

## **Cripps Mission: A Negotiatory Effort**

**Attia Batool**

*Lecture*  
*Department of History*  
*Postgraduate College for Women, Sargodha*

**Zafar Mohyuddin**

*Assistant Professor*  
*Department of History and Pakistan Studies*  
*University of Sargodha*

### **Abstract**

*During the 1940s, a new phase of negotiatory politics began in India. This phase is regarded as a new phase owing to the considerable alteration in the policies of the two major stakeholders that were entirely contrasting to the previous. Many efforts were made for the settlement of the Indian communal issue. Some of those efforts were between the British government and Indians, while the others were among the Indians themselves. Cripps Mission was one of the negotiatory efforts by the British authorities. To lead this Mission, a politician named Sir Stafford Cripps, who was known for his pro-Congress behavior and well aware of Indian political issues, was chosen as a suitable person. He came to India with his drafted formula. In that formula, an attempt was made to fulfil the basic demands of both the major political stakeholders, i.e. All India National Congress and the Muslim League, though their demands were contrasting to each other. This formula could not succeed in getting acceptance by major political stakeholders. Both the main political parties rejected it for different reasons. This paper attempts to highlight the nature and importance of the Cripps Mission containing the substances of two contradictory demands and also analyses the causes of its failure.*

**Keywords:** British Government, All India National Congress, Muslim League, Cripps Mission Plan, Viceroy, Political stakeholders

## **Introduction**

The Britishers introduced a new system of government in India that was based on democratic principles. The new governmental system was very complex for a heterogeneous country like India. That's why to satisfy the different communal groups; there was a realisation of the dire need for a communal settlement. For this purpose, many attempts were made by Indians themselves, but they could not succeed to come to an agreement. Initially, British government had taken some measures to safeguard minorities by granting them some constitutional guarantees. But the circumstances changed after the outbreak of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The negotiatory phase after the outbreak of war is very significant owing to the considerable alteration in the policies of the two major stakeholders that were entirely contrasting to the previous. During the 1940s, the stance of Congress was that it had the representation of all of India, while Muslim League in the same period claimed to be the sole representative of all Muslims living in India; both of these stances were contradictory to each other. Muslim League adopted the "Lahore Resolution" for the establishment of a separate homeland for Indian Muslims. Before that, its objective was to get reasonable representation for Muslims in the cadres of government. That's why the "Lahore Resolution" was regarded as the turning point of communal conflicts and the policy shift of the Muslim League. While on the other hand, Congress also altered its policy from securing a share in power to demanding "Quit India." During that phase, numerous negotiatory efforts were also made by the British government for the resolution of the Indian issue, one of those efforts was the "Cripps Mission."

### **Cripps Mission: Unfolding of the Negotiatory Phase**

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, "Cripps Mission" was sent to India by British authorities for the resolution of the Indian reservations. Besides that, there were many other causes which forced the British government to Indian settlement, such as:

- International pressure on Britain
- Attempt to pacify Indians.

- Gaining Indians' support for war efforts.<sup>1</sup>

Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, after consultation about the situation of war and the Indian issues, announced that the War Cabinet had decided to send its member to India for the sake of satisfaction by means of personal consultation. The proposed name of the above-mentioned member was Sir Stafford Cripps.<sup>2</sup> He was a member of the British House of Commons, having an awareness of Indian politics and close relations with Gandhi and Nehru. Once, he was titled as “British Nehru.”<sup>3</sup> He served as an ambassador in Moscow. After his arrival in the homeland, the first discussion he had with the Prime Minister was about the Indian political situation, illustrating his concern about India. After assuming charge as a member of the War Cabinet, Churchill asked him to make a plan about India in accordance with his own ideas. His deep concern about Indian politics and his good ties with Congress persuaded the British government to recommend him for talks with the Indian leaders for the resolution of the Indian political issues.<sup>4</sup> He came to India along with a drafted proposal to negotiate with the Indians.<sup>5</sup>

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps reached India and started discussing his Plan with the Indian leadership. Its major points were as followed:-

- The formation of the Indian union to be transformed into a “dominion”. It would have relations with the other dominions and the United Kingdom on the equal footings.
- A constituent assembly was to be formed right away after the end of the war, partially elected by the legislative assembly of provinces to be nominated on a proportional basis. The representation was partially nominated by the princes in accordance with the population of their states for framing the new constitution for India.
- Option for every Indian province or state either to stay outside or to move on the present grounds or to frame a new constitution as a separate dominion.
- The agreement between the British and the constituent assembly about the security of racial and religious

minorities in compliance with the undertakings provided by His Majesty Government.

- Provision of advisory cooperation by the British to the Indian representatives.<sup>6</sup>

Above mentioned Plan can be regarded as a “balanced document.” On one side, dominion status was promised for Indian Union, and on the other side, Indian provinces had the option to withdraw from Indian Union. In such a manner, it made an attempt to appease the Muslim League. In addition, adequate measures were recommended for the protection of the rights of various communal groups.

After announcing his Plan, Cripps interpreted it and stated that the British government and the British people had an aspiration for the Indians to have full self-rule with a constitution as the British and the other nations of Common Wealth. He also stated that the British government had given Indians adequate time and opportunities for their internal settlement about the formulation of a new constitution for self-ruling India. Owing to the absence of such a settlement, the British government had been castigated for delaying Indian freedom. Indian independence was in Indian hands. The decision that the Indian government must have a productive share in the Defense Council had also been taken about maintaining the position of the Commander in Chief as a member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council. It was intended to give Indians a productive representation in the central control strategy. H.M.G also asked Indians to send their representative in the War Cabinet.<sup>7</sup>

In the whole declaration announced by Cripps, there was no reference to discuss the Plan with the Viceroy. Subsequent events disclosed the existence of substantial differences between Cripps and the Viceroy. The Labour Party’s leader Mr. Attlee and Cripps have been critics of the Viceroy. A question was raised about the authority of Cripps in India. Directions were given to Viceroy relating to his power, but he later stated that he was never briefed about the directions given to him by the War Cabinet.<sup>8</sup> Differences between the Viceroy and Cripps indicate

that the clash among the British officials damaged the Cripps Mission and created a barrier to its successful accomplishment.

Apart from the differences between Cripps and Viceroy, Labour Party itself had no clear view of the Cripps Mission. On 30<sup>th</sup> March, Arthur Greenwood, Deputy Leader of the Party, in a statement, welcomed the Plan and urged the Indians to approve it. Later on, in its yearly conference, some delegates opted to castigate the Plan; others were of the view that Nehru should be invited to establish a national government. A unanimous resolution was passed, asking the British government and the Indians to make another effort for settlement.<sup>9</sup> This behavior of a major British political party reveals that some British politicians haven't had the realisation of the Indian communal disputes. They were under the influence of the Congress's propaganda to a large extent, that's why they were of the view that power should be handed over to Congress without any prior agreement with the Muslim League.

Following the declaration and interpretation of his proposal, Cripps initiated meetings with Indian leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Gandhi. Gandhi castigated the autocratic princely states under British protection and invitation to the Muslims to secede from Indian Union. Cripps responded to him that the British authorities had the target to establish a free union of India. It would become an initiative of a democratisation movement in the princely states, persuading them to join the union of India. About the later point, he emphasised that the secession would materialise only in the absence of settlement in the constituent assembly.<sup>10</sup>

In the Congress Working Committee, there was a powerful faction led by Mr. Gandhi which had negativity towards the Cripps plan. Gandhi's reported response to the above-mentioned Plan was that "it was a postdated cheque on a crashing bank"....<sup>11</sup> Abul Kalam Azad gave a justification about Gandhi's rejection of the Plan by stating that being the preacher of *Ahimsa* he was against the war. Gandhi's opposition to war and his, "Doctrine of Ahimsa" got revealed during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, in which he publicly assisted the British army. It can be concluded that "Doctrine of Ahimsa" was a political tactic of Gandhi that he

frequently used in accordance to the situation. In this way, the rejection of the Cripps Plan by Congress was entirely political in nature, not because of Gandhi's religious philosophy or his love for humanity.

Another group of Congress, like Nehru and Azad, had a different approach. The latter faction had the inclination to come to an agreement with the British authority to concede the provisional government that was to be formulated during the war. The status of the national cabinet was to be manifested by full authorities rather than viceroy's Executive Council. On the contrary, the British authorities were not in favor to initiate cabinet system in the Viceroy's Executive Council, as a cabinet proposed by a single political party would be responsible to no one but to itself. Consequently, it would lead to the constitution of an absolutistic dictatorship of the majority. This idea was not supposed to be approved by all the minorities in India as it can subject all of them to an everlasting and autocratic majority in the cabinet.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi's criticism about the Cripps plan indicates that Congress had no plan for any sort of agreement with the M.L. If there were any plan for agreement, then it won't have expressed reservation over the point of giving provinces the right to secede from the Union. As it was not resolved for agreement, its leadership interpreted the right of secession of the provinces as the creation of an independent Muslim state.

Moreover, Gandhi's statement about the Plan indicates that the Indian National Congress was in view of the decisive victory of the Japanese over the British. For that reason, its leadership was not inclined to approve the British Plan since it involved the responsibility to prosecute the war efforts. They had a stance that their aspiration for Hindu Raj manifested greater possibility when the British had been expelled from India by Japan. On the basis of this presumption, they initiated "The Quit India Movement" in August 1942. In the Plan of action that the Congress leaders had in mind, the Muslim community was just a visualised minority.<sup>13</sup> The above-mentioned actions and statements of Congress leadership indicate that it wasn't inclined to approve any such plan, securing the rights of minorities. As a result, the section of the Plan dealing with the rights of different

communal groups, including Muslims and that were to be enforced after the war got repudiated. At the same time, a faction of the Congress showed an inclination for the creation of the national government for the sake of instantly establishing the Congress's dictatorship.

In light of the the above-mentioned points, the C.W.C. passed a resolution on 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, disapproving the Plan. It had two major grievances, one about the right of secession for the provinces and the other about the representation of the princes instead of states people in the constituent assembly. The above-mentioned decision was not published because the provisional Plan was under discussion.<sup>14</sup> The point in which they were actually fascinated was the immediate defecto transference of powers, including defence. The personal representative of the U.S.A President Roosevelt, Colonel Louis Johnson, had active participation in bringing together the Congress leaders on the issue of defence. His Plan was later on called as "Johnson-Cripps formula." According to his Plan, the defence department could be handed over to the Indian representatives. At the same time, certain responsibilities linked to the conduct of war specified as the governmental relations of the General Headquarters, Naval Headquarters, and Air Headquarters would be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief (who would be the member of the council for the war department in control of the armed forces of India). Colonel Johnson reported that Congress initiated working on the Plan, but Viceroy soon asked him for retirement.<sup>15</sup> British Prime Minister and the Secretary of the State did not approve the "*Johnson-Cripps formula*." They were in favour of the views of the Viceroy and Commander in Chief who did not want to reduce the authority of the Viceroy during wartime.<sup>16</sup>

On 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 1942, another resolution was passed by Congress in which the above-mentioned Plan was rejected and asked to formulate a free national government having full powers. When the Cripps Plan was rejected by Congress, a resolution of the Muslim League's Committee was also published. Quaid-e-Azam complained that the talks had been made with the Congress leadership and the leadership of other organisations had been completely ignored.<sup>17</sup> Working

Committee of the Muslim League, in its resolution, demanded a clear declaration about a separate homeland for Muslims and stated:-

“...The Muslims cannot be satisfied by such a Declaration on a vital question affecting their future destiny, and demand a clear and precise pronouncement on the subject. Any attempt to solve the future problem of India by the process of evading the real issue is to court disaster. In the draft proposals no procedure has been laid down as to how the verdict of the province is to be obtained in favor or against accession to the one Union, but in the letter dated April 2<sup>nd</sup> from the Secretary of Sir Stafford Cripps addressed to the president of the All India Muslim League, it is stated that a province should reach the decision whether or not to stand out of the Union by a vote in the Legislative Assembly on a resolution to stand in. if the majority for accession to the Union is less than 60 percent the minority will have the right to demand a plebiscite of the adult male population. In this connection it must be emphasised that in the provinces where the Muslims are in a majority, as in the case of major provinces of Bengal and Punjab, they are in a minority in the Legislative Assembly, and in the Assemblies of Sindh and the North- West Frontier Province the total number (namely 60 and 50 respectively) is so small and the weightage given to the non Muslims so heavy that it can be easily manipulated, and a decision under such circumstances cannot be true criterion of ascertaining the real opinion of the Muslims of those provinces.”<sup>18</sup>

“Cripps Mission” was ended in failure after the rejection by two major political parties. Sir Stafford Cripps was very confident while arriving in India but returned empty-handed. Congress was of the opinion that Cripps being the leader of the Labor Party

known for his pro-Congress behavior, would support them. They negotiated over the issue of making the provisional government. The I.N.C leadership was of the opinion that the British were in a difficult position because of the war. Therefore, they could be influenced to accept the I.N.C demand not just for complete Indianisation of the Viceroy's Executive Council but also its being made answerable to the Central Assembly dominated by a 75% of Hindus, which would have meant the formulation of Hindu Raj in the name of provisional setup. It would also have involved primary amendments in the present constitution in favour of the Hindu majority and against Muslim interests. Congress miscalculated the situation, and their demand was not fulfilled. Even Sir Stafford Cripps, while leaving India, had to say that "the Congress leadership wanted all or nothing, and they have got nothing."<sup>19</sup> In this way, the real designs of Congress were revealed by its denial of those clauses which were to be enforced after the end of the War and its insistence to Indianize the Executive Council, including the point according to which Executive Council would be answerable before Central Assembly (as Hindus were in the majority in the Central Assembly). Its designs were accurately reported by Cripps as the "policy of nothing or everything."

While leaving India, Cripps addressed the Indians, briefing them how depressing he felt that this great opportunity of entrusting their defence and freedom to Indians had been lost. When the War Cabinet formulated a scheme unanimously, wishing to make the people of India contented by offering independence at the earliest practicable moment, Indian political leaders declined to accept it. Every leader wished to make his own scheme and express his own views. The Plan has been castigated, from all sides," Cripps concluded. "But ... those important parts of the proposals with which all agree have never been quoted. He persisted that the main Indian communities will have to agree upon an arrangement of formulating their new constitution."<sup>20</sup>

Inaccurately Mr. Cripps was of the opinion that his Mission, in spite of failure, caused a positive change in the approach of Indians to the war and made Congress more understanding of the British struggles against the Japanese.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, he informed

the British Prime Minister that he believed there was a possibility that the Congress might soon see the sagaciousness of their Cabinet's formula in the same way as M.L and Sikhs did.

At the time when Cripps was about to leave, Maulana Azad stated how shocked and dismayed he was over the persistent failure in their discussion. "What we informed in our first talk with you is now disavowed," Azad said. "You told me then that there would be a national government which would function as a cabinet and that the status of Viceroy would be equivalent to that of the king in England."<sup>22</sup> He was insistent that Congress was not anxious in making government, aspiring for the people of India collectively to get freedom.

After his return, Cripps delivered a speech in the House of Commons, blaming himself and Congress for the failure of his Mission. Amery, in his speech about the Mission, appreciated Cripps for his struggle.<sup>23</sup> Cripps gave no official report to the Cabinet, nor was he even invited to appear before its India Committee; however, Amery later told the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow that Cripps may have talked about the subject with the Prime Minister on a weekend tour with him just after his return.<sup>24</sup>

Following the failure of the "Cripps Mission", the All India Congress Committee passed a resolution and stated that A.I.C.C is convinced that India will get her independence through her own power and will retain it likewise... Britain must abandon her hold on India. It is on the basis of freedom alone that Indians can deal with Britain or other nations.<sup>25</sup> Gandhi also stated in an article in "*Horizon*," after the failure of Mission Cripps should have realised that Congress would not want dominion status. On the other hand, Mr. Jinnah expressed his concern just with the ambiguous declaration about the possibility of establishing a second dominion.<sup>26</sup>

Although in Cripps Scheme, the substance of Indian independence was included, but Congress rejected the Scheme as it was so infuriated at the right of non-accession granted to the provinces. Congress's emphasis on acquiring control of the central government of India became so desperate that it decided to initiate "Quit India Movement" which soon turned into an

open rebellion against the British government. The Muslims totally disaffiliated themselves from this movement, which brought about more division between the two communities.<sup>27</sup>

Congress became more fierce and inflexible following the failure of the Cripps Mission. Gandhi now had an assumption that Japan was going to defeat the British, and he appealed for the withdrawal of all British forces from India. In his opinion, the withdrawal of the British would not only stop Japan from invading India but also would resolve the Hindu–Muslim communal issues. He stated that to leave India in God’s hands or in other words, to anarchy. Then all parties will involve in confrontation against one another or come to a reason and settlement after facing the real challenges.<sup>28</sup> Gandhi’s insistence on leaving India in anarchy indicates his “Doctrine of Ahimsa” and his irrational mindset, as there were many opportunities for settlement between the two major organisations, but instead of using them, he tried to move the country towards turmoil and disorder.

Upon this, a prominent Congress leader–Rajagopal Achari, daringly took a stand and stated that he had been embarrassed at the irrational and negative behavior of Congress regarding the British authorities and Muslim community. He wanted a settlement based on Cripps Formula, but it had been dominated by Gandhi’s viewpoint.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the failure, British authorities were of the opinion that outside India, Cripps Mission had a very positive impact, as Amery was of the opinion that America would understand the complexities and confusions of Indian issues and of the inflexibility of Congress.<sup>30</sup> Failure of the Cripps Mission was unpleasant news for the American President. In a private letter to Winston Churchill, he asked that Cripps should stay in India until a national government could be formed.<sup>31</sup> Churchill responded to Roosevelt that he was not authorised to make decision about the matter of this kind without prior discussion with his cabinet, he also stated that ... “You know the weightage which I used to give to everything you say to me, but I did not think I could take responsibility for the defence of India if everything had again to be thrown into the melting –pot at this

critical juncture \_ anything like a serious difference between you and me would break my heart, and would surely injure both our countries at the height of this terrible struggle.”<sup>32</sup> On the other side, British media, specifically the press of right, criticised Congress because of its inflexible attitude “*The Daily Telegraph*,” which had warmly welcomed the Plan was very critical of the inflexibility and intolerance of Congress leadership both towards the Plan and the Muslim community.<sup>33</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The British government sent “Cripps Mission” in India owing to international pressure after signing “Atlantic Charter” at the same time, it tried to seek Indian support for the war effort by accepting their demands. In Cripps Scheme, British authorities made an effort to appease all the stakeholders of India, especially Congress and the Muslim League. On one side, it promised for the establishment of the Indian Union, and on other side it gave the provinces a right to secede from Union. Congress leadership, especially Mr. Gandhi, was very critical of the Plan, especially the right of secession promised to the provinces. He was of the opinion that the British should leave without any prior settlement amongst Indians or, in other words in anarchy. It reveals his irrational approach, as there were many opportunities for both major parties to come to an agreement, but instead of utilising them, he decided to move the country towards turbulence and disorder. The intention of Congress was exposed by its repudiation of those clauses which were to be implemented after the War and at the same time, its demand to Indianize the Executive Council, which would be responsible before Central Assembly (as Hindus were in the majority in that assembly) . Cripps described the above-mentioned designs of Congress as the “policy of nothing or everything.” Congress top leadership, such as Abul Kalam Azad tried to give a rationale about Gandhi’s repudiation of the Scheme by saying that being the preacher of “Ahimsa” he was against the war, but that statement was political and an attempt to conceal the designs of Congress under cover of humanitarianism. Gandhi’s opposition to war and his “Doctrine of Ahimsa” got exposed during First World War, in which he openly facilitated the British army. Therefore, it can be inferred that “Doctrine of Ahimsa” was often used by Gandhi

as a political tool. So it can be stated that disapproval of the Cripps Scheme by Congress was political in nature rather than Gandhi's religious philosophy or his humanitarianism. On the other hand, the Muslim League's disapproval of the Plan, owing to its ambiguity about the creation of a separate homeland for Muslims, indicates that now it was not ready to accept less than Pakistan. At the same time, it was an indicator that both of the major parties parted their ways and their reservations about Cripps Mission were contrary to each other.

## References

- 1 Nicholas Mansergh, *Transfer of Power: The Cripps Mission* (London: Her Majesty Stationary Office, 1970), 1:405.
- 2 Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, 1:407.
- 3 Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Hinge of Fate* (London: The Educational Book Company LTD, 1950), 6:160.
- 4 H.V Hudson, *the Great Divide* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 91.
- 5 Mansergh, Nicholas, "The Cripps Mission to India," *International Journal* 26 No2 (Spring 1942):344.
- 6 Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, 1:565.
  
- 7 Albert .E Kane, "Development of Indian Politics," *The Academy of Political Science* 59 no1(1944):75--76.
- 8 R.J Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979),79-80.
- 9 K.K Aziz, *Britain and Muslim India* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meal Publication,2006), 153-54.
- 10 Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 88.
- 11 Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Pakistan the Formative Phase* (New Delhi: Akash Shukla Press, 1995), 127-128.
- 12 Sayeed, *Pakistan the Formative Phase*, 127-128.
- 13 M.A.H Asphani, *Quaid e Azam as I Knew Him* (Karachi: Royal Book Company,1976), 59-60.
- 14 Hudson, *The Great Divide*, 98.
- 15 Hudson, *The Great Divide*, 100.
- 16 Hudson, *The Great Divide*, 100.
- 17 V.P Menon, *Transfer of Power in India* (Delhi: Sangam Book Publication,1981), 133.
- 18 Asphani, *Quaid e Azam as I Knew Him*, 58.
- 19 Asphani, *Quaid e Azam as I Knew Him*, 59.
- 20 Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, 1:752-753.
- 21 Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, 1: 740-741.
- 22 Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, 1:744.
- 23 Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful flight* (Karachi: Oxford University Press,2006), 37.
- 24 Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, 2: 42-43.
- 25 Wolpert, *Shameful Flight*, 40.
- 26 Mansergh, "The Cripps Mission to India":345-346.
- 27 Muhammad Ziaul Islam, "The Transfer of Power in India" *Pakistan Institute of International Affairs* 14 no3(1961):5.

- <sup>28</sup> Aziz, *Britain and Muslim India*, 154.  
<sup>29</sup> Panderal Moon, *Divide and quit* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961), 27.  
<sup>30</sup> Wolpert, *Shameful Flight*, 35.  
<sup>31</sup> Martin Gilber, *Winston Churchill: Road to Victory* (London: Willaim Heinman Ltd' 1986) 7:168.  
<sup>32</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War*, 6:169,  
<sup>33</sup> Aziz, *Britain and Muslim India*, 153.