

# India and its different cultures



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India was known for its different cultures which existed in our nation for centuries and all of it was had started to melt. Talking of religion, India was known for the number of religions it had which were more or less able to peacefully exist. When the Europeans arrived in India two major religions that existed in India at that time were Hinduism and Islam, with Hinduism being the majority. However despite of the fact that the Hindus were in a majority, there were never much problems between them. Politics was ranked over religion; hence kings that came to the throne were because of their political strength and not coz of their religious. Therefore in India it was not surprising to have a king from a religious minority ruling over the majority community as political strength mattered more. After this one may still wonder why did country eventually split into two, when it won Independence and when there was so much unity between them. then why did it split up into the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan? Why did Muslim community in India wished to form a separate nation and according to me to understand this, one has to first understand what the real meaning of communalism is and the reasons that led to its growth during the British rule.

“ Communalism is the idea that religion is a most important distinction between people”. Hence a communalist is the one who distinguishes people by the religion not taking into consideration their cultural or their geographical background. According to me this idea is illogical, because people living with each other in the same society will obviously be more similar then compared to the people of the same religion living far across. For instance a Hindu from Gujarat and a Muslim from Gujarat would have far

more in common, than a Muslim in Gujarat and a Muslim in Kashmir.

Communalism states that people of different religions have different political views and economic issues even they belong to the same nation. Due to this communalism and the communalist strongly believe that people of different religions cannot be united and cannot survive or live in one country and people of same religion can only unite and live in one nation. . keeping this in mind the idea of a separate nation for Muslims was taken into action but before coming to this effect we should also understand why did such feelings like communalist feelings rose during British rule.

It is said that During the revolt of 1857, which is called as the first attempt to fight for the independence against the British, Hindus and Muslims united in order to defeat a common enemy and this unity was marked as a stepping stone to our independence. The British noticed this unity and the importance of this unity and realized that if they had to survive in India they will have to get rid of this unity. They knew that they were able to establish their rule only because India was politically divided when they entered India. The British thus implemented the famous ‘ Divide and Rule’ policy. They played the mind games and started oppressing Muslims till 1870 as they held them responsible for the revolt and after 1870 they turned around and started favoring them thus causing a problem to the Hindus.

A very important feature of the national movement was that it took longer time to spread amongst the Muslim community and as a result the early nationalist movement consisted mainly of people from different communities like the Hindu, Parsi and Christian communities. Britishers quickly noticed the absence of the Muslim community and made sure the

Muslims don't unite with the other communities and started provoking them against the other communities who were a part of the national movement.

The Muslim community had embraced, western education and thought, a little later than some of the others. As a result when the British government opened up the administration of the country to Indians, they were not able to land as many jobs as some of the other communities. As a result they began to feel left out of the administration, and the idea that the majority communities could dominate their lives began to take root. Also the British policies for about fifteen years after the revolt were discriminatory against this community which made participation in the administration a difficult proposition. The seeds of division were sown during this period, with several Muslim leaders demanding a special reservation for Muslims in the government. While it was natural for the community to want to participate in the administration, reservation was only a temporary solution, for they would only be able to compete with other communities once they made some advances in education. In Industry there was intense competition for jobs, since the economy was very backward. The far sighted nationalist saw that the solution of the problem lay in developing the economy. However communalist elements instead looked for short term gains and demanded reservations and employment concessions. When the British changed their attitude after 1870 and began favoring communal elements, the demands of many communalist leaders were met, and this proved to be a major set back for the freedom struggle. The British were fairly successful in their aims, for as mentioned earlier, India was still a nation in the making, and when the people were exposed to nationalist views, they were not fully prepared and

searched for a way to bond into a nation. This was exploited by communalists and the ideas of separate nations began to form.

In 1906 a new political party was formed, known as the Muslim league, which would play a crucial role in the freedom struggle and the eventual partition of the country. The Muslim League, like the Indian National Congress in its initial years, took some time before it was able to gather mass support, and was initially confined to the educated class. However by this time the Indian National Congress was a mass based movement, and in fact had many young radical Muslims who supported it. Interestingly, one of the Muslim League members who was instrumental in the creation of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah (would also go on to become the leader of the new republic of Pakistan) was a member of the Indian National Congress till about 1920. The Muslim League, which considered itself as the representatives of the Muslim community began to feel increasingly sidelined since the Indian National Congress was the most active political force in the country. As a result when the provincial assemblies were opened up to Indians for direct voting, the League would invariably get less seats than the Indian National Congress. They were able to negotiate separate electorates for Muslims from the British, but since they were a minority community this did little to increase their share of the power. By the 1940's the move towards partition had gathered tremendous momentum and although secular nationalists tried right till the end to keep the country united, but sadly the country could not stay united, and its people were divided into two separate nations. It was a sad event, because the people had lived together for centuries without any discord, for India had always been a country of assimilation and integration.

The partition of the country resulted in one of the largest movements of all time of people across the borders of the two countries and also sparked off terrible communal riots.

The year 1937 was a turning point in the history of communalism in India as it concerns the stridency and intensity of politics of hatred. In the elections held for the provincial legislative assembly, the Muslim League won only 109 out of 492 reserved muslim seats and only 4.8 % of the total muslim votes showing thereby the lack of popular support for Muslim League even among the muslim population. It was a well known fact that the League's support base was mostly amongst the wealthy and the landlords. As constructive programme for development of popular support always takes the time and also the fact that any constructive socio-economic programme would have targeted at the wealthy and landed muslim supporters of the League, the League resorted to the short cut by raising the cry of 'Islam in danger' thereby directly talking to the muslim masses about the impending 'Hindu Raj'. And what followed was a communal propaganda 'full of fervor, fear, contempt and bitter hatred' (W. C. Smith)

In Jinnah's case, however there is a change in his political patterns. In spite of being a strong nationalist, Jinnah when started to lose his political battle, strengthened his position in the post-Khilafat movement with the onset of the communalism politics.

The political patterns did not have a purely communal change in the beginning, but it certainly had its hints when liberal communalism translated to extremism. Especially after the Muslim League debacle in the 1937

elections, Hindus and Muslims were referred to as two separate individual nationalities with different identities and different interests.

There is a relation in the rise and fall of Jinnah with the growth of communalism in modern India. Communalism begins with the “ belief that people who follow the same religion have common secular interests, i. e., common political, economic, social and cultural interests.” Secondly, The secular interests and the socio-cultural, economical and political interests are different within people of different religions. In a country like India, which has multiple cultures and religions being practiced simultaneously this dissimilarity surfaces strongly. Thirdly, “ when the interests of the followers of different religions or of different communities are witnessed to be mutually incompatible, antagonistic and hostile.”

Communal ideology lies at three levels, in a person, party or movement. In different religious based communities citing the notion of mutual divergence or hostility is the first stage of communal ideology. Moderate communalism and practitioners represent the second stage where they carry forward beliefs of liberal, democratic, humanist and nationalist values. Liberal framework was the fore most and popular way of functioning amongst the communalist before 1937. The the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League, the Ali brothers after 1925, MA Jinnah, MM Malviya & Lajpat Rai all came under this category.