

Emergence of Communalism in Modern India: A Critical Analysis (1905-1992)

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Abstract:

Throughout its history, India has been the target of a multitude of external aggressions, which have frequently resulted in initial confrontations between domestic forces and foreign aggressors. In India, the coexistence principle has played a significant role in the development of a multicultural and multiethnic society. However, the memory avenue remains scarred by the enduring effects of the violent conflict. Local communities, places of worship, and valuables were destroyed during the incessant conflict between regional regimes that opposed the expanding Mughal Empire prior to British colonization. Throughout this period, devout Hindus who harbored this resentment held in high regard monarchs who vehemently opposed the Islamic invaders. Following the British removal of Muslim authorities, the Muslim population, in conjunction with non-Muslim segments, extended a helping hand to the indigent and swore to defend India's independence. The sociological study of group dynamics exerted a significant impact on the political terrain of the Indian independence movement by fostering solidarity among individuals of various religious and racial affiliations who opposed the colonialists. Nevertheless, the British possessed knowledge of the religious and linguistic dichotomies that existed among the various communities in India, in addition to their extensive chronicle of internal turmoil and discord. Consequently, they devised the "divide and rule" strategy by specifically exploiting communal elements. At the behest of the authorities, the communal infection extensively permeated the Indian political system during the British colonial period. The Indian National Congress was established in 1885 in opposition to the British approach of fostering animosity between the Muslim and Hindu communities. In an effort to operate as a nationalist entity, the recently established organization solicited contributions from all sectors of Indian society and exerted diplomatic pressure on the government. Notwithstanding the Congress comprising leaders from both communities, a considerable number of Muslim leaders retained apprehensions concerning the impact of Hindu leaders. They held the view that the Congress, which was under the control of a westernized Hindu oligarchy, would be incapable of effectively representing Muslim interests and could potentially be detrimental to them. Measures were taken to enhance Muslim support on a national level in order to protect the interests and well-being of the Muslim community. Many interpreted the Viceroy of Bengal, Lord Curzon,'s 1905 decision to partition the province into communal territories as an effort to further segregate the Hindu and Muslim communities.

Keywords: Hindu, Muslim, Community, Modern India, Colonilism.

Content

Throughout its history, India has experienced series of external aggressions that precipitated initial confrontations between indigenous forces and foreign aggressors. The outliers were subsequently

assimilated via the processes of accommodation and assimilation. The coexistence principle has been upheld and has contributed to the formation of a multiethnic and multicultural society in India. However, in the depths of memory lane, the scars of a violent conflict still persist. Despite the establishment of a new power balance and the subsequent resolution of conflicts and restoration of peace, recollections of the "bad" times persistently endure. The entire Mughal era preceding British colonization was marked by ceaseless conflict between regional regimes that opposed the expanding Mughal Empire. In addition to destroying local communities, these conflicts similarly devastate places of worship and "loot" valuables. Weaning the weaker and more vulnerable segments of the conquered populations from their innate religious affiliations was also accomplished through coerced or enticed "conversions." A loss of property is frequently reconciled with, whereas an assault on a place of worship is seldom forgotten. Hindu monarchs who resisted the Islamic invaders with vigor, including Shivaji of Maharashtra and Maharana Pratap of Mewar, were venerated by the devout Hindus who harbored this resentment the entire time.

Upon the overthrow of the Muslim authorities by the British, the Muslim populace, in solidarity with other segments of the non-Muslim populace, embraced the impoverished and vowed to fight for the independence of the country they had adopted. It is an established sociological fact that when confronted with an external threat, individuals tend to suppress their internal divisions and present a unified front in order to safeguard the reputation of the larger organization. The sociology of group dynamics played a pivotal role in influencing the political landscape of the Indian independence movement, uniting individuals of diverse religious and racial backgrounds against the colonialists under a single banner. The renowned couplet Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai, Bharat Mata Sabki Hai (Churchill, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus are all offspring of Mother India) encapsulates the guiding principle of the independence movement. Therefore, during the early stages of British colonial administration, individuals of various sects and faiths united in opposition to the British. The unified appeal for India's liberation from the shackles of colonialism garnered a resounding response from the entire nation.

However, the British were cognizant of the religious and linguistic divisions among the communities in India, as well as their protracted history of internal strife and conflict. As a consequence, they formulated the "divide and rule" tactic by capitalizing on communal elements in particular. Therefore, the communal infection infiltrated the Indian political system extensively during the British colonial era, at the behest of the authorities. Upon establishing their dominion over India, the British initially encountered the Muslim elite class. As perceived by the British, the foundation of their imperialistic system needed to be established atop the administrations of Islamic decline. As a result, they instigated a progressive elimination of the Muslim elites from political prominence in India. They promoted the Hindu aristocracy concurrently. The proliferation of elite education and the Hindu elites' general openness to such developments paved the way for a new power structure. The Muslim elites, having suffered defeat at the hands of the British, opposed the modernization endeavor and forbade their subjects from receiving an English education. By purposefully distancing themselves from the forces of change, they forged a newfound sense of solidarity. Nonetheless, their bargaining power was hampered.

In 1885, the Indian National Congress was formed as an opposition to the British strategy of sowing discord between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The newly formed organization endeavored to function as a nationalist entity by soliciting contributions from all segments of Indian society and exerting diplomatic pressure on the government. It acted as a supranational entity to offer protection to numerous interest groups, Hindu revivalists being among them. To garner broad support from various religious factions, the Congress implemented a consensual approach and advocated for the notion of "territorial

nationalism." Despite the fact that leaders from both communities joined this organization, a considerable number of Muslim leaders harbored concerns regarding the influence of Hindu leaders within the Congress. They believed that the Congress, which was controlled by a westernized Hindu elite, would not effectively advocate for Muslim interests and might even be detrimental to them. Consequently, efforts were made to strengthen Muslim support within the nation with the intention of safeguarding the concerns and welfare of the Muslim community. This sentiment in 1903 prompted Ghulam-us-Saqlain to suggest the formation of an independent political organization dedicated to Muslims. "The interests of the Muslim community have already been harmed in a variety of ways and continue to be trampled underfoot due to the absence of such an organization," he provided as justification. Muslims were also dissuaded from entering the Congress by him. During this pivotal period in 1905, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of Bengal, rendered a decision to partition the province into communal territories. Notwithstanding the government's assertion that the partition served solely an administrative purpose, a considerable number of individuals perceived this as an attempt to further segregate the Hindu and Muslim communities. Opposition to the partition of Bengal, which the locals dubbed Bang-Bhang, was particularly vehement among the Hindus. They hold the opinion that the intention behind this action was to undermine the cultural harmony of the area, where Muslims and Hindus have lived in harmony for centuries. They contended that all regions of the province were inhabited by members of both communities and that the British government's decision to partition it according to religious concentration was a malicious strategy.

The agitators reached a consensus to engage in a boycott of foreign goods and initiate a Swadeshi (indigenous) movement, which entailed selecting domestically produced goods and rejecting those originating from abroad, predominantly the United Kingdom. Conversely, a considerable number of Muslims embraced a pro-government stance and actively sought government protection in opposition to the demonstrators. Given that the partition primarily benefited the Muslim community, it was only natural that the majority of Muslims aligned themselves with the government and opposed the Hindu agitationists. Thus, the opposition to the partition of Bengal evolved into a communal uprising. Concurrent with the partition of Bengal, the British government declared its intention to implement political reforms that would ensure that various communities were adequately represented in democratic governance.

In October 1906, a group of Muslim leaders visited the Viceroy, Lord Minto, in Shimla with the objective of petitioning him to implement the principle of separate representation for Muslims across all tiers of government. They were guaranteed complete protection of their interests by the viceroy. Inspired by the empathetic reception they received, the Muslims, led by Agha Khan, resolved to establish an autonomous political entity known as the All India Muslim League. The League was formally established on December 30, 1906, in Dhaka. It was the inaugural significant communal political party in India, distinguished by its exclusive membership of Muslims and its agenda designed to promote the political and general welfare of this community. Subsequently, the League established affiliates in diverse regions of the nation. The Aligarh branch was founded in the year 1908. Parallel to this, additional organizations dedicated to the propagation of the Islamic faith emerged. As an illustration, Muslim leaders hailing from Aligarh and Deoband established Nizarat-ul-Maarif (the Academy of Quranic Learning) in Delhi in 1913. Khuddam-i-Kaaba (Servants of Kaaba), an independent society founded under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Bari of Lucknow, was similarly established to represent Muslims' concerns regarding their religious sites in Central Asia.

The overarching stance of the All India Muslim League diverged significantly from that of the Indian National Congress, an organization whose membership transcended communal boundaries. The Congress,

in contrast to the Muslim League, was not a communal party of the Hindu faith; in contrast, membership in the Muslim League was not open to Hindus. A number of Muslims continued to be active participants in the Congress, attaining positions of senior leadership. Unsurprisingly, in response to the Muslim League's formation, certain Hindu leaders also resolved to organise themselves; the United Bengal Hindu Movement and the Punjab Hindu Sabha (established in 1907) constituted the initial Hindu endeavours in this regard. In December 1913, an All India Hindu Maha Sabha was ultimately established in Allahabad. The composition of the Sabha consisted predominantly of Arya Samaji, the majority of whom were also active Congress party members. During their inaugural assembly, the leaders of the Hindu Maha Sabha emphasised the following: "The Sabha is an inclusive movement that does not discriminate against any other movement, Hindu or non-Hindu, and is not a denominational or sectarian organisation. Its primary objective is to vigilantly and ardently protect the interests of the Hindu community as a whole in all aspects.

Thus, the Muslim League and the Hindu Maha Sabha were established with the intention of advancing their respective communities' interests. Nonetheless, with the expansion of both organizations, they became polarized and resembled two opposing factions. The British fostered this division because it undermined the unity of the Congress and thus advanced their own interests. As the 20th century commenced, the division between Hindus and Muslims had become more profound, with extremist factions within each community adopting antagonistic stances. Due to the resolute stance adopted by the Muslim League leaders, they severed ties with the Congress; consequently, the Congress party became predominately Hindu. This development was emphasized by the British and Muslim League, which positioned the Congress as the embodiment of Hindu culture and tradition. They perceived Bal Gangadhar Tilak's promotion of the Shivaji Utsava and Ganapati festival as an endorsement of Hinduism on the part of the Congress. The sentiment expressed in opposition to the partition of Bengal was similarly perceived. Concurrently, numerous Hindu leaders frequently referred to Muslims as "foreigners" and associated Hindu nationalism with nationalism. In response, the Muslims labeled the Hindus as Kafirs. However, the nationalist freedom fighters made every effort to preserve the secular nature of the national movement by refraining from communal strife and fostering a sense of amicability among themselves. However, the British possessed alternative motivations. They desired for this schism to widen rather than close ranks in order to consolidate their control over the colony even more.

This is unmistakably demonstrated by the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, which established separate electorates along communal lines. Separate constituencies were established exclusively for Muslim candidates to contest within under this system. This form of separatism impeded communication between communities and transformed legislative bodies into battlegrounds for communal strife.

The Muslims were profoundly taken aback in December 1911 when the British abandoned their original plan to partition Bengal. The Muslim movement was dealt a significant setback. Muslims were also incensed by the British government's treatment of Turkey throughout the Tripoli and Balkan conflicts. Simultaneously, they were perplexed by the national press's expression of sympathy towards their Muslim compatriots in those nations.

The Muslims found themselves in a precarious situation: on the one hand, the British reneged on their initial decision to partition, which was contrary to their interests in the Middle East; on the other, Indian nationalists backed the Turkish cause. They were unable to determine which side to take.

It is noteworthy to mention that not all Muslim leaders endorsed the Muslim League; among them were nationalists who perceived potential benefits in collaborating with leaders from other communities.

Therefore, Al-Hilal by Maulana Azad and Comrade and Hamdard by Maulana Mohammad Ali advocated for nationalism. Amid the sway of moderates, the Muslim League's constitution was amended during its March 1913 session in Lucknow.

Each of these elements had an impact on the Muslim psyche and incited an equally vicious response from them. Amid this climatic environment, the Muslims perceived the Supreme Court's ruling in the Shah Bano case as an additional attempt to undermine their religious identity. Utilizing this expanding sense of insecurity, Muslim leaders orchestrated nationwide demonstrations. Constantly, it was emphasized to Muslims that the divine Shariat was in peril and that safeguarding it constituted the sacrosanct obligation of each adherent. A substantial gathering was orchestrated in Delhi, where the Shahi Imam, among others, spoke. He condemned the assaults on Muslim religion and culture, employing scathing language and expressing concern that such actions would further estrange and polarize Muslims.

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