

Post-War National Scenario

Two Strands of National Upsurge

Two basic strands of national upsurge can be identified during the last two years of British rule—

(i) tortuous negotiations involving the government, Congress and Muslim League, increasingly accompanied by communal violence and culminating in freedom and the partition.

(ii) sporadic, localised and often extremely militant and united mass action by workers, peasants and states' peoples which took the form of a countrywide strike wave. This kind of activity was occasioned by the INA Release Movement, Royal Indian Navy (RIN) revolt, Tebhaga movement, Worli revolt, Punjab Kisan Morchas, Travancore peoples' struggle (especially the Punnapra-Vayalar episode) and the Telangana peasant revolt.

When the government lifted the ban on the Congress and released the Congress leaders in June 1945, they expected to find a demoralised people. Instead, they found tumultuous crowds impatient to do something. Popular energy resurfaced after three years of repression. People's expectations were heightened by the release of their leaders. The Wavell Plan backed by the Conservative government in Britain failed to break the constitutional deadlock.

In July 1945, Labour Party formed the government in

Britain. Clement Attlee took over as the new prime minister and Pethick Lawrence as the new secretary of state for India.

In August 1945, elections to central and provincial assemblies were announced.

In September 1945, it was announced that a constituent assembly would be convened after the elections and that the government was working according to the spirit of the Cripps Offer.

■ Why a Change in Government's Attitude

1. The end of the War resulted in a change in balance of global power—the UK was no more a big power while the USA and USSR emerged as superpowers, both of which favoured freedom for India.

2. The new Labour government was more sympathetic to Indian demands.

3. Throughout Europe, there was a wave of socialist-radical governments.

4. British soldiers were weary and tired and the British economy lay shattered. (By 1945 the British government in London owed India £1.2 billion and was being drained by the US Lend-Lease agreement, which was finally paid off only in 2006.)

5. There was an anti-imperialist wave in South-East Asia—in Vietnam and Indonesia—resisting efforts to replant French and Dutch rule there.

6. Officials feared another Congress revolt, a revival of the 1942 situation but much more dangerous because of a likely combination of attacks on communications, agrarian revolts, labour trouble, army disaffection joined by government officials and the police in the presence of INA men with some military experience.

7. Elections were inevitable once the war ended since the last elections had been held in 1934 for the Centre and in 1937 for the provinces.

The British would have had to retreat; the Labour government only quickened the process somewhat.

Congress Election Campaign and INA Trials

Elections were held in the winter of 1945-46.

■ Election Campaign for Nationalistic Aims

The most significant feature of the election campaign was that it sought to mobilise the Indians against the British; it did not just appeal to the people for votes.

The election campaign expressed the nationalist sentiments against the state repression of the 1942 Quit India upsurge. This was done by glorifying martyrs and condemning officials. The brave resistance of the leaderless people was lauded; martyrs' memorials were set up; relief funds were collected for sufferers; the officials responsible for causing pain were condemned; and promises of enquiry and threats of punishment to guilty officials were spelt out.

The government failed to check such speeches. This had a devastating effect on the morale of the services. The prospect of the return of Congress ministries, especially in those provinces where repression had been most brutal, further heightened the fears of those in government services. A 'gentleman's agreement' with the Congress seemed necessary to the government.

Mass pressure against the trial of INA POWs, sometimes described as "an edge of a volcano", brought about a decisive shift in the government's policy. The British had initially decided to hold public trials of several hundreds of INA prisoners besides dismissing them from service and detaining without trial around 7,000 of them. They compounded the folly by holding the first trial at the Red Fort in Delhi in November 1945 and putting on dock together a Hindu, Prem Kumar Sehgal, a Muslim, Shah Nawaz Khan, and a Sikh, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon.

Another issue was provided by the use of Indian Army

units in a bid to restore French and Dutch colonial rule in Vietnam and Indonesia: this enhanced the anti-imperialist feeling among a section of urban population and the Army.

■ Congress Support for INA Prisoners

- At the first post-War Congress session in September 1945 at Bombay, a strong resolution was adopted declaring Congress support for the INA cause.
- Defence of INA prisoners in the court was organised by Bhulabhai Desai, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Kailash Nath Katju, Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali.
- INA Relief and Enquiry Committee distributed small sums of money and food, and helped arrange employment for the affected.
- Fund collection was organised.

■ The INA Agitation—A Landmark on Many Counts

The high pitch and intensity at which the campaign for the release of INA prisoners was conducted was unprecedented. The agitation got wide publicity through extensive press coverage with daily editorials, distribution of pamphlets often containing threats of revenge, graffiti conveying similar messages, holding of public meetings and celebrations of INA Day (November 12, 1945) and INA week (November 5-11).

The campaign spread over a wide area of the country and witnessed the participation of diverse social groups and political parties. While the nerve centres of the agitation were Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, United Provinces towns and Punjab, the campaign spread to distant places such as Coorg, Baluchistan and Assam. The forms of participation included fund contributions made by many people—from film stars, municipal committees, Indians living abroad and gurudwaras to tongawallas; participation in meetings;

shopkeepers closing shops; political groups demanding release of prisoners; contributing to INA funds; student meetings and boycott of classes; organising kisan conferences; and All India Women's Conference demanding the release of INA prisoners.

Those who supported the INA cause in varying degrees, apart from the Congress, included the Muslim League, Communist Party, Unionists, Akalis, Justice Party, Ahrars in Rawalpindi, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikh League.

Pro-INA sentiments surfaced in traditional bulwarks of the Raj. Government employees collected funds. The loyalists—the gentlemen with titles—appealed to the government to abandon the trials for good Indo-British relations. Men of the armed forces were unexpectedly sympathetic and attended meetings, received those released (often in uniforms) and contributed funds.

The central theme became the questioning of Britain's right to decide a matter concerning Indians. Britain realised the political significance of the INA issue, which with each day assumed more and more of an 'Indian versus British' colour.

Three Upsurges—Winter of 1945-46

The nationalist sentiment which reached a crescendo around the INA trials developed into violent confrontations with the authority in the winter of 1945-46. There were three major upsurges—

1. November 21, 1945—in Calcutta over the INA trials.
2. February 11, 1946—in Calcutta against the seven-year sentence to INA officer Rashid Ali.
3. February 18, 1946—in Bombay, strike by the Royal Indian Navy ratings.

■ Three-Stage Pattern

All three upsurges showed a similar three-stage pattern.

Stage I. When a Group Defies Authority and is Repressed

In the first instance of this stage (November 21, 1945), a student procession comprising some Forward Bloc sympathisers, Student Federation of India (SFI) activists and Islamia College students, who had joined up with the League and the Congress, tied flags as a symbol of anti-imperialist unity, marched to Dalhousie Square—the seat of government in Calcutta. These protestors refused to disperse and were lathicharged. They retaliated by throwing stones and brickbats. The police resorted to firing in which two persons died.

In the next step (February 11, 1946), the protest was led by Muslim League students in which some Congress and communist students' organisations joined. Some arrests provoked the students to defy Section 144. There were more arrests and the agitating students were lathicharged.

Rebellion by Naval Ratings On February 18, 1946 some 1100 Royal Indian Navy (RIN) ratings of *HMIS Talwar* went on a strike to protest against

- * racial discrimination (demanding equal pay for Indian and white soldiers)
- * unpalatable food
- * abuse by superior officers
- * arrest of a rating for scrawling 'Quit India' on *HMIS Talwar*
- * INA trials
- * use of Indian troops in Indonesia, demanding their withdrawal.

The rebellious ratings hoisted the tricolour, crescent, and the hammer and sickle flags on the mast of the rebel fleet. Other ratings soon joined and they went around Bombay in lorries holding Congress flags threatening Europeans and policemen. Crowds brought food to the ratings and shopkeepers invited them to take whatever they needed.

Stage II. When the City People Join In

This phase was marked by a virulent anti-British mood resulting in the virtual paralysis of Calcutta and Bombay. There were meetings, processions, strikes, hartals, and attacks on Europeans, police stations, shops, tram depots, railway stations, banks, besides stopping of rail and road traffic by squatting on tracks and barricading of streets.

Stage III. When People in Other Parts of the Country Express Sympathy and Solidarity

While the students boycotted classes and organised hartals and processions to express sympathy with other students and the ratings, there were sympathetic strikes in military establishments in Karachi, Madras, Visakhapatnam, Calcutta, Delhi, Cochin, Jamnagar, Andamans, Bahrain and Aden. There were strikes by the Royal Indian Air Force in Bombay, Poona, Calcutta, Jessore and Ambala.

Patel and Jinnah persuaded the ratings to surrender on February 23 with an assurance that national parties would prevent any victimisation.

■ Evaluation of Potential and Impact of the Three Upsurges

The three upsurges were significant in many ways:

- Fearless action by the masses was an expression of militancy in the popular mind.
- Revolt in the armed forces had a great liberating effect on the minds of people.
- The RIN revolt was seen as an event marking the end of British rule.
- These upsurges prompted the British to extend some concessions:

(i) On December 1, 1946, the government announced that only those INA members accused of murder or brutal treatment of fellow prisoners would be brought to trial.

(ii) Imprisonment sentences passed against the first batch were remitted in January 1947.

(iii) Indian soldiers were withdrawn from Indo-China and Indonesia by February 1947.

(iv) The decision to send a parliamentary delegation to India (November 1946) was taken.

(v) The decision to send Cabinet Mission was taken in January 1946.

But could the communal unity witnessed during these events, if built upon, have offered a way out of the communal deadlock? Or, in other words, what was the potential of these upsurges?

These upsurges were in the nature of direct and violent conflict with authority, which had obvious limitations. Only the more militant sections could participate.

These upsurges were short-lived and were confined to a few urban centres while the general INA agitation reached the remotest villages.

Communal unity witnessed was more organisational than a unity among the people. Muslim ratings went to the League to seek advice and the rest to the Congress and the Socialists.

Despite considerable erosion of the morale of the bureaucracy, the British infrastructure to repress was intact. They were soon able to control the situation. It was a Maratha battalion in Bombay that rounded up the ratings and restored them to their barracks.

■ Congress Strategy

The leftists claim that the Congress indifference to the revolutionary situation arose because of two considerations—that the situation would go out of its control and that a disciplined armed forces were vital in a free India. They also claim that if the Congress leaders had not surrendered to power play, a different path to independence would have emerged. But actually these upsurges were an extension of earlier nationalist activity fostered by the Congress through its election campaign, its advocacy of the INA cause and highlighting of the excesses of 1942.

These upsurges were distinguishable from the earlier activity because of their form of articulation. These were violent challenges to the authority while the earlier activity was a peaceful demonstration of national solidarity.

The Congress did not officially support these upsurges because of their tactics and timing.

Negotiations had been an integral part of the Congress strategy, to be explored before a mass movement could be launched, especially when the British were seen to be preparing to leave soon.

In Gandhi's opinion, the mutiny was badly advised: if they mutinied for India's freedom, they were doubly wrong; if they had any grievances, they should have waited for the guidance of leaders.

Election Results

■ Performance of the Congress

- It got 91 per cent of non-Muslim votes.
- It captured 57 out of 102 seats in the Central Assembly.
- In the provincial elections, it got a majority in most provinces except in Bengal, Sindh and Punjab. The Congress majority provinces included the NWFP and Assam which were being claimed for Pakistan.

■ Muslim League's Performance

- It got 86.6 per cent of the Muslim votes.
- It captured the 30 reserved seats in the Central Assembly.
- In the provincial elections, it got a majority in Bengal and Sindh.
- Unlike in 1937, now the League clearly established itself as the dominant party among Muslims.

In Punjab A Unionist-Congress-Akali coalition under Khizr Hayat Khan assumed power.

■ Significant Features of Elections

The elections witnessed communal voting in contrast to the strong anti-British unity shown in various upsurges due to

1. separate electorates; and
2. limited franchise—for the provinces, less than 10 per cent of the population could vote and for the Central Assembly, less than 1 per cent of the population was eligible.

The Cabinet Mission

The Attlee government announced in February 1946 the decision to send a high-powered mission of three British cabinet members (Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State for India; Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade; and A.V. Alexander, First Lord of Admiralty) to India to find out ways and means for a negotiated, peaceful transfer of power to India. (Pethick Lawrence was the chairman of the mission.)

■ Why British Withdrawal Seemed Imminent Now

1. The success of nationalist forces in the struggle for hegemony was fairly evident by the end of the War. Nationalism had penetrated into hitherto untouched sections and areas.

2. There was a demonstration in favour of nationalism among the bureaucracy and the loyalist sections; because the paucity of European ICS recruits and a policy of Indianisation had ended the British domination of the ICS as early as the First World War and by 1939, there existed a British-Indian parity. The long war had caused weariness and economic worries. Now only a depleted, war-weary bureaucracy battered by the 1942 events remained.

3. The British strategy of conciliation and repression had its limitations and contradictions.

- After the Cripps' Offer there was little left to offer for conciliation except full freedom.

- When non-violent resistance was repressed with force, the naked force behind the government stood exposed, while if the government did not clamp down on 'sedition' or made offers for truce, it was seen to be unable to wield authority, and its prestige suffered.

- Efforts to woo the Congress dismayed the loyalists.

This policy of an unclear mix presented a dilemma for the services, who nevertheless had to implement it. The prospect of Congress ministries coming to power in the provinces further compounded this dilemma.

4. Constitutionalism or Congress Raj had proved to be a big morale-booster and helped in deeper penetration of patriotic sentiments among the masses.

5. Demands of leniency for INA prisoners from within the Army and the revolt of the RIN ratings had raised fears that the armed forces may not be as reliable if the Congress started a 1942-type mass movement, this time aided by the provincial ministries.

6. The only alternative to an all-out repression of a mass movement was an entirely official rule which seemed impossible now because the necessary numbers and efficient officials were not available.

7. The government realised that a settlement was necessary for burying the ghost of a mass movement and for good future Indo-British relations.

Views

The British Cabinet saw the growing rift between the Congress and the Muslim League as their trump card... Both Linlithgow and the Cabinet looked to the rivalry of the Congress and the League as their most useful weapon against the demands of either.

B.R. Tomlinson

Our time in India is limited and our power to control events almost gone. We have only prestige and previous momentum to trade on and these will not last long.

Lord Wavell (October 1946)

Now the overarching aim of the British policy-makers was a graceful withdrawal, after a settlement on the modalities of the transfer of power and nature of post-imperial India-Britain relations.

■ On the Eve of Cabinet Mission Plan

The Congress demanded that power be transferred to one centre and that minorities' demands be worked out in a framework ranging from autonomy to Muslim-majority provinces to self-determination or secession from the Indian Union—but, only after the British left.

The British bid for a united and friendly India and an active partner in defence of the Commonwealth, because a divided India would lack in defence and would be a blot on Britain's diplomacy.

The British policy in 1946 clearly reflected a preference for a united India, in sharp contrast to earlier declarations. On March 15, 1946, the Prime Minister of Britain, Clement Attlee said: "...though mindful of the rights of minorities... cannot allow a minority to place their veto on advance of the majority." This was a far cry from the Shimla Conference where Wavell had allowed Jinnah to wreck the conference.

■ Cabinet Mission Arrives

The Cabinet Mission reached Delhi on March 24, 1946. It had prolonged discussions with Indian leaders of all parties and groups on the issues of

- (i) interim government; and
- (ii) principles and procedures for framing a new constitution giving freedom to India.

As the Congress and the League could not come to any agreement on the fundamental issue of the unity or partition of India, the mission put forward its own plan for the solution of the constitutional problem in May 1946.

■ Cabinet Mission Plan—Main Points

- Rejection of the demand for a full-fledged Pakistan, because

- (i) the Pakistan so formed would include a large non-Muslim population—38 per cent in the North-West and 48 per cent in the North-East;
- (ii) the very principle of communal self-determination would claim separation of Hindu-majority western Bengal and Sikh- and Hindu-dominated Ambala and Jullundur divisions of Punjab (already some Sikh leaders were demanding a separate state if the country was partitioned);
- (iii) deep-seated regional ties would be disturbed if Bengal and Punjab were partitioned;
- (iv) partition would entail economic and administrative problems, for instance, the problem of communication between the western and eastern parts of Pakistan; and
- (v) the division of the armed forces would be dangerous.

- Grouping of existing provincial assemblies into three sections:

Section-A: Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa (Hindu-majority provinces)

Section-B: Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Sindh (Muslim-majority provinces)

Section-C: Bengal and Assam (Muslim-majority provinces).

- Three-tier executive and legislature at provincial, section and union levels.

- A constituent assembly was to be elected by provincial assemblies by proportional representation (voting in three groups—General, Muslims, Sikhs). This constituent assembly would be a 389-member body with provincial assemblies sending 292, chief commissioner's provinces sending 4, and princely states sending 93 members.

(This was a good, democratic method not based on weightage.)

- In the constituent assembly, members from groups A, B and C were to sit separately to decide the constitution

for provinces and if possible, for the groups also. Then, the whole constituent assembly (all three sections A, B and C combined) would sit together to formulate the union constitution.

- A common centre would control defence, communication and external affairs. A federal structure was envisaged for India.

- Communal questions in the central legislature were to be decided by a simple majority of both communities present and voting.

- Provinces were to have full autonomy and residual powers.

- Princely states were no longer to be under paramountcy of the British government. They would be free to enter into an arrangement with successor governments or the British government.

- After the first general elections, a province was to be free to come out of a group and after 10 years, a province was to be free to call for a reconsideration of the group or the union constitution.

- Meanwhile, an interim government was to be formed from the constituent assembly.

■ Different Interpretations of the Grouping Clause

Each party or group looked at the plan from its own point of view.

Congress: To the Congress, the Cabinet Mission Plan was against the creation of Pakistan since grouping was optional; one constituent assembly was envisaged; and the League no longer had a veto.

Muslim League: The Muslim League believed Pakistan to be implied in compulsory grouping. (The Mission later clarified that the grouping was compulsory.)

■ Main Objections

Different parties objected to the Plan on different grounds.

Congress ● Provinces should not have to wait till the first general elections to come out of a group. They should have the option of not joining a group in the first place. (Congress had the Congress-ruled provinces of NWFP and Assam in mind which had been included in groups B and C respectively.)

- Compulsory grouping contradicts the oft-repeated insistence on provincial autonomy.

- Absence of provision for elected members from the princely states in the constituent assembly (they could only be nominated by the princes) was not acceptable.

League ● Grouping should be compulsory with sections B and C developing into solid entities with a view to future secession into Pakistan.

The League had thought that the Congress would reject the plan, thus prompting the government to invite the League to form the interim government.

■ Acceptance and Rejection

The Muslim League on June 6 and the Congress on June 24, 1946 accepted the long-term plan put forward by the Cabinet Mission.

July 1946 Elections were held in provincial assemblies for the Constituent Assembly.

Wavell's "Breakdown Plan"

Wavell presented his plan to the Cabinet Mission in May 1946. It visualised a middle course between "repression" and "scuttle". This plan envisaged the withdrawal of the British Army and officials to the Muslim provinces of North-West and North-East and handing over the rest of the country to the Congress. Though superseded by the Cabinet Mission Plan, Wavell's plan was an evidence of

- British recognition of the impossibility of suppressing any future Congress-led rebellion.

- desire in some high official circles to make a "Northern Ireland" of Pakistan.

July 10, 1946 Nehru stated, “We are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided to go into the Constituent Assembly (implying that the Constituent Assembly was sovereign and would decide the rules of procedure). The big probability is that there would be no grouping as NWFP and Assam would have objections to joining sections B and C.”

July 29, 1946 The League withdrew its acceptance of the long-term plan in response to Nehru’s statement and gave a call for “**direct action**” from August 16 to achieve Pakistan.

Communal Holocaust and the Interim Government

From August 16, 1946, the Indian scene was rapidly transformed. There were communal riots on an unprecedented scale, which left around several thousands dead.

The worst-hit areas were Calcutta, Bombay, Noakhali, Bihar and Garhmukteshwar (United Provinces).

■ **Changed Government Priorities**

Wavell was now eager to somehow get the Congress into the Interim Government, even if the League stayed out (a departure from Wavell’s stand during the Shimla conference). This attitude was against the League’s insistence that all settlements be acceptable to it and also against earlier government postures of encouraging communal forces, of denying the legitimacy of nationalism, and of denying the representative nature of Congress.

Thus, continuance of British rule had demanded one stance from Britain, and the withdrawal and post-imperial links dictated a contrary posture.

■ **Interim Government**

Fearing mass action by the Congress, a Congress-dominated Interim Government headed by Nehru was sworn in on

September 2, 1946 with Nehru continuing to insist on his party's opposition to the compulsory grouping.

Despite the title, the Interim Government was little more than a continuation of the old executive of the viceroy (Wavell overruled the ministers on the issue of the release of INA prisoners in his very last cabinet meeting in March 1947).

Wavell quietly brought the Muslim League into the Interim Government on October 26, 1946. The League was allowed to join

- without giving up the 'direct action';
- despite its rejection of the Cabinet Mission's long-term and short-term plans; and
- despite insistence on compulsory grouping with decisions being taken by a majority vote by a section as a whole (which would reduce the opponents of Pakistan in Assam and NWFP to a position of helpless minority).

14 Ministers of Interim Government (September 2, 1946–August 15, 1947)

1. **Jawaharlal Nehru:** Vice President of Executive Council, External Affairs and Common Wealth Relations
2. **Vallabhbhai Patel:** Home, Information and Broadcasting
3. **Baldev Singh:** Defence
4. **Dr. John Mathai:** Industries and Supplies
5. **C. Rajagopalachari:** Education
6. **C.H. Bhabha:** Works, Mines and Power
7. **Rajendra Prasad:** Agriculture and Food
8. **Jagjivan Ram:** Labour
9. **Asaf Ali:** Railway
10. **Liaquat Ali Khan (Muslim League):** Finance
11. **Ibrahim Ismail Chundrigar (Muslim League):** Commerce
12. **Abdur Rab Nishtar (Muslim League):** Communications
13. **Ghazanfar Ali Khan (Muslim League):** Health
14. **Jogendra Nath Mandal (Muslim League):** Law

■ **Obstructionist Approach and Ulterior Motives of League**

The League did not attend the Constituent Assembly which had its first meeting on December 9, 1946. Consequently, the Assembly had to confine itself to passing a general 'Objectives Resolution' drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru stating the ideals of an independent sovereign republic with autonomous units, adequate minority safeguards and social, political and economic democracy.

The League refused to attend informal meetings of the cabinet to take decisions.

The League questioned the decisions and appointments made by the Congress members.

Liaquat Ali Khan as the finance minister restricted and encumbered the efficient functioning of other ministries.

The League had only sought a foothold in the government to fight for Pakistan. For them, it was a continuation of the civil war by other means. The Congress demand that the British get the League to change its attitude in the Interim Government or quit was voiced ever since the League joined the Interim Government.

In February 1947, nine Congress members of the cabinet wrote to the viceroy demanding the resignation of League members and threatening the withdrawal of their own nominees. The last straw came with the League demanding the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. A crisis seemed to be developing rapidly.

Birth and Spread of Communalism in India

With the rise of nationalism, communalism appeared around the end of the nineteenth century. It proved to be a huge threat to the unity of the Indian people and the national movement. The legacy, unfortunately continues.

■ Characteristic Features of Indian Communalism

Communalism (more accurately ‘sectarianism’) is basically an ideology, which gives more importance to one’s own ethnic/religious group rather than to the wider society as a whole, evolved through three broad stages in India.

(i) **Communal Nationalism:** the notion that since a group or a section of people belong to a particular religious community, their secular interests are the same, i.e., even those matters which have got nothing to do with religion affect all of them equally.

(ii) **Liberal Communalism:** the notion that since two religious communities have different religious interests, they have different interests in the secular sphere also (i.e., in economic, political and cultural spheres).

(iii) **Extreme Communalism:** the notion that not only do different religious communities have different interests, but also that these interests are incompatible, i.e., two communities cannot co-exist because the interests of one community come into conflict with those of the other.

There is nothing unique about Indian communalism. It was the result of the conditions which have, in other societies, produced similar phenomena and ideologies such as Fascism, anti-Semitism, racism, the Catholic-Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland and the Christian-Muslim conflict in Lebanon.

Bypassing basic economic interests, the communalists claim to protect interests which do not necessarily exist.

Communalism is a modern phenomenon—rooted in the modern social, economic and political colonial structure—that emerged out of modern politics based on mass mobilisation and popular participation. Modern politics made it necessary for people to have wider links and loyalties and to form establish identities. This process involved the spread of modern ideas of nation, class and cultural-linguistic

identity. In India, religious consciousness was transformed into communal consciousness in some parts of the country and among some sections of the people.

Its social roots lay in the rising middle classes who propagated imaginary communal interests to further their own economic interests—communalism was a bourgeois question par excellence, according to the Left.

Communalists were backed in their communal campaign by the colonial administration. It was the channel through which colonialists expanded their social base.

Communalists and colonialists were helped in their sinister motives by the fact that often socio-economic distinctions in Indian society coincided with religious distinctions. The inherent class contradictions were given a post-facto communal colouring by the vested interests.

Conservative social reactionary elements gave full support to communalism.

Religiosity itself did not amount to communalism but in a country where lack of education and low awareness of the outside world was a sad reality, religion had the potential of becoming, and was used as, a vehicle of communalism.

■ Reasons for Growth of Communalism

Communalism grew in the modern economic, political and social institutions where new identities were emerging in a haphazard manner even as the old, pre-modern identities had not diminished. A clash of this fundamental dichotomy gave rise to a communal ideology.

Socio-economic Reasons

Religion did not actually dictate the economic and political interests of the Hindus and Muslims. One community (consisting of Hindus as well as Muslims) differed from another (also consisting of Hindus and Muslims) by language, culture, caste, social status, food and dress habits, social practices or customs and so on. Even socially and culturally the Hindu and the Muslim masses had developed common

ways of life: a Bengali Muslim has much more in common with a Bengali Hindu than with a Punjabi Muslim. Moreover, Hindus and the Muslims were equal victims of oppression and exploitation by British imperialism.

Modern Western thought and scientific ideas were not absorbed by Muslim intellectuals, who remained traditional and backward. Even when, as a result of the efforts of reformers, modern education spread among Muslims, the proportion of the educated was far lower among Muslims than among Hindus, Parsis or Christians. The Muslims also lagged behind as participants in the growth of trade and industry. As the number of educated persons and men of trade and industry among the Muslims was rather small, it was easy for the reactionary big landlords and the richer classes to continue to wield influence over the Muslim masses. Landlords and zamindars, whether Hindu or Muslim, supported the British rule out of self-interest. But, among the Hindus, the modern intellectuals and the rising commercial and industrialist class had taken over the leadership from the old order of landlords.

The educated Muslims found few opportunities in business or the professions; they inevitably looked for government employment. The British officials and the loyalist Muslim leaders incited the educated Muslims against the educated Hindus. Syed Ahmad Khan and others demanded special treatment for the Muslims in the matter of government service, on the one hand, and on the other told the Muslims that if the educated Muslims remained loyal to the British, the latter would reward them with government jobs and other special favours. The same arguments were used by some loyalist Hindus and Parsis with regard to their people, but they were in a small minority.

As a result of the underdevelopment due to colonial policies, there was a lack of industrial development; hence, unemployment was an acute problem in India, especially for the educated, and there was an intense competition for

Views

There has been a difference of a generation or more in the development of the Hindu and the Muslim middle classes, and that difference continues to show itself in many directions, political, economic, and other. It is this lag which produces a psychology of fear among the Muslims.

Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India*

He who does what is beneficial to the people of this country, be he a Muhammedan or an Englishman, is not alien. 'Alienness' has to do with interests. Alienness is certainly not concerned with white or black skin or religion.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

existing jobs. In the circumstances there were advocates of short-sighted and short-term solutions such as reservation in jobs on communal, provincial or caste lines. These persons aroused communal and religious and, later, caste and provincial passions in an attempt to get a larger share of the existing, limited employment opportunities. It was easy for those desperately searching for jobs for employment to fall prey to such ideas.

Because of the economic backwardness of India and rampant unemployment, there was ample scope for the colonial government to use concessions, favours and reservations to fuel communal and separatist tendencies. Also, modern political consciousness was late in developing among the Muslims and the dominance of traditional reactionary elements over the Muslim masses helped a communal outlook to take root.

There was talk of Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism. Politically immature, many Hindus as well as Muslims did not realise that the economic, educational and cultural difficulties they were experiencing were born out of their subjection to foreign rule and because of economic underdevelopment.

British Policy of Divide and Rule

Muslims were generally looked upon with suspicion initially, especially after the Wahabi and 1857 revolts, and were subjected to repression and discrimination by the British government. Also, the introduction of English education had undermined Arabic and Persian learning which added further to the economic backwardness and exclusion of the Muslims from service.

After the 1870s, with signs of the emergence of Indian nationalism and growing politicisation of the educated middle classes, the government reversed its policy of repression of Muslims and, instead, decided to rally them behind the government through concessions, favours and reservations, and used them against nationalist forces. The government used persons like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to counter the growing influence of the Congress. Syed Ahmed Khan had a broadminded and reformist outlook initially but later he started supporting the colonial government, exhorting the Muslim masses to stay away from the Congress and not to get politicised. He also started talking of separate interests of Hindus and Muslims.

Communalism in History Writing

Initially suggested by imperialist historians and later adopted by some chauvinist Indian historians, the communal interpretation of Indian history portrayed the ancient phase as the Hindu phase and the medieval phase (which included the rule of the Turks, the Afghans and the Mughals) as the Muslim phase. The conflicts of ruling classes during the

View

Communal harmony could not be permanently established in our country so long as highly distorted versions of history were taught in her schools and colleges, through the history textbooks.

M.K. Gandhi

medieval phase were distorted and exaggerated as Hindu-Muslim conflicts.

Historians ignored the fact that politics, ancient and medieval as of all times and anywhere, was based on economic and political interests and not on religious considerations. It was in the interests of the British and communal historians to refuse to acknowledge the notion of a composite culture in India. On its part, the Hindu communal view of history chose to project the view that Indian society and culture had reached ideal heights in the ancient period from which they began to decay in the medieval period because of 'Muslim' rule. In this, there was a refusal to acknowledge how Indian economy and technology, religion and philosophy, arts and literature, culture and society had developed and been enriched in the medieval period.

Side-effects of Socio-religious Reform Movements

Reform movements such as the Wahabi Movement among Muslims and Shuddhi among Hindus with their militant overtones made the role of religion more vulnerable to communalism. Reforms, at times, were seen as a process of insulating one community from the influence of another religious community.

Side-effects of Militant Nationalism

The early nationalists made conscious efforts to remove minority fears. Dadabhai Naoroji, presiding over the second Congress session (1886), declared the intentions of the Congress not to raise socio-religious questions in its forums. In 1889 the Congress decided not to take up any issue opposed by the Muslims. But later, with the coming of militant nationalism, a distinct Hindu nationalist tinge was palpable in the nationalist politics. For instance, Tilak's Ganapati and Shivaji festivals and anti-cow slaughter campaigns created much suspicion. Aurobindo's vision of an Aryanised world, the Swadeshi Movement with elements like dips in the Ganga and revolutionary activity with oath-taking before

goddesses were hardly likely to enthuse Muslims into these campaigns in a big way. The communal element in the Lucknow Pact (1916) and the Khilafat agitation (1920-22) was too visible to be of insignificant consequences.

When the Khilafat question came up, there was unease among some Congressmen who felt that the issue was not really nationalistic. The fight against imperialistic Britain in this case was not about the economic and political consequences of imperialism, but on the ground that the Caliph and some holy places of Islam were being threatened. The Muslims' sympathy for Turkey was on religious grounds. Even later, the heroes and myths and cultural traditions the Muslims appealed to belonged not to the history of India but to the history of West Asia. Though this tendency did not immediately clash with Indian nationalism, but in fact made its supporters anti-imperialist, in the longer term, it encouraged the habit of looking at political questions from a religious point of view.

Communal Reaction by Majority Community

The minority communalism met with a reaction from the majority community. From the 1870s itself, some Hindu zamindars, moneylenders and middle-class professionals began to give expression to anti-Muslim sentiments. They went to the extent of declaring that the British had liberated the land from Muslim tyranny and saved the Hindus from the oppression by Muslims. The cause of Hindi was given a communal colour by saying that Urdu was the language of the Muslims (which was not historically quite correct).

Then came organisations to promote a communal outlook. The Punjab Hindu Sabha, founded in 1909 by U.N. Mukherjee and Lal Chand, opposed the Congress for trying to unite Indians of all colours into a single nation. They argued that Hindus should side with the colonial government in their fight against Muslims. The All-India Hindu Mahasabha held its first session in April 1915 with the Maharaja of

Kasim Bazar as president. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was established in 1925. However, Hindu communalism was not a strong force for a long time as the modern secular intelligentsia and middle class among Hindus wielded a greater influence. This was not the case with the Muslims; the Muslim communal elements – landlords, traditional religious leaders and bureaucrats – exercised a lot of influence on the Muslims.

The one-upmanship of different versions of communal tendencies was a factor which deterred any effective counter-offensive against communalism.

■ Evolution of the Two-Nation Theory

The development of the two-nation theory over the years is as follows:

1887: There was a frontal attack on the Congress by Dufferin, the viceroy, and Colvin, the Lt. Governor of the United Provinces. Syed Ahmed Khan and Raja Shiv Prasad of Bhinga were propped up as an anti-Congress front by the government. Syed Ahmed Khan appealed to the educated Muslims to stay away from the Congress, although some Muslims did join the Congress. These included Badruddin Tyabji, Mir Musharraf Hussain, A. Bhimji and Hamid Ali Khan.

1906: Agha Khan led a Muslim delegation (called the Shimla delegation) to the viceroy, Lord Minto, to demand separate electorates for Muslims at all levels and that the Muslim representation should be commensurate not only with their numerical strength but also with their “political importance and their contribution to the British Empire”. Minto assured them of special communal representation in excess of their population for their “extraordinary service” to the empire.

The All India Muslim League was founded by the Agha Khan, Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Nawab Waqar-ul-Mulk to preach loyalty to the British

government and to keep the Muslim intelligentsia away from the Congress.

1909: Separate electorates were awarded under Morley-Minto Reforms.

Punjab Hindu Sabha was founded by U.N. Mukherji and Lal Chand.

1915: First session of All India Hindu Mahasabha was held under the aegis of the Maharaja of Kasim Bazar.

1912-24: During this period, the Muslim League was dominated by younger Muslim nationalists, but their nationalism was inspired by a communal view of political questions.

1916: The Congress accepted the Muslim League demand of separate electorates and the Congress and the League presented joint demands to the government. But the Congress and the League came together as separate political entities and the Congress gave political legitimacy to the existence of the Muslim League.

1920-22: Muslims participated in the Rowlatt and Khilafat Non-Cooperation agitations but there was a communal element in the political outlook of the Muslims.

1920s: The shadow of communal riots loomed large over the country. The Arya Samajists started Shuddhi (purification) and Sangathan (organisation) movements. The Shuddhi movement was aimed at reconverting to Hinduism those who had converted to Islam. The Muslims started the Tabligh and Tanzeem movements in retaliation.

Some nationalists also turned communal. The Swarajists were divided along communal lines and many of the Responsivists among them joined the Hindu Mahasabha. The Ali brothers, after having put up a spectacular united front with the Congress, accused the Congress of protecting only Hindu interests.

The Congress failed to evolve a suitable strategy to counter the rise of communalism.

1928: The Nehru Report on constitutional reforms as

suggested by the Congress was opposed by Muslim hardliners and the Sikh League. Jinnah proposed fourteen points demanding separate electorates and reservation for Muslims in government service and self-governing bodies. By negotiating with the Muslim League, the Congress made a number of mistakes:

1. It gave legitimacy to the politics of the League, thus giving recognition to the division of society into separate communities with separate interests.
2. It undermined the role of secular, nationalist Muslims.
3. Concessions to one community prompted other communities to demand similar concessions.
4. Launching an all-out attack on communalism became difficult.

1930-34: Some Muslim groups, such as the Jamaat-i-ulema-i-Hind, State of Kashmir and Khudai Khidmatgars participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement but overall the participation of Muslims was nowhere near the level of the Khilafat agitation. While the Congress stayed away from two of the three round table conferences held in London to discuss further constitutional reforms, the communalists attended all three of them.

1932: The Communal Award accepted all Muslim communal demands contained in the 14 points.

After 1937: After the Muslim League performed badly in the 1937 provincial elections, it decided to resort to extreme communalism. There began a tendency to project the Muslims, not as a minority but as a separate nation (in the early 1930s this idea of a separate Muslim nation was proposed by a young Muslim intellectual Rahmat Ali and later developed further by the poet Iqbal). From now onwards, communalism was organised as a mass movement with its base among middle and upper classes. Vicious propaganda was launched against the Congress by Z.A. Suleri, F.M. Durrani, Fazl-ul-Haq, etc. Extreme communalism was based on fear, hatred and violence of word and deed.

Till 1937 there had been liberal communalism, centred around safeguards and reservations. It was communal while upholding certain liberal, democratic, humanistic and nationalistic values and the notion that these diverse communities could be welded together into one nation in one national interest.

The extreme communalism of Muslims found its echo in the militant communal nationalism of Hindus represented by organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS and in the thoughts of leaders like Golwalkar. There were several reasons for the advent of extreme communalism.

1. With increasing radicalisation, the reactionary elements searched for a social base through channels of communalism.

2. The colonial administration had exhausted all other means to divide nationalists.

3. Earlier failures to challenge communal tendencies had emboldened the communal forces.

1937-39: Jinnah blocked all avenues for conciliation by forwarding the impossible demand that the Congress

Views

The question of majority and minority community is a creation of the British Government and would disappear with their withdrawal.

M.K. Gandhi

We divide and they rule.

Maulana Mohammad Ali

After 1940 it was clear as daylight to the Muslims that their real destiny was neither a second class citizenship in a uni-national Hindu state, nor even the doubtful partnership in a multinational India...but a separate nationhood with a separate homeland.

History of Freedom Movement of Pakistan

The independent sovereign nation of Pakistan was born in the Muslim University of Aligarh.

Agha Khan

should declare itself a Hindu organisation and recognise the Muslim League as the sole representative of the Indian Muslims.

March 24, 1940: The ‘Pakistan Resolution’ was passed at the Lahore session of the Muslim League calling for “grouping of all geographically contiguous Muslim majority areas (mainly north-western and eastern India) into independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign, and adequate safeguards to Muslims in other areas where they are in a minority”.

During Second World War The British India Government gave a virtual veto to the League on political settlement. The League made full use of this privilege and stuck to its demand of a separate Pakistan throughout the negotiations under the August Offer, Cripps’ proposals, Shimla Conference and Cabinet Mission Plan. Finally, it got what it had aspired for—an independent Pakistan comprising Muslim majority areas of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province and Bengal in 1947.

Summary

- **Last Two Years of British Rule**

- * **Two basic strands—**

1. Tortuous negotiations resulting in freedom and partition, accompanied by communal violence
2. Sporadic, localised mass action

- * **July 1945** Labour government comes to power in Britain
 - * **August 1945** Elections to central and provincial assemblies announced

- * **September 1945** Announcement of a Constituent Assembly after War

- * **A change in Government’s attitude due to**

- Change in global power equations; UK no longer a power
 - Labour government sympathetic to India
 - Tired British soldiers and shattered British economy
 - Anti-imperialist wave throughout Asia

Officials feared another Congress revolt

* **Two Main Election Planks for Congress**

1. Repression of 1942
2. Mass pressure against trial of INA POWs

* **INA Agitation—Main Features**

Had unprecedented high pitch and intensity

Had wide geographical and social spread

Penetrated traditional bulwarks of Raj—government employees and loyalists

With each day, became a purely India versus Britain issue

* **Three Upsurges**

1. November 21, 1945 in Calcutta over INA trials
2. February 11, 1946 in Calcutta over seven-year sentence to an INA officer
3. February 18, 1946 in Bombay, strike by Royal Indian Navy Ratings

Congress did not support these upsurges because of their timing and tactics

* **Election Results**

Congress won 57 out of 102 seats in Central Assembly;

— got majority in Madras, Bombay, UP, Bihar, Orissa and Central Provinces and coalition partner with Unionists and Akalis in Punjab

Muslim League won 30 reserved seats in Central Assembly; got majority in Bengal, Sindh

* **Why British Withdrawal Seemed Imminent by 1946**

1. Success of nationalist forces in struggle for hegemony
2. Demoralisation among bureaucracy and the loyalist sections
3. Limitations of British strategy of conciliation and repression
4. Demands of leniency for INA by army men and RIN ratings' revolt
5. An entirely official rule was impossible

* **Main Aim of Government Policy Now**

A graceful withdrawal after settlement on modalities of transfer of power, and post-imperial Indo-British relations

● **Cabinet Mission**

* **Proposals**

Rejection of Pakistan

Grouping of existing assemblies into three sections A, B, C
 Three-tier executive and legislature at province, princely states and union level

Provincial assemblies to elect a constituent assembly
 Common centre for defence, communications, external affairs

Provinces to have autonomy and residual powers

Princely states free to have an arrangement with the successor government or the British Government

In future, a province free to come out of the section or the union

Meanwhile, an interim government to be formed from constituent assembly.

* **Interpretation** Congress claimed that the grouping was optional while the League thought that the grouping was compulsory. Mission decided the matter in the League's favour

* **Acceptance** League, followed by Congress, accepted Cabinet Mission proposals in June 1946

* **Further Developments: July 1946** League withdrew from the Plan after Nehru's press statement, and gave a call for "direct action" from August 16, 1946

September 1946 An Interim Government headed by Nehru sworn in

October 1946 League joins Interim Government and follows an obstructionist approach

February 1947 Congress members demand removal of League members; League demands dissolution of Constituent Assembly

● Birth and Spread of Communalism in India