

Reactions of Congress and Muslim League (1909–1916)

Background:

After the Morley–Minto Reforms of 1909, both the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League reacted strongly but differently. The Congress represented the broader Indian nationalist movement, while the Muslim League represented the political interests of Muslims. These reactions revealed the early signs of division in Indian politics, which the British cleverly encouraged through their “Divide and Rule” policy.

Congress Reaction:

The Indian National Congress had mixed feelings about the reforms. The moderate leaders, such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, appreciated them as a small but positive beginning because they allowed some Indian representation in councils. However, the extremist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak rejected the reforms, saying they offered no real power. Congress was especially unhappy with the **separate electorates for Muslims**, believing this policy would divide Indians and harm the unity needed for independence. The Congress continued to demand more self-government and full Indian control over administration.

Muslim League Reaction:

The All India Muslim League, founded in 1906, welcomed the Morley–Minto Reforms. The introduction of **separate electorates** gave Muslims the right to elect their own representatives. This was seen as a political victory for Muslim leaders like Aga Khan, who felt it recognized Muslims as a distinct political community. Many Muslims trusted the British government more after these reforms and believed their interests would be safe under British protection. However, this also created a political gap between Hindus and Muslims, which later affected India’s unity.

British Strategy and Political Division:

The British government achieved its goal through these reforms — to divide Indian politics. By treating Hindus and Muslims separately, the British reduced the influence of the Congress and prevented united action against colonial rule. Hindus began to mistrust Muslims for cooperating with the British, while Muslims felt safer supporting the government. This “Divide and Rule” strategy became one of the most powerful tools of British control in India.

Consequences and Importance:

The different reactions of the Congress and the Muslim League had long-term effects. The Congress learned that unity was essential for the success of the independence struggle. The Muslim League gained strength and recognition as the political representative of Muslims. Both groups, however, realized the importance of cooperation, which later led to the **Lucknow Pact of 1916**, where both agreed to work together. The reactions to these reforms marked an important turning point in India’s political development and the relationship between Hindus and Muslims.

