakistan Resolution) by the Muslim League on 23 March 1940 during its annual session in Lahore. Moved by A.K. Fazlul Huq, the Premier of Bengal, and drafted under the guidance of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the resolution called for the grouping of Muslim-majority regions in northwestern and eastern India into "independent states" that would be "autonomous and sovereign." Though ambiguously worded—employing the plural "states" and avoiding explicit mention of "Pakistan".(Subba, 2022, pp. 949-950).it marked Jinnah's decisive shift from earlier demands for safeguards within a united India to an irrevocable commitment to partition. For Jinnah and his supporters, this was a pragmatic response to perceived Hindu majoritarianism and the need to protect Muslim political, cultural, and economic interests in a post-colonial order.

This separatist demand was vehemently rejected by a significant segment of Muslim opinion, most notably the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind (JUH), one of the foremost organizations of Islamic scholars in India. Founded in November 1919 by prominent Ulema-Islamic theologians.(Adravi, 1982.p.54).The JUH emerged from the anti-colonial legacy of the Darul Uloom Deoband and the Khilafat Movement. From its inception, the organization aligned closely with the Indian National Congress, actively participating in Gandhian non-violent campaigns such as Non-Cooperation (1920–22), Civil Disobedience (1930–34), and Quit India (1942).....

Its leaders endured repeated imprisonments, yet remained steadfast in their commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity as essential for expelling British imperialism. This article therefore asks: How did the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind conceptualise and oppose the demand for Pakistan between 1940 and 1947, and why did its alternative vision of composite nationalism fail to prevent Partition? It argues that the JUH articulated a coherent Muslim alternative to the Two-Nation Theory through *muttahida qaumiyat*, maintaining that religious identity could coexist with a shared territorial Indian nationality. Its political activities between 1940 and 1947 demonstrate an attempt to translate this intellectual position into practical politics. The eventual failure of this project reflected not simply the weakness of the JUH's ideas but the growing political dominance of the Muslim League, increasing communal polarisation, and the collapse of constitutional alternatives during the final years of British rule.

By examining the JUH as an organised Muslim opponent of Partition, this study seeks to recover an important dimension of Muslim political pluralism in late colonial India. It argues that the history of Partition should be understood not only through the emergence of Pakistan but also through the competing Muslim visions of nationalism, political representation, religious identity, and territorial belonging that existed before 1947.

Literature Review

The historiography of Partition has developed around several interconnected questions concerning Muslim political identity, the rise of the Muslim League, the demand for Pakistan, regional politics, constitutional negotiations, and the consequences of Partition. While earlier interpretations often emphasised Muslim separatism, subsequent scholarship has increasingly demonstrated that Muslim political opinion in late colonial India was diverse and contested. This scholarship provides the broader context for examining the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind (JUH) as a Muslim organisation that rejected the demand for Pakistan and advocated composite nationalism.

Francis Robinson's *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* shows that Muslim political consciousness developed within specific regional and social circumstances, particularly in the United Provinces (Robinson, 1974). The study is significant because it demonstrates that the development of a distinct Muslim political identity did not automatically lead to a demand for territorial separation. The study also revolves around United Provinces, the province from which many of the Jamiat Ideologues came from as it was composed of many graduates of the Islamic seminary at Deoband (Darul Uloom Deoband), Saharapur.

Ayesha Jalal's *Self and Sovereignty* further examines the changing relationship between Muslim community, individual identity, sovereignty, and nationalism in South Asia (Jalal, 2000). Her analysis is useful for understanding the possibility of distinguishing religious identity from territorial nationality. This provides an important conceptual context for the JUH's doctrine of *muttahida qaumiyat*, which similarly maintained that Muslims could remain members of the Islamic *millat* while belonging politically to a common Indian *qaum*. Bose and Jalal's *Modern South Asia* likewise situates nationalism and Partition within the wider political and social transformations of colonial South Asia, emphasising the historically changing nature of political identities (Bose & Jalal, 2023). Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman* is central to the modern historiography of the Pakistan movement (Jalal, 1985). Jalal challenges the interpretation of Pakistan as the inevitable outcome of a long-standing Muslim demand for a separate state and instead emphasises the importance of constitutional negotiations, political representation, and Jinnah's strategy. Her analysis is particularly relevant to the present study because the question of who had the authority to represent Indian Muslims was central to the political conflict of the 1940s. The JUH's efforts to challenge the Muslim League's claim to be the sole representative of Muslims can therefore be understood as part of this wider struggle over political representation.

Ian Talbot's *Pakistan: A Modern History* places the Pakistan movement within the broader development of colonial institutions, provincial politics, and Muslim political demands (Talbot, 1998). His work highlights the importance of regional political contexts in shaping the movement for Pakistan. David Gilmartin's *Empire and Islam*, particularly through its study of Punjab, similarly demonstrates that Muslim mobilisation was influenced by provincial politics, religious networks, landed interests, and colonial institutions (Gilmartin, 1988). These studies are important for the present research because they caution against treating Indian Muslim politics as uniform across different regions.

Joya Chatterji's *Bengal Divided* demonstrates that the politics of Partition in Bengal developed through the interaction of communal identities, provincial politics, and competing social and political interests (Chatterji, 1994). Together with Gilmartin's study of Punjab, this work highlights the regional diversity of

the Partition process. Such regional differences are important for understanding the JUH's position because Muslims living in Muslim-majority provinces faced different political circumstances from Muslims living in minority provinces such as the United Provinces and Bihar. The political process of Partition is further examined by Talbot and Singh in *The Partition of India* (2009). Their study connects constitutional negotiations, British policy, provincial politics, communal mobilisation, and the eventual division of the subcontinent. It is particularly useful for understanding the final constitutional crisis and the failure of alternatives to Partition during 1946–47.

Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition* shifts attention from elite political negotiations to the experiences of ordinary people (Khan, 2007). Her emphasis on violence, displacement, uncertainty, and the breakdown of social and administrative structures demonstrates that Partition was not simply a constitutional settlement but a profound social rupture. This perspective is relevant to the JUH's warnings concerning the consequences of territorial division and the insecurity that Partition could create for Muslims who remained outside Pakistan. Mushirul Hasan's *Legacy of a Divided Nation* is particularly important for understanding the consequences of Partition for Muslims who remained in India (Hasan, 1997). Hasan demonstrates that Partition did not resolve questions of Muslim political identity, representation, and belonging. Instead, it created new political and social challenges for Indian Muslims. This post-Partition perspective is relevant to the JUH's pre-Partition argument that territorial separation would leave substantial Muslim populations outside the proposed Muslim state.

Historiographical Gap

The scholarship discussed above has substantially expanded our understanding of Partition. Jalal (1985) highlights constitutional negotiations and the problem of Muslim representation; Jalal (2000) examines the relationship between Muslim identity, community, and sovereignty; Dhulipala (2015) explores the ideological dimensions of Pakistan; Talbot (1998), Gilmartin (1988), and Chatterji (1994) emphasise regional political contexts; Talbot and Singh (2009) examine the broader political process; Khan (2007) foregrounds the human consequences of Partition; and Hasan (1997) examines the position of Muslims after 1947.

Nevertheless, comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining the JUH's opposition to Partition as a sustained and interconnected political programme. Existing works such as Faruqi (1959), Islam (2016), and the documentary collection of Rozina (1981) provide important evidence concerning Deobandi opposition to Pakistan, nationalist Muslim mobilisation, and the JUH's organisational activities. However, there remains scope to connect the JUH's ideological commitment to *muttahida qaumiyat* with its practical interventions in political, constitutional, electoral, and grassroots arenas between 1940 and 1947.

This study addresses this gap by examining the JUH not simply as an organisation that opposed the Muslim League, but as an alternative Muslim political movement that sought to reconcile Islamic identity with territorial Indian nationalism. It therefore connects the intellectual foundations of *muttahida qaumiyat* with the JUH's political activities, including the All India Azad Muslim Conference, opposition to separate electorates, attempts to challenge the League's claim to Muslim representation, engagement with the Cabinet Mission, and anti-Partition mobilisation in Sylhet. In doing so, the study seeks to demonstrate that Muslim political opinion during the final years of British rule was contested and that the demand for Pakistan represented one, rather than the only, Muslim conception of India's political future.

Political Struggle Against the Demand for Pakistan, 1940–47

The Lahore Resolution of March 1940 marked an important turning point in the constitutional debate over India's future. By advancing the idea of geographically contiguous Muslim-majority areas being constituted into independent political units, the resolution provided the Muslim League with a new framework for its political demands. For the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind (JUH), however, the demand conflicted with its established commitment to composite nationalism. The JUH's opposition was not limited to rejecting the League's political programme. It sought to establish that opposition to Pakistan could itself be articulated through an Islamic and Muslim political framework. The existence of a distinct Muslim religious community did not necessarily require the creation of a separate Muslim state. This argument allowed the JUH to challenge the League's claim that support for Pakistan was the natural or inevitable expression of Muslim political aspirations. The political significance of this alternative became particularly visible through the All India Azad Muslim Conference of 1940.

Participation in the All India Azad Muslim Conference of 1940

Barely a month after the Muslim League passed the Lahore (Pakistan) Resolution in March 1940, a major gathering of nationalist Muslims was organised in Delhi under the banner of the All India Azad Muslim Conference (27–30 April 1940). The conference was presided over by Khan Bahadur Allah Bakhsh Soomro, the Premier of Sind, and drew more than 1,400 elected delegates representing a wide spectrum of anti-League, pro-unity Muslim organisations and parties. On the final day, the public session attracted a crowd estimated at over 100,000 people—contemporary reports noted that attendance was roughly five times larger than that of the League’s Lahore session. Indian and British press coverage, as well as later scholarly assessments, regarded the Azad Muslim Conference as more truly representative of the Muslim masses than the Muslim League’s largely elite leadership. The explicit purpose of the conference was to challenge the Muslim League’s claim to be the sole spokesman of Indian Muslims and to demonstrate that a substantial section of Muslim opinion firmly rejected the demand for Pakistan and supported a united, independent India. The major participating organisations and parties included the All India Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, All India Momin Conference, All India Majlis-e-Ahrar, All-India Shia Political Conference, Khudai Khidmatgars, Bengal Krishak Praja Party, All-India Muslim Parliamentary Board, Anjuman-e-Watan (Baluchistan), All India Muslim Majlis, and Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadees. Duly elected delegates came from the United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces, Punjab, Sind, North-West Frontier Province, Madras, Orissa, Bengal, Malabar, Baluchistan, Delhi, Assam, Rajasthan, Kashmir, Hyderabad, and numerous other princely states. Among the several resolutions adopted, the one most directly relevant to the partition demand stated: “This Conference considers any scheme which divides India into two—a Hindu India and a Muslim India—as impracticable and harmful to the country’s interests generally and those of the Muslims in particular. This Conference is convinced that the inevitable result of such a scheme will be that obstacles will be created in the path of Indian freedom and British Imperialism will exploit it for its own purposes.” (reported in *Hindustan Times*, 30 April 1940). Additional resolutions emphasised the need for complete independence from British rule, adequate constitutional safeguards for Muslim religious, cultural, economic, and political rights within a united India, and the rejection of any imperial strategy that used communal divisions to delay transfer of power. The conference thus articulated a clear alternative: a free, composite India in which Muslims would enjoy full citizenship and protected minority status rather than territorial separation. The Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind played a leading role in organising and mobilising support for the Azad Muslim Conference. Its leaders, including Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and other senior Deobandi ulema, worked actively to secure broad participation from provincial branches, issued appeals for unity, and helped frame the ideological critique of the two-nation theory on both religious and practical grounds. The JUH’s extensive network of madrasas, mosques, and local committees proved crucial in generating grassroots attendance and in projecting the conference as a genuinely mass-based counter-mobilisation. Contemporary observers reinforced this assessment. The Canadian orientalist Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who was in India at the time, wrote that the delegates “representing at that time probably still the majority of India’s Muslims, came to protest against the Pakistan idea, and against the use of the Muslims by the British government and others as an excuse for political inaction” (Smith, 1946, p. 279). In short, the Azad Muslim Conference of April 1940 stood as one of the most significant organised expressions of Muslim opposition to partition in the immediate aftermath of the Lahore Resolution, with the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind at the forefront of both its organisation and its ideological defence of composite nationalism.

Ratification of the Azad Muslim Conference Resolutions at the Jaunpur Session (1940)

The Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind (JUH) wasted no time in formally endorsing the anti-partition stance articulated at the All India Azad Muslim Conference. At its annual session held in Jaunpur from 7–9 June 1940, the JUH unanimously ratified the Delhi conference’s resolutions in the following terms: “This session of the Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind approves and endorses the resolutions of the Azad Muslim Conference, Delhi, stating that these were extremely necessary for the freedom of the nation and for the protection of Muslim interests, and that it is essential to act upon them in order to achieve these objectives.” (Rozina, 1981, p. 699) The timing of the Jaunpur session—barely five to six weeks after the Delhi gathering—underscored the urgency with which the JUH sought to translate the Azad Muslim Conference’s public demonstration of Muslim opposition into a clear organisational mandate. By formally adopting the Delhi resolutions, the Jamiat transformed a broad coalition statement into the official policy of one of the largest and most influential bodies of Islamic scholars in India. In his presidential address at the same session, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani powerfully reiterated the doctrine of composite nationalism (*muttahida Qaumiyyat*), emphasising that religious diversity did not negate a shared Indian national identity: “We, the inhabitants of India, share a common national identity by virtue of being Indian. This shared identity remains intact despite

our religious and cultural differences. Just as variations in our physical appearances such as complexion, caste, colour, or height—do not affect our shared humanity If a fire breaks out in a village and its residents fail to extinguish it together, or if a flood occurs and the villagers do not unite to build embankments, the entire village will be destroyed, and everyone will suffer. Similarly, it is the collective duty of all citizens whether Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi, or of any other community—to confront national crises together. Religious differences must not be a hindrance in our efforts. Everyone can remain firmly committed to their respective faiths while fulfilling their civic duties.” (Rozina, 1981, p. 693). Madani’s village-fire (and flood) analogy became one of the most frequently quoted illustrations of the JUH’s argument that Muslims and Hindus were bound by common territorial and civic interests rather than divided by faith. The metaphor was carefully chosen: it grounded the abstract concept of composite nationalism in the everyday experience of rural Indian life, making the case for inter-communal cooperation both theologically permissible and practically indispensable for national survival and independence. Beyond the formal ratification and Madani’s address, the Jaunpur session also served to mobilise the organisation’s provincial and local networks. Delegates were urged to disseminate the Azad Conference resolutions through mosques, madrasas, and public meetings, and to counter League propaganda that portrayed opposition to Pakistan as a betrayal of Muslim interests. In this way, the session reinforced the theological-political case for Hindu-Muslim unity while converting the Delhi conference’s momentum into sustained organisational activity. By explicitly endorsing the Azad Muslim Conference resolutions and reinforcing the doctrine of *muttahida qaumiyyat* at the highest level, the Jaunpur session of June 1940 solidified the JUH’s position as the leading organisational voice of Muslim composite nationalism in the critical years following the Lahore Resolution. It marked a decisive consolidation of the Jamiat’s anti-partition politics and set the ideological and organisational tone for its subsequent campaigns between 1940 and 1947.

The Lahore Session (March 20–22, 1942) and Rejection of Separate Electorates

At the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind’s annual conference held in Lahore from March 20 to 22, 1942, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, in his presidential address, categorically rejected the demand for Pakistan and reaffirmed the organization’s longstanding opposition to separate electorates. He argued that separate electorates were antithetical to national unity and democratic governance:

“Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind deliberated on this in several meetings and concluded that in a democratic and representative form of government, only joint electorates can establish a relationship of affection and unity among the public. Separate electorates will always lead to mutual disagreement and struggle, and even sedition and mischief, and cannot lead to any useful outcome. The Jamiat Ulema, in its Saharanpur formula, proposed accepting joint electorates while securing all means and conditions for the protection of Muslim rights”. (Rozina, 1981, p. 739)

The Simla Conference (1945) and the Muslim Nationalist Response

On June 14, 1945, Viceroy Lord Wavell announced the formation of a new interim Executive Council composed almost entirely of Indian members, as a step toward self-governance (Wolpert, 2013, pp. 242–245). The subsequent Simla Conference (June–July 1945) aimed to secure agreement on the council’s composition but foundered on Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s insistence that the Muslim League alone had the right to nominate all Muslim members. Jinnah refused to accept any plan allowing the Congress to nominate Muslim representatives.

To counter the League’s claim of being the sole spokesman for Indian Muslims, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind convened a conference of nationalist Muslim organisations in Delhi from September 17 to 19, 1945, at the residence of Sir Syed Wazir Hasan (former Chief Justice of Oudh) and Qazi Qadeeruddin Ahmad in Qasimjan Street. The invited organisations included:

All India Muslim Majlis
Majlis-e-Ahrar-ul-Islam
All India Momin Conference
Khudai Khidmatgar
Independent Party of Bihar
Krishak Praja Party
(Mian, 2005, p. 245)

The conference resolved to form a Joint Muslim Parliamentary Board to contest the forthcoming 1945–1946 elections under a unified nationalist banner, thereby challenging the League’s monopoly claim (Mian, 2005, p. 245). Although the Muslim League swept most urban Muslim seats and performed strongly in Bombay and Madras presidencies, it failed to form ministries with clear Muslim-majority support in Punjab, Sind, and Bengal without coalition partners or European votes. In the North-West Frontier Province and Assam, Congress-led ministries assumed office, and in Punjab a Congress–Unionist–Akali coalition took power.

Engagement with the Cabinet Mission (1946)

With the Congress and the Muslim League deadlocked over the future constitutional structure of India, the British government despatched the Cabinet Mission in March 1946 to negotiate the transfer of power and explore the possibility of a united India. The Mission, consisting of Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps, and A.V. Alexander, arrived in Delhi on 24 March 1946. As president of the newly formed All India Muslim Parliamentary Board (the organisational vehicle through which nationalist Muslim groups coordinated their political activity), Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani was invited to represent the views of those Muslims who rejected the two-nation theory and the demand for Pakistan. He was authorised to bring three companions: Khwaja Abdul Majid (All India Muslim Majlis), Sheikh Hisham-ud-Din (Majlis-e-Ahrar-ul-Islam), and Sheikh Zaheeruddin (All India Momin Conference). Hafiz Mohammad Ibrahim, a Congress minister in the United Provinces, served as interpreter. On 16 April 1946 the delegation met the Cabinet Mission for more than an hour and presented a detailed memorandum advocating a united, federal India with a strong emphasis on provincial autonomy and robust constitutional safeguards for religious and cultural minorities. The memorandum reflected the long-standing JUH position that Muslim interests could best be protected within a composite national framework rather than through territorial separation. It rejected the League's claim to be the sole representative of Indian Muslims and insisted that any constitutional settlement must preserve the territorial integrity of the country while guaranteeing minority rights. The Mission's plan, announced on 16 May 1946 (with a supplementary statement on 16 June concerning the interim government), rejected outright partition as impracticable on economic, administrative, and defence grounds. Instead it proposed a three-tier structure: a weak Union centre limited to foreign affairs, defence, and communications (with power to raise the necessary finances); compulsory grouping of provinces into three sections—Section A (Hindu-majority provinces of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces, and Orissa), Section B (Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, and Sind), and Section C (Bengal and Assam); and residual powers vested in the provinces. Provinces would first meet in their sections to frame constitutions for the groups, after which the Union Constituent Assembly would draft the federal constitution. The plan also provided for an interim government and a Constituent Assembly elected by provincial legislatures. Initially both the Congress and the Muslim League accepted the 16 May plan (the League on 6 June and the Congress later in June), raising genuine hopes that a united, federal India might still be achieved. The JUH and other nationalist Muslim organisations welcomed the rejection of sovereign Pakistan and the retention of an all-India Union, seeing it as consistent with the principles of composite nationalism they had defended since 1940. However, differences quickly emerged over the interpretation of “grouping” whether it was compulsory or optional and over the composition of the interim government. The League, interpreting the groupings as a stepping-stone toward Pakistan, withdrew its acceptance in late July 1946, reverted to its demand for a separate state, and called for “Direct Action” on 16 August 1946. The ensuing communal violence, beginning in Calcutta and spreading to other parts of the country, spiralled out of control. Members of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, true to their commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity, toured affected villages and towns in a desperate effort to restore peace, counteract inflammatory propaganda, and prevent further polarisation. Despite these efforts, the cycle of violence, mutual distrust, and political breakdown proved irreversible. The failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan marked the effective collapse of the last major attempt to preserve a united India and accelerated the momentum toward partition—an outcome the JUH had consistently opposed throughout the period 1940–1947.

Anti-Partition Efforts in the Sylhet Referendum (1947)

Sylhet was a Muslim-majority, Sylheti-speaking district in the Hindu-majority, Assamese-speaking province of Assam. The Congress-led Government of Assam believed that excising Sylhet would make the remaining province more linguistically and culturally homogeneous and therefore stronger. Under the Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947, the British announced a referendum to be held on 6–7 July 1947 to decide whether the district would remain with Assam (and thus with India) or be transferred to East Bengal (Pakistan). H.C. Stock was appointed Referendum Commissioner, and arrangements were made for voting across the district's subdivisions. The All-India Muslim League threw its full organisational weight behind the campaign for Pakistan. It dispatched thousands of volunteers, including Muslim National Guards from Bengal, and conducted an intense, well-funded propaganda drive centred on religious solidarity and the promise of an Islamic homeland. League leaders and supporters framed the referendum as a decisive test of Muslim loyalty to the two-nation theory. To counter the League, the Indian National Congress turned to the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind for assistance. A Jamiat contingent, including prominent leaders such as Maulana Mufti Nayim (Secretary of the All India Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind) and Maulana Shahid Mian Fakhri (President of the United Provinces Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind), was dispatched to campaign among Muslim voters for retention in India. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani himself directed his followers in Assam to oppose Sylhet's amalgamation with East Bengal and addressed meetings urging support for a united India on the basis of composite nationalism (*muttahidaqaumiyat*). The Jamiat's local network of maulvis, which had earlier secured significant Muslim support for Congress in the 1946 Assam elections, was mobilised for the referendum campaign. Despite their efforts, the Jamiat leaders found it difficult to present a clear and compelling distinction between their nationalist, territorial message and the League's emotive religious appeal in the eyes of ordinary Muslim voters. Local Jamiat organisers were outmatched by the League's superior organisation, resources, and relentless campaigning. The League identified the Jamiatis as their principal adversaries and targeted them accordingly. Working closely with Congress workers, the Jamiat emphasised Sylhet's syncretic religious and cultural heritage, invoking shared historical figures and the region's plural traditions. One of the most widely used slogans during the joint Congress–Jamiat campaign was: “O people of Sylhet Do not make the land of Chaitanya and Shah Jalal a part of Pakistan.” In the event, the referendum produced a clear majority in favour of joining Pakistan: 239,619 votes for East Bengal against 184,041 for remaining with Assam (a majority of approximately 55,578). Turnout was high (around 77 per cent of eligible voters). Most of Sylhet district was accordingly transferred to East Pakistan under the Indian Independence Act and the subsequent Radcliffe Award, although the Karimganj subdivision (and a few contiguous areas) was retained by India following representations to the Boundary Commission. The Sylhet referendum thus marked one of the final and most concrete expressions of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind's anti-

partition politics in 1947 an effort rooted in the doctrine of composite nationalism, yet ultimately overwhelmed by the League's religious mobilisation and the broader momentum of Partition.

Ideological Battle

The ideological foundation of the JUH's opposition rested on the concept of composite nationalism (*muttahida qaumiyyat*). In a detailed 1938 correspondence with Muhammad Iqbal, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani distinguished between *qaum* and *millat*. He explained that *qaum* referred to any human collectivity sharing a common homeland, territory, language, or social circumstances, irrespective of religion, whereas *millat* denoted a religious community united by faith and Sharī'ah. Muslims could therefore belong simultaneously to the Indian *qaum* and the Islamic *millat* without contradiction. In Madani's view, the modern world defined nations by territory and political boundaries rather than by religious identity alone. He cited countries such as England, where people of multiple religions and sects lived together as one nation, to demonstrate that territorial nationalism had become the dominant global norm. This conceptual framework enabled the JUH to argue that Indian Muslims were religiously distinct but politically part of a single Indian nation alongside Hindus, Sikhs, and others (Madani, 1938, pp. 44–47).

This theoretical position received institutional expression at the All India Azad Muslim Conference in April 1940, in which the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind played a leading role. The conference declared India to be a natural geographical and political whole—the common homeland of all its inhabitants—and asserted that every Muslim was an Indian from a national point of view. This directly contradicted the Muslim League's two-nation theory and Jinnah's claim that Hindus and Muslims belonged to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures.

To legitimize composite nationalism within an Islamic framework, the JUH drew on historical precedents from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Madani invoked the Charter of Madinah to show that Muslims and Jews had lived together as a single political community under a common administrative arrangement. He also referred to the Prophet's attachment to Makkah and the Treaty of Hudaibiyah to argue that love for one's homeland and peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims were fully compatible with Islamic teachings (Madani, 1938, pp. 61–69).

On the practical political level, the JUH contended that Pakistan would not serve Islamic interests because the Muslim League leadership had demonstrated little commitment to Islamic law—evidenced by its lack of support for the Shariat Application Act of 1937 and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 (Madani, 1990, p. 380). Far from creating an Islamic state, Pakistan would, in their view, become a secular and Westernised entity.

The JUH also rejected the League's "hostage theory." Maulana Abul Mahasin Muhammad Sajjad, General Secretary of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, argued in his booklet *Pakistan ki Cheestan aur Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind ka Wazeh Faisla* that no Muslim government could legitimately commit atrocities against its own peaceful non-Muslim citizens simply because Muslims were persecuted elsewhere. Such a policy violated Sharī'ah, which enjoined fairness and compassion toward non-Muslims, and lacked any precedent in Islamic history or international norms (as cited in Dhulipala, 2015, p. 286).

The JUH further warned that partition would abandon the majority of Indian Muslims—those living in minority provinces such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madras—to political vulnerability. It accused the British of promoting partition as a continuation of "divide and rule," citing statements by British officials and earlier proposals to divide India into Hindu and Muslim zones (Faruqi, 1959, pp. 111–115).

Regarding relations with Hindus, Madani emphasised centuries of shared social, economic, and political life. Complete separation was both impossible and undesirable (Madani, 1946, pp. 44–45). In his booklet *Hamara Hindustan aur Uske Fazail* (Our India and Its Virtues), he described the religious and historical significance of India, asserted Muslims' legitimate claim to the soil, and refuted extremist Hindu claims that Muslims were foreigners (Rasheed & Ahmad, 2019, p. 138).

In addition to processions, speeches, and pamphlets, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind waged an ideological campaign through numerous books and articles, including:

Hindu India aur Muslim India par Ek Ahem Tabsira

Muslim League ki 8 Muslim-kash Siyasi Ghaltiyan

Muslim League Kya Hai?

Muslim League aur Congress ki Mukhtasar Haqiqat aur Unke Fawaid aur Nuqsanat

Muttahida Qaumiyyat aur Islam

Pakistan ki Cheestan aur Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind

Jawaz-e-Shirkat-e-Congress aur Izala-e-Shubhatiya 'ni Majmu'a-e-Fatawa wa Irshadat.

Why Did the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind Fail to Prevent Partition?

The Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind (JUH) consistently opposed Partition between 1940 and 1947, but several political and structural factors limited its ability to influence the final outcome. The ulema of the Jamiat possessed a robust case against Pakistan, yet they largely failed to communicate it effectively to the Muslim masses—partly because they spoke and wrote primarily as scholars rather than as modern propagandists and lacked mastery of contemporary publicity techniques (Hardy, 1972, p. 245).

The growing dominance of the Muslim League was particularly important, but this was reinforced by its access

to political resources, support from influential landed groups, and the restricted nature of colonial representative institutions. The electoral system itself limited the extent to which popular Muslim opinion could be politically represented. Under the Government of India Act 1935, voting rights were subject to qualifications relating to property, taxation, tenancy, income, and education. This meant that large sections of the population had no direct electoral voice. The League was also able to build relationships with traditional power holders, including landlords and religious elites, giving it access to resources and local influence that organisations such as the JUH could not easily match.

The Second World War further changed the political balance. After the Congress leadership was imprisoned following the Quit India movement in 1942, the Muslim League had greater political space to organise and strengthen its position. British wartime policy also increasingly treated the League as an important political interlocutor. Contemporary British records noted that the imprisonment of Congress leaders gave non-Congress organisations greater freedom for political propaganda. This wartime advantage helped the League expand its organisational influence at precisely the time when its opponents were politically constrained. The JUH also faced a gap between **popular mobilisation and formal political representation**. Events such as the Azad Muslim Conference demonstrated that substantial Muslim opinion opposed Partition, but participation in such gatherings did not automatically translate into electoral or constitutional power. The problem was therefore not simply whether anti-Partition Muslims existed, but whether they possessed institutions through which their political preferences could effectively influence the colonial constitutional system.

Finally, the failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan removed one of the last possibilities for maintaining Indian unity through a constitutional compromise. The JUH's defeat therefore resulted not from the absence of Muslim opposition to Partition, but from the combination of League political dominance, unequal access to resources and institutions, restricted representation, wartime political conditions, and the collapse of constitutional alternatives.

Conclusion

From the Lahore Resolution of March 1940 to the partition of 1947, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind conducted a sustained, principled, and multifaceted campaign against the division of India. Grounded in the doctrine of composite nationalism (*muttahidaqaumiyat*), most systematically articulated by Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, the organisation insisted that nationhood was territorial rather than religious. Muslims and non-Muslims, it argued, had long shared a common homeland and could and must continue to do so as equal citizens of a single, independent India. This stance was demonstrated through successive organisational and political interventions. Within weeks of the Lahore Resolution, the JUH played a leading role in the All India Azad Muslim Conference held in Delhi in April 1940, a mass gathering of nationalist Muslim organisations that explicitly rejected any scheme dividing India into Hindu and Muslim states. The Jamiat promptly ratified the conference's resolutions at its own annual session in Jaunpur in June 1940, where Madani's presidential address, with its memorable village-fire analogy, reaffirmed the theological and civic case for Hindu-Muslim unity. Throughout the mid-1940s the organisation continued to mobilise against separatism by forming nationalist Muslim parliamentary boards, contesting League claims to sole representation, and engaging directly with the Cabinet Mission in 1946. As president of the All India Muslim Parliamentary Board, Madani led a delegation that presented a detailed memorandum advocating a united federal India with provincial autonomy and minority safeguards an intervention consistent with the Mission's eventual rejection of sovereign Pakistan in its May 1946 plan. Even in the final, most localised contest the Sylhet Referendum of July 1947 the JUH remained active. At the request of the Congress, senior Jamiat leaders including Maulana Mufti Nayim and Maulana Shahid Mian Fakhri campaigned among Muslim voters for Sylhet's retention in India, emphasising the district's syncretic cultural heritage and Madani's territorial conception of nationhood. Although the League's superior organisation and religious mobilisation secured a majority for Pakistan, the Jamiat's presence in Sylhet illustrated the consistency of its anti-partition politics down to the last months of British rule. Despite these efforts, the JUH was unable to prevent partition. The Muslim League's greater organisational resources, financial strength, and capacity to mobilise religious sentiment proved decisive in the polarised atmosphere of the 1940s. The failure, however, was not primarily one of ideas. The vision the Jamiat defended—a pluralistic, democratic India in which religious identity did not dictate political destiny—survived 1947 and found constitutional expression in the secular Republic of India proclaimed in 1950. The Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind's campaign against partition therefore constitutes one of the most significant yet still under-examined chapters of the freedom struggle. It demonstrates that the demand for Pakistan was vigorously contested by a substantial, theologically grounded section of the Indian ulema and the Muslim communities they influenced. The idea of India as a shared homeland of many faiths was not solely a Congress or Gandhian ideal; it was also deeply rooted in an influential tradition of Islamic scholarship and nationalist politics. In contemporary India, where questions of pluralism, minority rights, and national cohesion continue to resonate, the legacy of the Jamiat's resistance to the two-nation theory retains enduring historical and political relevance.

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