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EMERGENCE OF COMMUNAL POLITICS IN INDIA

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Emergence of Communal Politics in India

Ekramul Haque Choudhury

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of History, Calorx Teachers' University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Abstract – An important feature of colonial India was the emergence of communalism as a force that guided the destiny of India into a blood bath and inevitable partition of the Indian subcontinent on communal lines. Though India was a land of multi-religions, creeds and faiths, pre-colonial India was never plagued by the worm of communalism.

Key Words: Communalism, Muslim League, Two Nation Theory, Hindu- Muslim Politics, Pakistan, Politics of Division, Hate etc.

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INTRODUCTION

It was the purposeful colonial policy of divide and rule that laid the seeds of communalism which grew into a huge tree that disturbed the solidarity, of the age-old mosaic of India and it is still haunting to sap the vitality of the newly won independence.

Communalism is thus a modern phenomenon which has gained currency as a negative concept in recent times. Bipan Chandra observes: 'communalism is basically an ideology appears to be a simple and easily understood. Communalism or communal ideology consists of three basic elements or stages, one following the other.

The three basic premises are:

- (1) Belief that people who follow the same religion has common political, economic, cultural and social interests,
- (2) Belief in a notion that in a multi-religious society like India, the common interests of the followers of one religion are dissimilar and divergent from the interests of the followers of another religion, and
- (3) Belief that the interests of the followers of different religions or different communities are seen to be mutually incompatible, antagonistic and hostile".

The practice of communalism based on the above principles leads to communal politics, communal violence and communal terrorism. We can trace stages in the growth of the trends of liberal and extreme communalism. Bipan Chandra is of the view that 1937 was the dividing landmark and pre 1937,

was an era of liberal communalism and the post-1937 phase was that of extreme communalism.

We may agree with Bipan Chandra's perception that communalism emerged as consequence of the modern politics based on mass mobilization and politicization which has become evident in the Indian context from 1930 onwards. Nehru also notices "one must never forget that communalism in India is a latter day phenomenon which has grown up before our eyes". Thus, the communal consciousness arose as a result of the transformation of Indian society under colonialism and its results like administrative unification of regions, the formation of modern social classes and the spread of new ideas of nationalism based on cultural and linguistic development.

Another factor was the economic stagnation, ruination of industries and crafts, stark unemployment and dwindling of resources and the growing number of people vying for the pie. Communalism does not mean social conflict or class conflict between the exploiter and the exploited. Communalism is thus a complex phenomenon where many factors real and unreal, contributed to the rise of consciousness of communalism.

There is a considered, view advocated by Bipan Chandra and agreed upon by many, a strong contributory factor in the growth of communalism was the pronounced Hindu tinge in much of nationalist thought and propaganda in the beginning of the 20th century. Added to this, the communal approach adopted by James Mill, the British historian in dividing the periods of Indian history as the Hindu, the Muslim and the British showed considerable influence on the thought process of young and old mind in developing communal consciousness of superiority and inferiority.

Some sections of the Hindu and the Muslim communalists used religion as the mobilizing factor for their selfish interests. We may say that religion by itself was not a major contributor to communalism as such but the narrow minded religiosity promoted by intolerant leaders led to extreme communalism with a political end.

In India, till 1880 communal consciousness as a driving force was absent both in the Hindus and the Muslims. Sir Sayyad Ahmad Khan, an outstanding intellectual of India announced in 1884, "Do you, not inhabit this land? Are you not buried in it or cremated on it? Surely, you live and die in the same land. Remember that Hindus and Muslims are religious terms.

Otherwise Hindus, Muslims and Christians who live in this country are by virtue of this fact one Qauam (nation or community)". Till the founding of Indian National Congress, he believed in the oneness of Indians, i.e., Hindus and Muslims. The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 sowed the seeds of uncertainty and made him view Congress as a Hindu body, whose major objectives were against the Muslim interest.

The concept of elections and consequential power made him oppose the Congress and as desired by the government, the Muslims began to be loyal to the British. But some Muslims under the leadership of Badruddin Tyabji joined Congress and by the time of Swadeshi movement some more sided with the Congress. In such a situation, the Indian Muslim League was founded in 1907 by big landlords and Zamindars. This loyalist, communal and conservative political organization supported the partition of Bengal, demanded separate electorates and made its motto to oppose Congress but not colonial rule.

Side by side, with Muslim communalism, Hindu communalism also began by demanding that Hindi language was the language of the Hindus and it should be protected. They also started a movement for banning cow slaughter in 1896. They also began to demand due share to the Hindus in legislature and government jobs.

The Punjab Hindu Sabha founded in 1909 and the All India Hindu Mahasabha founded in 1915 spearheaded the activities of the Hindu communalists. But the younger generation of the Muslim League was dissatisfied with the loyalist approach and in 1916 there was an understanding between the League and Congress known as Lucknow Pact which led to the Khilafat and non-cooperation movement. Once again the communalists became active after the end of the non-cooperation movement in 1922.

The nationalists made determined bid to frustrate the efforts of the communalists. But the Round Table Conference once again provided an opportunity to the communalists to stress, "the inherent impossibility of

securing any merger of Hindu and Muslim, political or indeed social interests and the impracticability of ever governing India through anything but a British agency". The announcement of communal award of 1932 which included the demands embodied in 1927 Delhi proposals and Jinnah's 14 points of 1929 further bolstered the communalists.

Since 1937 began the extreme communalism of the Muslims and the Hindus. It was so because the Congress formed ministries in five provinces and the Congress refused to cooperate with Muslim League. In 1938, M.A. Jinnah, in his presidential address of the League announced "The High Command of the Congress is determined, absolutely determined to crush all other communities and cultures in this country and establish Hindu raj in the country".

In 1940, he told the students of Aligarh, "Mr. Gandhi's hope is to subjugate and vassalize the Muslims under a Hindu raj". By 1941, Jinnah announced that "Pakistan is not only a practical goal but the only goal if you want to save Islam from complete annihilation in this country". Finally, in 1946, while asking the Muslims to vote for the League, he declared if we fail to realize our duty today you will be reduced to the status of Sudras and Islam will be vanquished from India".

Besides Jinnah, Z.A. Suleri, F.M. Durrani and M.A. Gazdar also propagated for the annihilation of the Hindus. Gazdar proclaimed "The Hindus will have to be eradicated like the Jews in Germany if they did not behave properly". The Muslim communalists launched a vicious campaign against Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and Khan Abdul Gafar Khan as the stooges of the nationalist Hindus. While Muslim communalism was becoming extremely violent, Hindu communalism was lagging behind. By 1923, Lala Lajpat Rai was no more and by 1937 another liberal communalist Madan Mohan Malaviya also retired from active politics. V.D. Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha and M.S. Golwarkar of the RSS led the extreme communalists of the Hindus. In 1937, V.D. Savarkar announced that Muslims "want to brand the forehead of the Hindu down and other non-Muslim sections of the Hindustan with a stamp of self-humiliation and Muslim domination" and "to induce the Hindus to the position of helots in their own land".

In 1938, he reiterated and affirmed "we Hindus are (already) reduced to the veritable helots throughout our land". M.S. Golwalkar in 1939 declared that if minority demands were accepted, Hindu national life runs the risk of being shattered and he attacked the nationalists for "hugging to our bosom our most inveterate enemies (Muslims) and thus endangering our very existence". Thus both the Hindu and Muslim extremists tried to play on the fears and suspicious of majority and minority and raised the cry of 'Hinduism in danger' and 'Islam in danger' or Hindu culture and Islamic culture in danger. This creation of hatred proved harmful to both the Hindus and the Muslims in

the end and thousands lost their lives in the communal holocaust.

In this atmosphere of extreme communalism preached and practiced by the determined few from both sides, the British added fuel to the fire. When the Second World War began and the Viceroy without consulting the Indian leaders, admitted India into the Second World War, the Congress ministries resigned in 1939.

The Muslim League celebrated that day as the day of deliverance. The British assured that they would grant Dominion status to India immediately after the war. This announcement made the Muslim League to press for a separate homeland for Muslims in 1940. By his August offer of 1940, Linlithgow, the Viceroy assured the Muslims that their interests would be protected.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar, C. Rajagopalachari and the communists suggested that the demand of a separate homeland to the Muslims be accepted. The British appointed Cripps Mission in 1942 and the proposals of Cripps were rejected by both the League and Congress.

When Congress launched Quit India movement in August 1942, the League opposed it and propagated its dream of separate homeland. The League took the help of Islam to spread its idea of Pakistan along with popular newspapers. In 1944, C. Rajagopalachari placed his compromise formula before Jinnah. Owing to the adamancy of the League, the Wavel plan and the Simla plan failed. When elections were held in 1946 as per the 1935 Act, the League rejected it and refused to participate in the interim government.

In protest, the Muslim League observed August 16, 1946 as the Direct Action Day which led to Hindu and Muslim riots throughout India. The League joined, the interim government formed under the leadership of Nehru.

When Constituent Assembly was formed, the League refused to accept it. In the meanwhile communal riots flared up throughout the country in which both Hindus and Muslims suffered a lot. In February 1947, the British government announced that it would leave India certainly before June 1948. On March 27, 1947, the League celebrated 'Pakistan Day' in East Bengal and Punjab.

It led to the worst fears of large scale massacre and the interim government remained helpless. Except Gandhi, the others agreed for the partition and V.P. Menon drafted the proposal for partition of India. It was put as June Plan or Mountbatten Plan before the League and Congress. This was accepted by both the League and Congress. The Independence Act of 1947 made the partition legal and real.

As the entire nation rejoiced, very disappointed and disillusioned Gandhi spent the first day of Indian independence in 24-hour fast. Later, he spent the rest of the time in healing the wounds of suspicion and hatred of communal frenzy. On 30 January, 1948 in an evening prayer Gandhi was shot by a fanatic; thus the cause so near and dear to him cost his life and plunged the nation into darkness.

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