

Gandhi: the hindu- muslim gap



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Introduction

The opening years of the twentieth century were stormy. That was the time when the greatest catastrophe of history took place. The political scenario was undergoing a change. The British were beginning to feel a bit uneasy. Discontentment was brewing. Political discontent was growing due to the inability of the government to organize effective relief during the period of plague and famine. In order to stem the discontent, the British played the political trump card with great aplomb. For the first time, they used their divide-and-rule political game with great force. From 1870 onwards, the British started inciting the Hindus and the Muslims to form their own political parties to establish their distinct religious identities. That was perhaps, the beginning of the communalisation of politics. The British not only encouraged the two communities to form political parties along religious lines, they took various constructive steps to create a situation whereby Hindus and Muslims would be forced to think in a way as if their religious identity is at peril. This effort culminated in the partition of Bengal in 1905. The partition was made along communal lines.

The British had realized that a united India was a strong India and thus they decided to separate Hindus and Muslims, the major population of India. As a result India would not be united and would remain weak. The British continued this strategy of divide and rule and finally India was divided. This policy left a deep impact on the Indians, the communal hatred between Hindus and Muslim is still prevalent and has taken a major form. This has resulted in many riots and caused major harm to life and property.

Revolt of 1857

The British East India Company came to India as traders but slowly took over the rule in India and in no time the whole of India was under the British rule. India was the largest and the most important colony of Britain. They made immense profits in their rule, but they treated Indians as an inferior race. Indians were tortured and treated like slaves, they were forced to grow Indigo and as a result the cottage industries suffered a heavy setback. Slowly over a period of time Indians realized about their rights and got to know about nationalism. They also fought for freedom in numerous revolts, but all of them were crushed as the Indians were not united. Some of the famous revolts were the Santhal Rebellion, Indigo revolts and many more. These small revolts took shape of a national movement and emerged in the form of the revolt of 1857

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The greatest and the most widespread armed uprising which shook the foundations of the British rule in India was the Revolt Of 1857. The accumulating hatred against British rule which had resulted in numerous, though localized, outbreaks burst in a mighty rebellion in 1857. The dispossessed rulers of Indian states, the nobles and the zamindars who had been deprived of their lands, the Indian soldiers of Britain's army in India and the vast masses of peasants, artisans and the others who had been ruined by British economic policies and had been rising up in revolts in their isolated pockets, were now united by the common aim of overthrowing British rule. The introduction of greases cartridges which showed the British rulers complete disregard of the religious beliefs of the Indian people provided the

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immediate cause of the revolt. The soldiers killed the British officers and marched to Delhi. They conquered Delhi and proclaimed the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar as the emperor of India. The rebellion spread like wild fire and the British rule ceased to exist over a vast part of Northern and Central India for many months. The major centres of the revolt, besides Delhi, where some of the fiercest battles were fought were Kanpur, Lukhnow, Bareilly and Bundelkhand. This victory was short-lived as British reconquered the states and Indian rule was back in the hands of the British.

The revolt was over and now the power had been transferred from the British East India Company to the British Crown. The Queen had decided herself to take care of the Indian politics as she had realized that the conditions had become far worse than expectations. Many promises were made to the Indians regarding their welfare under the 'Queens Proclamation', but hardly any were followed. The conditions had not improved and the same tactics were used in a minor form.

Rise of Indian Nationalism

Nationalism is a sentiment based on common cultural characteristics that binds a population and often produces a policy of national independence or separatism. It involves the feeling of oneness and brotherhood for your own countrymen.

The growth of Indian nationalism started in the nineteenth century. Political unification of India, fall of India's old social and economic system, the beginning of modern trade and industry and the rise of new social classes laid the basis of nationalism.

The social and religious reform movements and popular anti-British revolts contributed to the growth of nationalism. The farmers were suffering under the new land tenure systems introduced by the British government. The Indian industrialists were sad because of the economic policy of the British government. All import duties on cotton textiles were removed in 1882, which harmed the textile industry.

The people of India became aware of the fact that the development of their country was not possible unless British rule was ended. There was a series of famines, which took a toll of millions of human lives, due to the indifference of the autocratic British administration.

Indian Nationalism was broadly divided into three phases

Moderate phase

Radical phase

Gandhian phase

The Moderates advocated and used methods of Constitutional agitation for demanding reforms. They had faith in British and thought that the British would agree to their demands. They considered British just and kind. Some of the famous leaders were Dada Bhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Surendranath Bannerjee

The Aggressive Nationalists had no faith in British rule, they thought that India could not progress under the British rule and freedom was necessary for their development. They believed that this could only be done by

adopting aggressive methods. Some of the important leaders were Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra pal and Aurobindo Ghosh

The Gandhian Phase was led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; he devised the methods of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satyagraha (insistence on truth) to attain independence. He converted the Indian freedom struggle into a mass movement; Gandhiji played a very important role in the independence of India.

Partition of Bengal

The decision took effect the Partition of Bengal was announced in July 1905 by the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon. The partition took effect in October 1905 and separated the largely Muslim eastern areas from the largely Hindu western areas. The reason behind the partition that was officially announced was that the Bengal province was too large to be administered by a single governor and therefore was partitioned on administrative purpose. But the real reason behind the partition was political and not administrative. East Bengal was dominated by the Muslims and West Bengal by the Hindus. Partition was yet another part of the ' Divide and rule' policy. Indians were outraged at what they recognise as a " divide and rule" policy, where the colonisers turned the native population against itself in order to rule. This partition provided an impetus to the religious divide and rule, as a result of that, All India Muslim League and All India Hindu Mahasabha was formed. Both the organisations aimed at fanning communal passions.

Muslim League

The All-India Muslim League was a political party during the period of the British Rule which advocated the creation of a separate Muslim-majority nation. Being a political party to secure the interests of the Muslim diaspora in British India, the Muslim League played a decisive role during the 1940s in the Indian independence movement and developed into the driving force behind the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim state in the Indian subcontinent. Muslim League was a political organization of India and Pakistan, founded 1906 as the All-India Muslim League by Aga Khan III. Its original purpose was to safeguard the political rights of Muslims in India.

By 1940, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, it had gained such power that, for the first time, it demanded the establishment of a Muslim state (Pakistan), despite the opposition of the Indian National Congress. During World War II the Congress was banned, but the League, which supported the British war effort, was allowed to function and gained strength. It won nearly the entire Muslim vote in the elections of 1946. The following year saw the division of the Indian subcontinent and the Muslim League became the major political party of newly formed Pakistan. By 1953, however, dissensions within the League had led to the formation of several different political parties

Hindu Mahasabha

Separate Electorates

Separate electorate is a system of election to legislatures which divides voters along the lines of their religion or ethnicity; designed to ensure that each religious or ethnic group can elect their own representatives. In the <https://assignbuster.com/gandhi-the-hindu-muslim-gap/>

case of separate electorates, the voting population of a country or region is divided into different electorates, based on certain factors such as religion, caste, gender, and occupation. Here, members of each electorate votes only to elect representatives for their electorate. It was used in India, prior to Independence, to guarantee representation for religious minorities. Separate electorates have been criticized as socially divisive, and for privileging one aspect of social identity above all others.

In India's pre-independence era, when the Muslims in India demanded fair representation in power-sharing with the British government along with the Hindus, the British government provided for a separate electorate system for the Muslims. As a result, of the total 250 seats of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, 117 seats were kept reserved for the Muslims.

Efforts of Gandhi to bridge Hindu Muslim Gap

One of the greatest contributions of Mahatma Gandhi was his unparalleled attempt at Hindu- Muslim Unity. Although he could not accomplish this task at the end still he fought for its realisation throughout his life. He always said " Even if I am killed, I will not give up repeating the names of Ram and Rahim, which mean to me the same God. With these names on my lips, I will die cheerfully." He believed all religions to be true but not fallible. To Gandhiji Hindu-Muslim unity means unity not only between Hindu and Muslims but also between all those who believe India to be their home, no matter to what faith they belong. He believed that it was a criminal to quarrel over trivialities. Gandhiji knew that India could not attain freedom without Hindu - Muslim unity, so he worked for the cause. To attain freedom India had to be united as one nation, they had to fight together for a

common cause. He realized this and took advantage of this in the Khilafat issue.

The Khilafat movement (1919-1924) was a pan-Islamic, political protest campaign launched by Muslims in British India to influence the British government and to protect the Ottoman Empire during the aftermath of World War I. The position of Caliph was in danger and Ottoman Empire existence was short-lived, but the Caliph was the religious representative of the Muslims so they decided to launch a movement against the British. The Khilafat Movement was launched under the Ali Brothers, Gandhiji decided to support this movement to win the support of Muslims.

Gandhiji thus strived for Hindu – Muslim unity and considered Muslims as his brothers. Hindu – Muslim rivalry would cause partition of India which would result in a weak India, this was exactly what the British wanted. They wanted a weak and divided India as it would be easy to govern it. This partition would result in various riots and bloodshed, it would result in a divided India, thus Gandhiji was against the partition from the start

Mountbatten Plan

The actual division of British India between the two new dominions was accomplished according to what has come to be known as the 3 June Plan or Mountbatten Plan. Lord Mountbatten worked out a detailed plan for the transfer of power to the Indian people. It was announced at a press conference by Mountbatten on 4 June 1947, when the date of independence was also announced – 15 August 1947. The plan's main points were:

Hindus and Muslims in Punjab and Bengal legislative assemblies would meet and vote for partition. If a simple majority of either group wanted partition, then these provinces would be divided.

Sindh was to take its own decision.

The fate of North West Frontier Province and Sylhet district of Bengal was to be decided by a referendum.

India would be independent by 15 August 1947.

The separate independence of Bengal also ruled out.

A boundary commission to be set up in case of partition.

The Indian political leaders accepted the Plan on 2 June. It did not deal with the question of the princely states, but on 3 June Mountbatten advised them against remaining independent and urged them to join one of the two new dominions (India or Pakistan).

Rioting

The British conquest of India was accompanied by large-scale violence, sometimes directed toward the Indian civilian population. During the colonial wars of conquest, there were mass killings, but few are remembered.

Violence between Hindus and Muslims is one of the most publicized features of colonial India's history. Some, particularly Indian historian Gyan Pandey, hold that its characterization as violence between religious communities was "invented" by colonial administrators in the 19th century, and that it misrepresented forms of violence which were in fact extremely complex.

Others see in it a faithful reflection of the actual crystallization of communitarian identities based on religion, in response to certain colonial policies. Whichever is the case, Hindu-Muslim riots became a permanent feature of the Indian political scene in the first half of the twentieth century. The main reason for these riots were the divide and rule policy which had instigated everything. These riots were hindrance in India's independence because they made India weak and this is what the British wanted. If India was weak then their rule would become even stronger, as a result India was divided and Hindu Muslim riots are still prevalent.

Finally Partition of India

The British had laid their roots long ago, now the Hindu – Muslim rivalry had become severe and Partition of India now could not be stopped. The partition of India was the partition of British India on the basis of religious demographics. This led to the creation of the sovereign states of the Dominion of Pakistan (later the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of Bangladesh) and the Union of India (later Republic of India) which took place in 1947, on 14 and 15 August, respectively.

The partition of India was set forth in the Indian Independence Act 1947 and resulted in the dissolution of the Indian Empire and the end of the British Raj. With the decision in favour of partition made, the parties next faced this nearly impossible task of fixing a border between the new states. The Muslims occupied two main regions in the north on opposite sides of the country, separated by a majority-Hindu section. In addition, throughout most of northern India members of the two religions were mixed together – not to mention populations of Sikhs, Christians and other minority faiths. The Sikhs

campaigned for a nation of their own, but their appeal was denied. On August 14, 1947, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was founded.