

An All White Commission: A Disastrous Psychological Misjudgement Or A Miscalculation

Key Words: *Statutory Commission, Conservatives, Labour Government, 'Go back Simon', Dominion Status, Black flags, Hartals, Dyarchy.*

ISSN 0975 1254 (PRINT)
ISSN 2249-9180 (ONLINE)
www.shodh.net

A Refereed Research Journal
And a complete Periodical dedicated to
Humanities & Social Science Research

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The appointment of Simon Commission (in 1927) was one of the most miscalculated moves by the British Government which infuriated Indians to no end. The Commission which was to decide upon the future of India did not have even a single Indian in it. When the non-cooperation movement lapsed and there was a lull in political activities the great political agitation against the commission gave direction to the Indian freedom movement. A common grievance n` the complete exclusion of Indians from the membership of the commission, which was to pronounce on India's fitness for self government brought together parties and politicians, who were really poles apart at that point of time.

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The appointment of Simon Commission was one of the most miscalculated moves by the British Government which infuriated Indians to no end. The Commission which was to decide upon the future of India did not have even a single Indian in it. When the non-cooperation movement lapsed and there was a lull in political activities the great political agitation against the commission gave direction to the Indian freedom movement. A common grievance n` the complete exclusion of Indians from the membership of the commission, which was to pronounce on India's fitness for self government brought together parties and politicians, who were really poles apart.

The historic announcement of Edwin Samuel Montague, the then Secretary of State for India¹ on August 20, 1917, in the House of Commons, stated that the policy of the British government was to associate Indians in every branch of the administration and to develop self governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India. It thus envisaged a gradual transfer of authority to Indian hands and a true Parliamentary government system in India. Subsequently, after rising the hopes of Indians, Montague-Chelmsford² scheme was worked out and was embodied in the act of 1919, which established a new constitution for India.

The act provided for "Dyarchy"³ in provinces and as far as Centre was concerned, in place of Viceroy's Legislative Council, a two chambered legislature n` the Legislative Assembly and Council of State, was provided. The latter was an entirely elected chamber, and was vested with the powers, mainly including freedom of speech and the voting of a large portion of the annual budget.⁴ The Indians found the scheme disappointing because the legislature still had virtually no control over the Governor-General and his executive council. All the rights given to the Legislature had so many restrictions that they lost their significance. Governor-General, and in provinces, Governors continued to enjoy their despotic powers, by overriding and restricting all the powers and rights of legislatures.

The scheme undoubtedly failed to fulfill the expectations of Indians. Consequently the INC met in a special session at Bombay in August, 1918, under the presidentship of Hasan Imam, condemned the reforms as unsatisfactory and demanded effective self

government instead.⁵ The 1919's Act was preceded by the Rowlatt Act and the martial law administration, and these were followed by the Non Cooperation movement. By the means of this movement Congress resolved to attain Swarajya by legitimate, peaceful and non violent means. The non-co-operation agitation was carried on intensively throughout the country. Boycott of councils, courts of law and schools and colleges- what was called the triple boycott-the picketing of liquor shops, the establishment of Panchayats and of national schools were the main planks of the Congress platform.

Unfortunately the Non Cooperation movement did not last long (February, 1922) and Gandhiji had to apply the reverse gear; the reason was the Chauri Chaura violence⁶, the Moplah outbreak in Malabar⁷ and the riots in Bombay on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales. A few weeks later, Gandhi was arrested and imprisoned.

However, the Muslims participated in the (Khilafat) Non Cooperation movement but there was a communal element in their political outlook. Consequently, as the Non Cooperation movement petered out and the people felt frustrated, communalism reared its ugly head.⁸

The reformed Constitution (of 1919's Act) came into operation on February 9, 1921 and the country was so much agog with the feelings of unrest and restlessness that every person who was an elected member of any legislative council was questioned, disliked and distrusted, while the few, who accepted office as ministers and members of executive councils, came in for special opprobrium.⁹

In accordance with the preamble of 1919's Government of India Act¹⁰, the parliament of England was vested with the power and responsibility of shaping India's political future, and the fate of India was left to be judged and decided by an outside authority and not by the Indians. Section 84-A of the 1919's Act provided that at the expiration of ten years from the institution of reforms, a Royal Commission should be sent out to India in order to report to parliament as to their progress and effects.¹¹ So the Commission was due in the year 1929 (ten years after the passing of the Act) to examine and report on the working of the Act and the development of the representative institutions in India with a view to determine what further action if any, should be taken to extend, modify or restrict the degree of responsible government than existing in India.

In the legislative Assembly and the Councils,

Swrajists exposed the hollowness of 1919's Act and made their position clear in their manifesto by announcing that they demanded the right for the people of India to control their own destiny. If they were refused, they would carry on the policy of uniform continuous and consistent obstruction, with the view of making the functioning of the government through the Legislative Assembly and Councils impossible.¹²

Swrajists, under the leadership of M.L. Nehru modified the old moderate demand for Royal Commission and said that India did not wish to have such a Commission to inquire into the fitness for further reforms as in their opinion, India was as fit as England. They rather demanded the summoning of a RTC in order to discuss and draw up the Indian Constitution, for full responsible government.

Obviously the Government was not going to pay heed to these kind of demands but instead it agreed to the appointment of the Reforms Enquiry Committee in 1924, presided over by Alexander Muddiman, consisting both British and Indian members¹³, with the task of enquiring into the difficulties of the working of the 1919's Act and to investigate the feasibility and desirability of securing remedies for such difficulties and defects consistent with the structure, policy and purpose of the Act.

The Committee had verbal and written evidence from past and present Indian ministers and Executive Councilors from all the provinces and published its report in 1925. The majority report held that the constitution gave valuable training in parliamentary government to the electorate but the minority (consisting of all Indians) report held that the constitution had failed and must be replaced by a constitution on a permanent basis.¹⁴ On July 7, 1925, Lord Birkenhead made an important statement in the House of Lords, in which he described the 1919's Act, as an extremely bold experiment, made in the atmosphere of post-war idealism.¹⁵ He denied that the new constitution had failed, on the other hand; it had never been given a chance.

In this way, at this stage by one way or another British Government reiterated repeatedly that the re-examination of the constitution could not take place, earlier than 1929. But Indians, on the other hand also kept on demanding for a RTC, to revise the constitution and for advancing the date of the commission to enquire and re-examine the working of 1919's Act.

But strangely in 1927, when the 1919's Act

had been in operation for just last eight years, and the statutory period as laid down in the Act, had not yet expired, due to the prevailing circumstances and political considerations (both in India and Britain), the British Conservative government headed by Stanley Baldwin accelerated the date and surprised the Indians by announcing the appointment of Statutory Commission, two years earlier i.e. in 1927.

Now the Question arises, that what prompted the Conservative Party, which had been so long refusing the same demand of Indians so sternly, to think of accelerating the appointment of the Commission before the scheduled time (i.e.1929). The elections in Britain were due in 1929 and there was growing probability that the new election would return the Labour Party to power. It was generally held in Britain that a Labour Government would be more sympathetic to Indian demands, and perhaps go further in conceding reforms, than would be compatible with the vested interests of Britain in India .It was therefore considered safer to appoint the Commission forthwith and thus forestall the Labour Government.¹⁶ So the Conservatives wanted to dispose of the Indian Question while in power and Indians were very well aware of these intentions.

Birkenhead wrote to Irwin: 'We must not run the slightest risk of the delay in selection so much that an election might interrupt our plans or even come soon enough to make it not wholly unreasonable to attempt some monkeying tricks without selection. It is of course, obvious that the mere anti dating of the Commission would deprive us of nothing valuable. We can play with the time as we want.'¹⁷

There was another factor which also hastened the appointment of Statutory Commission. The Swaraj Party was unhappy at the working of the reforms. It had expressed much criticism and dissatisfaction in this regard and had been pressing hard, time and again, for more and more autonomy in the provinces and responsibility at the centre. Therefore the purpose of the Conservative party was to utilize the appointment of the Statutory Commission as a bargain-counter and to disintegrate the Swaraj Party.¹⁸

Birkenhead was also very much concerned over the changing political trends both in England and India. According to Halifax, 'the legal minds of Birkenhead and Reading were outraged that anyone should speak about Dominion Status.'¹⁹

So, suddenly, on 8 November, 1927, the British Prime Minister (Stanley Baldwin) sprang a

surprise (and doubts also) upon the Indian public by announcing the decision of British Cabinet to constitute the Commission immediately .The announcement of the appointment of the Statutory Commission was made by the Secretary of State in England and the Viceroy, Irwin in India on the same day, i.e.8 November, 1927.

The personnel of the Commission were selected solely from British community without any Indian representative, although it was the future constitution of India which was to be subject of inquiry, discussion, and decision. This decision was bound to give offence to the patriotic sentiments of Indians as not a single Indian was found efficient enough, in the whole country who could be the part of it. Their total exclusion infuriated the Indians.

Lord Irwin was himself in favour of All-White Commission, suggested the British Government that the choice of the personnel ought to be confined the members of parliament only.²⁰ He argued, 'Such a course, too would have the advantage of affording the best defence that occurs to me for not putting Indians on the Commission.'²¹ The excuse given was that the framers of the Act of 1919 intended to confine its scope to only members of parliament. Even if the British government wanted to restrict the membership of the Commission to only the members of parliament, the availability of two prominent Indians in the parliament was the relevant answer: one was S.P. Sinha and the other was Shapurji Saklatwala. In fact, S.P.Sinha had been closely connected with the various stages of the constitutional reforms in India and his inclusion as a member of the Commission would have been of great consequence.²²

C.Y.Chintamani sounds the same, 'The Simon Seven were all Englishmen. It was not only that Indians Qua Indians were excluded, but the reasons given therefore were the most insulting. It was mere pretext that the Commission must consist of members of Parliament and therefore must necessarily be exclusively British, for at that time there were two Indians in Parliament...The stamp of inferiority was fixed on the brow of Indians merely because they were not God's own Englishmen.'²³

Birkenhead was of the view that, against the Commission, although, inevitably, there would be an outcry in certain Quarters, he did not believe that it would endure in the case, and ultimately the Commission should experience no difficulty on that account.²⁴

Birkenhead advanced another excuse (for the

exclusion of Indians from the Commission) and stated that there were numerous mutually hostile sections in India and it would not be feasible to choose Indians without offending them ,and, therefore it would be better to leave them altogether, and let British representatives decide these important matters for them .This rubbing-in of Indian internal divisions was felt to be scarcely less humiliating than the racial discrimination itself."²⁵

According to Lord Halifax, one of the dangers that the Secretary of State foresaw from a mixed Commission was that an 'unreal alliance' might be created between the Indian and the Labour representatives.²⁶ Obviously, Birkenhead and Irwin were in agreement on the point that there was no need of appointing Indians on the Commission as the advantages of having Indians were outweighed by the disadvantages.

It was also argued by the British, in the same regard, that if only two or three Indian members were taken, it would not in any sense, be considered as the representative body of true Indian opinion. It felt difficult to include members from multi-farious interests as such a Commission, it was feared, would become the body of very considerable size in which the prospects of an agreed report would be a difficult proposition. Moreover, Birkenhead had never desired that the Statutory Commission should recommend a great measure of advancement, for which he believed that India was entirely unprepared.²⁷

Justifying the non-inclusion of Indians in the Commission ,Baldwin ,in one of his speeches said, 'In including in the Commission not merely no Indian but no Englishman who have been associated hitherto with the Government or commerce of India ,our sole desire ,paradoxical as it may seem ,was to give the real, responsible and instructed opinion among Indians the best chance of playing an effective and constructive part in devising a solution."²⁸

However much the Secretary of State and the Viceroy underrated the psychological dangers of their course, they had not decided upon a Parliamentary Commission without long and anxious thought, and their reasons for doing so were, in strict logic, unassailable. Birkenhead had, for some time, kept an open mind on the subject of the personnel of the Commission, and unlike Irwin, had at first envisaged Indian participation in it. On 29 July 1926 he had written to the Viceroy: 'In the meantime I should be very glad to hear any suggestions you have in your mind as to the personnel on the Indian side. On ours

I am not bothering particularly, for there are so many people who would be suitable that the only difficulty will prove to be one of selection."²⁹

Viceroy's own advisors in India had been unanimous in thinking that a British Commission drawn from both Houses of Parliament would be the best method of gaining the sympathy of the Indian Liberals and causing them to exercise a moderating influence upon the more extreme policies of Congress. They also nourished the hope, sanguine as it proved in the event, that as the Moslems would in any case support the Commission, the fear of their thus gaining its sympathy would prevent any considerable attempt to boycott it by the Hindus, a miscalculation which was rightly described by S.Gopal as the first and greatest mistake of Lord Irwin's viceroyalty.³⁰

He was hell bent to convince Secretary of State and eventually succeeded in his aim, 'The Viceroy was anxious to carry the Secretary of State with him in the view that a Commission chosen from both Houses of British Parliament was the most suitable instrument for the task."³¹

Irwin, while making the announcement of the Commission in New Delhi, on 8th November, 1927, also tried to justify the composition of the Commission and said, 'It would be generally agreed that what is required is a Commission which would be unbiased and competent to present an accurate picture of facts to Parliament, but it must be found willing to take whatever action a study of these facts may indicate to be appropriate.' Further said, 'To fulfill the first requirement, it would follow that the Commission should be such as may approach its task with sympathy and a real desire to assist India to the utmost of its power, but with minds free from preconceived conclusions on either side. It's however open to doubt whether a Commission constituted so as to include a substantial portion of Indian members ,and, as rightly would ,British official members also, would satisfy the first condition of reaching conclusions unaffected by any process of 'a priori' reasoning. It might be felt that the desire ,natural and legitimate, of the Indian members to see India a self governing nation could hardly fail to colour their judgment of her present capacity to sustain the role."³²

There was another significant instance which caused anger, resentment and criticism of the people of India still magnified. The fact that the Labour Party of England had agreed³³ to serve on the Commission of this character gave to enlightened public opinion in India a grave shock indeed, because previously

Laborites were not in favour of all white Commission and infact some party members advocated for a mixed Commission in the Commons. B.C.Spoor said that there should be adequate representation on that commission of every shade of opinion in India.³⁴ Therefore Party"s participation in the Commission was very much disliked by the Indians.

Graham Pole, a prominent member of the Labour Party who paid a short visit to India, in a statement to the Associated Press, stated that Party's attitude was misunderstood in India. It was simply informed that the Conservative government had decided two points; first, that no Indian should be members of the Commission; and second, that no member of Parliament should be on the Commission who had already expressed themselves strongly either on one side or the other or who are directly concerned with the services or with the business affairs of India. He further clarified that Labour was asked to nominate two representatives who conformed to the requirements laid down by the British government. It had never been known to any political party in England to refuse to cooperate in a Royal Commission. The Labour party, therefore, decided to be represented on it to give weight to its point of view and also to see exactly that evidence was put before the Royal Commission and what weight was given to that evidence. Assuring the Indians, he stated that in the present Commission, his party had no axe to grind, and in nominating two of its members, it was actuated solely by a desire to help India and consider her interest sympathetically. He asked Indians to trust the two Labour members as 'straight and honest men'.³⁵

It is true that no one iQuestioned the honesty of the two Labour members, but it was difficult to say how they could give effect to their party"s professed policy in regard to India as member of this Commission as Labour members were only two out of seven, they could not exercise any of these powers unless they could win at least one other member over their side.It was evident that no serious opposition was encountered in the British parliament to the appointment of the Commission. The few voices of the members of opposition like those of Saklatwala and some of the Labour party members were lost amidst the general chorus of approval.

The British Prime Minister (Baldwin) in Britain and the Viceroy (Irwin) in India, eventually, after so much of discussions and preparations, on November 8, 1927, simultaneously, announced the

appointment of the Statutory Commission to 'bring fresh, unbiased, unaffected and impartial judgment to bear upon an immensely complex constitutional issue.'³⁶

While appointing the Commission, it was not feasible, to dictate to the Commission what procedure it should follow during its duration of investigation in India; but it was opined that its task in taking evidence would be greatly facilitated if it were to invite a Joint Select Committee of Central, chosen from its (elected and nominated) non-official members, to convey its views to the Commission in any manner decided upon by the latter (It was also suggested that a similar procedure should be adopted with the provincial Legislatures.) Further after the Commission had reported to His Majesty's government; and before the latter had laid its own proposals on the report before parliament, a full opportunity would be given for Indian opinion of different schools to give its views upon them .To this end it was intended to invite Parliament to refer these proposals to a Joint Committee of both houses and permit delegations from the Indian Central Legislature and any other bodies whom the Joint Parliamentary Committee might wish to consult, to attend and confer with the Joint Committee.³⁷

This procedure of consulting Indian opinion was thought to be effective and it was to assure Indians an opportunity to express themselves before the Commission and also before the Joint Select Committee Of parliament. But this did not evoke any enthusiasm among the organized parties in the country. Only the loyalists came forward to form committees to assist the Commission in acquiring essential information.

It was decided that the Commission should proceed to India early in next year i.e. 1928.The purpose of this preliminary tour was not so much the intention of taking evidence as for the members to gain some experience of the working of legislatures, local-government institutions, educational centres and any other public department which mainly concerned the problem they had been set to unravel and also to 'form in the mind's eye' a clear picture of Indian conditions with which they were asked to deal.³⁸

The following persons were appointed as members of the Statutory Commission.³⁹

1. Sir John Allsebrook Simon (Chairman)⁴⁰
2. Viscount Burnham⁴¹
3. Baron Strathcona⁴²

4. George Richard Lane-Fox⁴³
5. Edward Cecil George Cadagon⁴⁴
6. Vernon Hartshorn⁴⁵
7. Clement Richard Attlee⁴⁶

J.W.Bhore and S.F.Steward were appointed Secretaries of the Commission.⁴⁷

Lord Birkenhead on November 24, 1927, in House of Lords, paid glowing tribute to John Simon for making immense personal sacrifice and undertaking the difficult task in the spirit of public-service. He said he regarded the Commission as an exceptionally intelligent jury going to India with no preconceived prejudices and no other task except to return to England and give the honest result of their examination of Indian problems.⁴⁸ but according to Olivier, 'the list seemed to him likely to be disappointing to most Indians who would consider it not of a sufficient calibre.'⁴⁹

The composition of the Statutory Commission was one for the decision of parliament and His majesty's government, and its procedure was settled by the Commission itself.⁵⁰

John Simon said, 'The Commission does not go to India with any idea of imposing western ideas or constitutional reforms from without. We go to listen, learn and faithfully report our conclusions with regard to the actual condition and the varying proposals made from within. When the Commission has reported, the scheme must provide for that full and final consultation between the representatives of Legislature in India and Great British, which is essential condition to be fulfilled before reaching a decision on which so much depends.'⁵¹

Though Baldwin and Birkenhead in Britain and Irwin in India also made a lot of assurances for Indians regarding the Commission as they wanted Indians to welcome the Commission but India was not at all ready to accord welcome to such a Commission which was a real blow to the self respecting Indians. Consequently, a lot of agitation, criticism and anger were shown by the people of India soon after the announcement of the appointment of the Commission, infact, a new political upheaval broke out in the country. The whole procedure proposed by the government was condemned by Indian leaders from the extreme left to the extreme right and Government was to face a vigorous and widespread boycott movement against it.

'The Simon Commission was the premature child of Birkenhead's brain... The news of the Simon Commission astounded India. The Commission

would determine the fate of India, but it had no Indian member. Indians were being treated as 'natives'; the whites would come, look around, and decide the fate of the dumb, brown Asiatics. Are these the fruits of co-operation, the Gandhian non-co-operation scoffed? ... Congress was of course unanimous for boycott, and needed no promptings from Gandhi. Mr. Jinnah, of the revived Moslem League, also seemed inclined to join the boycott. Irwin, according to his biographer, 'did his utmost to bring Jinnah back into the fold and made a substantial offer to him'. But a rude speech by Birkenhead challenging Indians to produce 'an agreed scheme' of future government convinced Jinnah that the British were playing on Indian religious divisions and caused him to spurn the Viceroy's substantial offer". One touch of Birkenhead made all Indians non-cooperate."⁵²

Moderates and extremists, Swarajists and No-changers, Congressmen and some of the loyalists – all stood on the same platform to condemn and boycott the Commission, openly advised their countrymen to abstain from helping the Commission in any way. Meeting of protest were held in almost all the towns and cities, throughout the country. However with the exception of the European Association, the Anglo-Indian press and a small section of the Muslims, headed by Muhammad Shafi, in the Punjab⁵³, all shades of opinion merged in a common unanimity and the whole of India stood as one against the personnel and the proposed methods and procedure of the Commission.

At once all the Indian newspapers and all organized sections of Indian political opinion rallied to the attack. Gone with the vengeance was the prolonged indifference now, and in Indian political circles all was eager activity, strenuous canvassing of India's claims to representation on the body which was to play such a large part in shaping her political future, and indignant assertion that India could produce men of calibre and impartiality to match any which could be found in England.⁵⁴

Obviously, interviews, letters and reports of protest meetings advocating complete boycott of the Simon Commission poured in ceaselessly. The intentions of the Conservative party were strongly suspected and questioned for adopting rushing tactics in Indian affairs and the common feeling was there that the future constitution of India should be framed by the people themselves.

M.A.Aansari, president of INC (1927) advised the Viceroy to convene a Round Table Conference

(RTC) instead, between the British and Indian representatives to make a decision for the future constitution of India.⁵⁵ The Congress (Madras session i.e. forty-second session, December, 1927) resolved that the only self respecting course for India to adopt was to boycott the Commission at every stage and in every form (particularly, to hold mass demonstrations during its visits, to organize propaganda with the aim of persuading the Indians of all shades of public opinion to boycott the Commission). It also called upon non official members of the Indian Legislatures and leaders of political parties and communities of India and all others not to give evidence before the Commission nor cooperate with it in any manner, public or private, nor vote for it and nor attend or participate in any social functions given to them. The Congress also authorized the working Committee to confer with and secure the cooperation, whenever possible, of other organizations and parties with a view to make the boycott effective and complete.⁵⁶

Maulana Azad, who also attended the Madras session of the INC, thanked God for sending the Simon Commission because it had made Indians realize that they could no longer place trust in the British government, but in themselves, the Hindu in the Muslim and the Muslim in the Hindu.⁵⁷

Mahatma Gandhi opposed the appointment of the Simon Commission and opined that in this matter he had surrendered his conscience to the president of the Indian National Congress and through him to the Congress. He suggested, 'If a general, and dignified uncamouflaged boycott was brought about, it would be an effective answer to the extraordinary step taken by the British government. I have no opinion in the matter except that of the leader of the Congress.'⁵⁸

The old Liberal or Moderate school of Indian politicians, led by Tej Bahadur Sapru, attacked the announcement of the Commission and held the exclusion of Indians from it as an insult to India's self-respect. He emphatically declared that he had no confidence in Lord Birkenhead or the India Office, and asked his fellow liberals not to have any such confidence.⁵⁹ In the biography of Halifax, Birkenhead confirms that it was a painful moment for the Viceroy of India, when Tej Bahadur Sapru decided to boycott the Simon Commission.⁶⁰

A conference of all parties was convened by Annie Besant in Madras to discuss the issue. The meeting included prominent Indians like S.Srinivasa Iyengar, T.B.Sapru, A.Rangaswami Iyenger, M.Abdul Hameed Khan and a number of other members of

the Legislative Council.⁶¹ All agreed to a common resolution to boycott the Simon Commission.

M.A.Jinnah, the leader of Muslim League also expressed his adherence to the boycott and said that no self-respecting and accredited representative of India would associate himself with or serve on the commission, unless invited on absolutely equal terms and with equal rights.⁶² Besides, at a protest gathering, represented by prominent Indians like Chimanlal Setalvad, M.R.Jayakar, Sarojini Naidu and H.P.Mody, where all of them condemned the Commission, Jinnah lashed out that it was not a Question of having a few Indians on the Commission, but it was a Question of how far Indians were prepared to stand together and how much they would sacrifice for their honour. He felt confident that whatever might be the differences among themselves, the Hindus and Muslims would not accept a proposal which was an affront and insult to India.⁶³

The Working Committee of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, met at Banaras under the presidentship of B.S.Moonje also adopted a resolution urging the boycott of the Commission.⁶⁴

However the prominent Muslim leaders of the Punjab assembled at Lahore under the leadership of Muhammad Shafi who advised the Muslims of India not to be misled by the ideas of false sentiment, but to follow the dictates of reason and common sense. He reminded them not to talk of boycott of Simon Commission which would be impracticable and would produce bad effects in England so the Musalmans should in no circumstances boycott the Commission but should take the fullest advantage of it in every conceivable manner. In this regard he got immediate support from the prominent Muslims of Punjab. So they decided to support the Commission.

Similarly the non-official Europeans under C.B.Charters, President, European Association, in Madras, welcomed the appointment of the purely Parliamentary Commission on the ground that such a Commission would tackle the problem without preconceived ideas, and would not only ask for but would also follow Indian and British advice.⁶⁵

With the passage of time, Indian opinion-nationalist and liberal alike-hardened more and more against the Commission. The Indian press featured commentary and interviews from all over India counselling its boycott. The Hindu⁶⁶ critically held the Commission as an insult to India. The Bandematram⁶⁷ hailed the Commission as offering an opportunity to Indians to show to the world that

the British government in India was based on might. It called upon Indians to be on their guard against the British tactics of putting one community against the other. The Milap,⁶⁸ a vernacular newspaper from Lahore, regarded the advisory Committees of legislatures as merely 'unpaid clerks appointed to lighten the burden of the Commission, with a view to throw dust into the eyes of the world. The Leader⁶⁹ of Allahabad regarded the Commission as being insult and injury to India, and a calculated affront to the Indian opinion, intelligence and self-respect. The Bombay Chronicle,⁷⁰ under caption, 'Boycott it' said that the Commission was indefensible, unjust and humiliating. The Amrita Bazar Patrika⁷¹ commented that the government wanted to take full advantage of the unfortunate situation in India to impose a constitution of its liking, regardless of Indian public opinion. The Indian National Herald⁷² stated that the British Cabinet had risen to the full length of Imperialist arrogance by appointing such a commission. Under the caption 'Boycott the New Sham' the Rangoon Mail⁷³ argued that the Indian nationalism in the council and in assembly was on its trial and it must reject the select Committee proposal. The Kesari⁷⁴ wrote that instead of unitedly uttering the word boycott, all should join hands to raise the banner of self-government, casting aside all considerations of self and communities.

J.L.Nehru, on his arrival from Colombo, on December 22, 1927, in a statement accused Labour party for adopting the fully imperialist attitude of Conservatives, and the members of the party like MacDonald and Lansbury, for talking and doing nothing. He lashed out at them as being fond of only giving advices to the Indians.⁷⁵

S.P.Sinha expressed his views that India would lose nothing by boycotting the Commission and no reforms, however, generous, would have a reasonable chance of success if they were ushered in after a spirit of general ill-will and feeling of utter mistrust that was being created.⁷⁶

M.L.Nehru in an interview stated that if Indians had agreed to the proposal like that, they would have to give away the principle of self-determination which they had been claiming all along. He wished all parties would concentrate on the framing of the constitution which the country needed.⁷⁷ Under instructions from the president and Secretary of INC, he wrote to the members of the Labour party in the House of Commons outlining the views of the Congress party in the central assembly

as regard the Commission and expressing surprise at the official cooperation of Labour party to the Commission and termed it as an insult to India which could only widen the breach already existing between the two countries.⁷⁸ He also asked Lansbury to consider the admissibility of withdrawing Labour members from the Commission.⁷⁹

The All- India Muslim League under the presidentship of Maulvi Muhammed Yakub who was also the Deputy President of Legislative Assembly, met in Calcutta on the 30th December, 1927.⁸⁰ It moved the resolution of boycott of the Commission, and called upon the Muslims of India not to have anything to do with it in any form and at any stage. Its subjects committee unanimously resolved disaffiliating the Punjab League and censuring Mohammed Shafi.⁸⁰

At the invitation of M.A.Ansari, a conference of the prominent representatives of various political parties was held at Banaras on January 15, 1928. It resolved that the Commission must be left severely alone by the people of India and appealed to the People to observe hartal all over India on February 3rd, the day Commission landed at Bombay and to hold public meetings all over India. The conference also resolved to have nothing to do with the Commission in any form at any stage of its work. It called upon all elected members of the Council of State, Legislative Assembly and Legislative Councils to do everything that lies in their power to oppose and prevent formation of a committee of the Legislature in connection with the said Commission.⁸¹

The Central Legislative Assembly of India also debated the issue on February 16, 1928. Lala Lajpat Rai stated that he had no faith in the bona fides of the Government or of the people who had appointed the Commission. He was of firm opinion that the problem of India was not for Commissions, it must be tackled by the representative men, both from England and India in a spirit of conciliation and negotiation. He moved a resolution that 'the present constitution and scheme of the Statutory Commission are wholly unacceptable to this House and that this House will, therefore, have nothing to do with the Commission at any stage and in any form.⁸² For his opinion he was supported by the leaders like M.A.Jinnah, S.Srinivasa Iyengar and M.L.Nehru, who also leveled trenchant criticism against the British government's stand and policy. When the motion was put to vote, it was adopted and won by a majority of seven votes, viz. 66 in favour and 59 against the motion.⁸³

'The historic defeat inflicted on the government

by the combined forces of popular parties was more remarkable because fourteen elected Muslim members were against the Statutory Commission, and only twelve voted with the government, thus giving a 'crushing' reply to Lord Birkenhead who had pictured millions of Muslims going on their knees before the Commission.⁸⁴

By the end of January 1928, the spectrum of Indian politics had almost arranged itself. It appeared that the Tory Government miscalculated the forces at work in India. One touch of Birkenhead made all India non-cooperate. 'Go back Simon,' this slogan was to ring in to Commissioners' ears throughout their stay in India.⁸⁵

The Tribune dated October 2, 1927 commented, 'It would indeed be a sheer waste of time and effort to send out such a commission to India. Political India would not touch the report of such a commission with a pair of tongs. The only effect of the appointment of such a commission would indeed be to further aggravate the already grave situation in India and to immensely strengthen the forces of discontent, dissatisfaction and resistance.'⁸⁶

All political conferences and meetings throughout the country condemned the Commission. All provincial conferences (Jan-June 1928)-Bengal, Punjab, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala advocated boycott and shammed it. Boycott resolutions were moved in Assam, C.P., U.P., Madras and Bengal Councils against Simon Commission and it was extensively debated in Madras, Punjab and Burma legislative councils.⁸⁷

Not only in India but the matter created furor abroad also. 'The hostility shown to the Royal Commission, and the attempts of a section of politicians to secure the boycott of Sir John Simon and his colleagues, aroused widespread attention abroad, and, in England, many people who had hitherto taken little or no interest in Indian affairs began to realize that a situation of some gravity had arisen.'⁸⁸

The Commission arrived in India in two phases. In the first phase it landed in Bombay on February 3, 1928 and went back on March 29, 1928; in the second phase it arrived at Bombay on October 11, 1928 and returned back to England on April 13, 1929. The first visit was to take a preliminary survey of the Indian problems. In this visit its main task was to examine the papers which the Government of India had prepared on the various aspects of the system of government in India. At the same time the

Commission made efforts to explain its own task and the manner in which it proposed to discharge it. This was necessitated by what it considered to be the misunderstanding on which Indian opposition was based.

After spending the summer months in England it returned to India on October 11 and undertook a long tour of the country to record the evidence of those associations, individuals and officers of the provincial governments which came to urge their views or offer explanation on the point that arose out of the written memoranda.⁸⁹

To perform its preliminary visit in the atmosphere, charged with excitement and agitation, when the Statutory Commission, headed by John Simon landed in Bombay on February 3, 1928, it was greeted with countrywide hartals and demonstrations. In every province, and at all important places, public meetings were held to condemn the appointment of the Commission, to express complete want of confidence in it, and to declare India's solemn and unalterable resolve to have nothing to do with it in any form or at any stage.⁹⁰

On February 11, 1928 Gandhi congratulated the organizers for great success they achieved on the hartal day. During this first phase Commission visited Calcutta took a southern tour (Bezwada, Guntur, Madras, Tanjore, Madurai etc.) then the places like Lahore and Peshawar. 'India was in turmoil. From February 3, 1928, when the Simon Commission landed at Bombay, India boycotted it. Gandhi's boycott was so complete that he never mentioned the commission. For him, it did not exist. But others demonstrated against it.'⁹¹

Never since the agitation against the Rowlatt Bill has been such complete unanimity of the opinion in the country and among men of all communities and all shades of political views in the respect of any matter of outstanding importance.⁹²

Between the first departure for England of the Simon Commission in April and its second visit to India in October 1928, the most significant and constitutional episode in the national sphere was the appointment of the Nehru Committee.⁹³ It was appointed by the All-Parties' Conference in Bombay in order to consider and determine the principles of the constitution of India. It recommended that, 'India shall have the same constitutional status in the comity of nations known as the British empire, as the Dominion of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Dominion of New Zealand, the

Union of South Africa and the Irish Free State, with a parliament having powers to make laws for the peace, order and good government of India, and an executive responsible to that Parliament, and shall be styled and known as the Commonwealth of India.⁹⁴ Thus it framed its constitution on the basis of Dominion Status. Besides it made an effort to reconcile the various conflicting communal claims and also to find a balance between the radicalism of the INC and the conservatism of the Indian liberals. The communal politicians however still opposed the Nehru Committee report, which failed to completely fulfill their demands.

In its second phase of visits Commission reached Bombay on October 11, 1928, was received by the elite of the town and simultaneously by a large number of demonstrators with black flags and shouts of "Simon go back". Simon told the representative of the Times of India, "Tell India we are return fully conscious of the gravity of our task. We hope that our work will prove to be not only of value of India, but of value to the world."⁹⁵

The special train brought the members to Poona, the first place of their official halt, on October 12. The city observed complete hartal and demonstrations took place with black flags and cries of "Simon go back", and "India does not want you." Public meetings were held, condemning it.⁹⁶

From Poona it left for Lahore on October 28, and arrived on October 30, 1928, where during a peaceful procession, "some police officials used their lathis on the first row of the procession, which included Lalaji (Lala Lajpat Rai, who was leading the procession). One of them struck him hard in the chest, which proved fatal after a few days."⁹⁷

After Lahore on November 11, Commission reached Karachi, where also like other places it faced demonstrations. Peshawar, where it reached on November 17, also presented the same scene.

Meanwhile, the sad news of Lala Lajpat Rai's death (on 17th November, 1928) gained currency like wild fire in the Indian press. In fact, he could not recover from the severe hits of the police lathi-charge on him. Hartal was observed all over the Punjab and Delhi as a mark of respect to the fearless soldier of freedom. Prominent leaders expressed their utter grief and sorrow at his untimely demise, including Gandhi, M.L.Nehru, J.L.Nehru, Jinnah, T.B.Sapru, C.Y.Chintamani, S.C.Bose and many more.⁹⁹ All praised Lalaji's courage, sacrifice, forbearance, nobility, heroism and patriotism, and condemned

severely the police assaults.

Throughout Country and in Britain also the repressive policies of Conservative Government in India were vigorously condemned. This unfortunate incident really further ignited the feelings of the Indians against the Simon Commission and added fuel to fire.

Meanwhile the Commission arrived at Delhi on November 21, where also it had to face huge protest movement and general hartal.

On November 28, 1928, Commission arrived U.P. (Uttar Pradesh, at that time was known as United Provinces) and stayed there till 11 December, 1928. In U.P. it visited Agra (November 28), Lucknow (November 30 and again on December 5) and Kanpur (December 3). Like other places, here also it faced the demonstrations of same intensity as were in Lahore. J.L.Nehru and G.B.Pant⁹⁹ faced the lathi charge in the historic city of Lucknow, while leading processions.

Jawahrlal Nehru who towards the end of 1926 was in Berlin and was set to attend the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities as the representative of Indian Congress, to be held at Brussels in February 1927. As the outcome of this Congress a permanent organization was formed- the League Against Imperialism. After attending the same Nehru along with his father, M.L.Nehru travelled Europe and later in November paid a brief visit to Moscow during the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Soviet. He was actually in Moscow when the announcement about the Simon Commission was first made. Eager to attend the next Congress session which was going to be held in Madras at Christmas-time, Nehru decided to cut short his abroad visit and came back to India.¹⁰⁰

After U.P., Commission visited Patna, Assam, Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras and Nagpur and the tour ended at Delhi. Wherever it went, was boycotted everywhere and was greeted with black flags, hartals and the cry of 'Simon go Back.' '..... and thus vast numbers of Indian masses became acquainted not only with Sir John Simon's name but with two words of the English language, the only two they knew. These words must have become a hated obsession for the members of the Commission. The story is related that once, when they were staying at the Western Hotel in New Delhi, the refrain seemed to come to them in the night out of the darkness. They were greatly irritated at being perused in this way, even at night. As a matter of fact, the noise that disturbed them came from jackals that infest the waste places of the

imperial capital."¹⁰¹

Mr. S.Srinivasa Iyer, Congress President received a letter from Mr. C.B.Clarke, ex-Chairman, British Congress Committee and Mr. A.Fenner Brockway, Political Secretary, Independent Labour Party, 'The united attitude of Indian leaders has made a deep impression here. The need for unity was never greater in history of the National movement. We extend to India our sympathy, admiration and goodwill.'¹⁰²

On its tour at the places where it stopped to take evidence and examine witnesses, the Commission sat with the Central Committee and the Provincial Committee appointed by the council of province. In England it was joined by the Central Committee (19th June to 30th July) for deliberations and exchange of views. According to the procedure laid down, the reports of the Central Committee of the Indian Central Legislature and of the Statutory Commission were separately written and submitted to Parliament.¹⁰³

The massive boycott movement which stormed the whole India was beyond the expectations of British and Indian Governments, they never apprehended this much boycott, however they were expecting oppositions but only from certain sections of India, 'The Viceroy's advisers seem to have believed in a rather wishful manner, that if Hindus were critical the Moslems would support the Commission, and that the fear of the Moslems securing the benefits of the Commissioners sympathy would prevent any large scale attempt of boycott by the Hindus.'¹⁰⁴

This was the first and greatest mistake of Irwin's Viceroyalty, and the fact that he had agreed to a colourless, and exclusively British Commission showed that he had as yet gained no insight into the minds of Indian people.¹⁰⁵

'No single step could have been better calculated to drive deep the rift between Government and the ruled.'¹⁰⁶

Irwin, who sternly advocated the All-White Commission, in a letter dated May, 26, 1927 to Birkenhead assured that he would be able 'to break the boycott of 'the Hindu Congress' with the help of the Muslims, the Liberals and the Indian states.'¹⁰⁷ Writing 30 years later, Irwin admitted that the total exclusion of Indians 'from the Commission by keeping its membership to the two Houses of the British Parliament was the object of sharp criticism and in the light of the events that followed appeared to have been a mistake'.¹⁰⁸ The decision proved to be a

disastrous psychological misjudgment. The Viceroy and the India Office were aware that their decision would not be popular, but they had not realized how tender were the susceptibilities on which they had so heavily pressed.

Irwin soon became aware how mistaken his advisers had been in assuming that because the Moslems co-operated with the Commission the Hindus would not dare to boycott it, and that the Liberals would be on the side of constitutional progress. Instead a movement sprang up throughout India to deny all help to the Simon Commission in its enquiries.¹⁰⁹

The Commission became one of the greatest examples of racial discrimination which at that point of time was definitely the worst thing to happen as countrymen had already tolerated enough of it and were not any more ready to take the idea.

Indeed the decision to appoint a 'White' Commission proved to be a disastrous psychological misjudgment.¹¹⁰

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- Under this system some subjects, such as finance and, law and order were called 'reserved' subjects and remained under the control of the Governor and his Councilors and other subjects such as education, public health, local self government. Agriculture and Fisheries were called 'Transferred' subjects and were to be controlled by Governor and ministers (responsible to legislatures).
- Expenditure on defence and foreign departments was excluded from its purview.
- Some of the veteran Congress leaders led by Surendranath Bannerjea were in favour of accepting the government proposals. They left the Congress at this time and formed the 'Indian Liberal Federation'. They came to be known as 'Liberals'.
- which resulted in the loss of the lives of a few policemen.
- Moplahs, or Muslim peasants, created a powerful anti-zamindar movement, in Malabar (Northern Kerala).
- The communal elements took advantage of the situation to propagate their views and after 1923 the country was repeatedly plunged into communal riots. The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, which was founded in December 1927, once again became active. The result was the growing feeling that all the people were Indians first, received a set back. Even the Swaraj Party, which was formed in 1923, was split by communalism. 'Responsivists' including Malviya and Lala Lajpat Rai, accused M.L.Nehru of letting down Hindus by being Anti-Hindu.
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दृष्टिकोण से उपन्यास में प्रस्तुत किया गया है। उक्त उपन्यास में लेखिका का स्त्रीवादी विमर्श पूर्ण सक्षमता से प्रस्तुत हुआ है। कथा लेखिका का यह प्रयास महिला सशक्तिकरण की मुहिम को ताकत देता है। शायद इससे बड़ी राष्ट्रसेवा एक साहित्यकार के द्वारा नहीं हो सकती।

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Thus we can conclude that ancient Indian wisdom is just like a sun in the sky which is shining from eras and universal truth because it is the only source of light which is showing path of development to modern medical science.

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