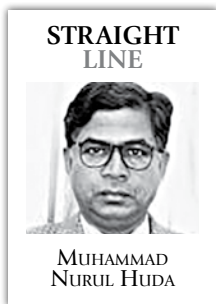


74 YEARS SINCE PARTITION

# Sectarian obstinacy and the Partition of 1947



**STRAIGHT LINE**  
**MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA**

FOR a significant number of people, including those who had ventured to understand the causes of the historic Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Indian Muslim psyche and the supportive separatist politics of that community (propounded and pursued by the Muslim League) were predominantly instrumental in the territorial divide along communal lines. However, it is important to also discuss the political ideology and tactics of the numerically dominant community who were in no small measure responsible for the hugely unsettling Partition as well.

From a historical perspective, it can be seen that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Indian political scene was dominated by mainly Hindu politicians. On the crucial question of mobilising Muslims, the Congress demand for elected councils was not liked by prominent Muslim leaders owing to the fear of Hindu majority rule. The Hindu dominated Congress leadership were not particularly concerned about these apprehensions, as no rival Muslim political organisation came into being until 1906.

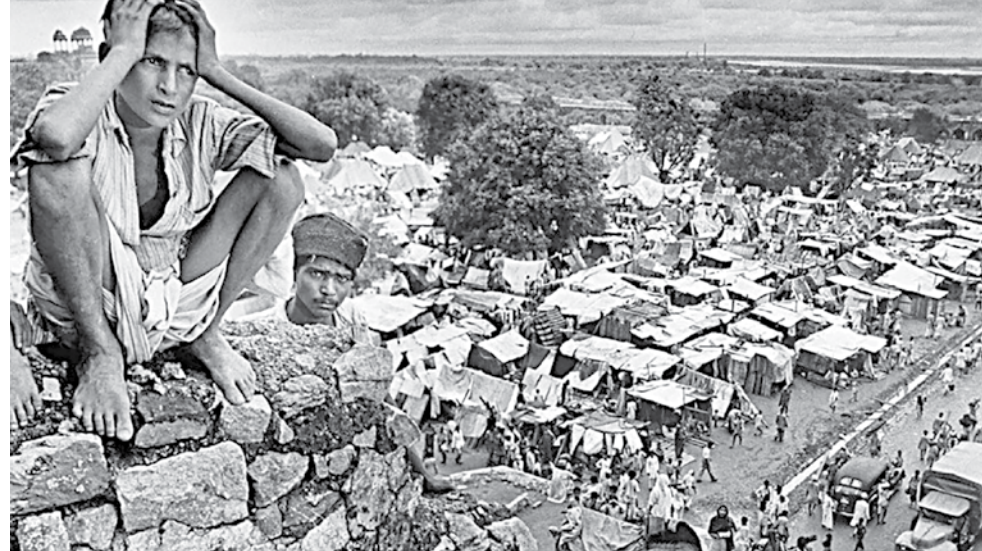
cow was not regarded as sacred or inviolable. To the politician, "the cow question was merely a war cry to arouse the lethargic Hindus".

The increasing need for mobilisation along community lines marked by Hindu revivalism gradually became an established political force. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, nationalism came to be associated with Hindu religious revivalist ideas. Such developments inevitably led to the unhappy consequence of alienating Muslims, who

It is significant to note that mainstream Indian nationalism under the stewardship of the Indian National Congress could not maintain its separation from the blooming Hindu nationalism. Interestingly enough, the Muslims, by no means a homogeneous community with a visible political opinion in the late 19th century, had sectarian differences, linguistic barriers and economic disparities. It was the colonial authorities who largely helped the Muslims in building an image of a homogeneous "religio-political

Muslim politics. They demanded an All India Muslim University as a cultural centre of Pan-Indian Islam. The older Muslim leaders and the colonial bureaucracy felt the urgent need for a political organisation for mobilising the Muslim community against the Congress, and also to offer an independent political platform. A clear shift of emphasis from community based on common descent, to a community based on allegiance, to a common faith, became noticeable. Added to this was a fear of the Hindu nationalist

a separate electorate provided an official legitimacy to their minority status and the separate political identity of Indian Muslims, with the Muslim League representing its public face. However, according to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, it was the resounding victory of the Indian National Congress that "gradually brought all... divergent groups together under the banner of a revived and revitalised Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah".



**A young boy sits on the walls of Purana Qila in New Delhi. The 16th century fortress turned into one of Delhi's biggest refugee camps as the capital struggled with a refugee crisis amid spurts of communal rioting.** PHOTO: MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION

became suspicious of Hindu majority rule. Political programmes naturally necessitated mass mobilisation and religion was seen as a means to reach the masses. Hindu religious revivalism, therefore, was a main feature of the then emerging politics. The *Bhagavad Gita* became a source of spiritual inspiration for "Swadeshi" volunteers and Hindu religious symbols and imagery were frequently used. This quite clearly alienated the Muslims, who felt that the Hindu religion was expected to become the bond of unity for the whole nation.

community". As Mushirul Hasan explains in *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, many Muslims "began to see themselves in the colonial image of being unified, cohesive, and segregated from the Hindus", and the efforts to homogenise started to construct a Muslim community identity that was later "enlarged into Muslim nationhood".

The Muslim political leaders largely influenced by the "Ulama" rediscovered the inspiration of Islam as a mobilising force. This resulted in a gradual Islamisation of

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demand of annulment of the partition of Bengal, to the disadvantage of Bengali Muslims.

In such circumstances, at the Dacca Educational Conference on December 30, 1906, a new party by the nomenclature of All India Muslim League was launched to safeguard the political rights and interests of Muslims. At this point, the majority of educated Muslims had already decided to tread a different path, quite distinct from the so-called nationalist agitation.

It would be relevant to recall here that the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 provided for reserved seats for Muslims in imperial and provincial legislatures. The granting of

Noted historian Joya Chatterji in *Bengal Divided* wrote that, in Bengal at least, the larger and powerful segment of Hindu preferred Partition to avoid being ruled by Muslims (in a similar vein to how many Muslims in other regions feared Hindu majority rule). To prevent this, Hindu leaders exhorted their fellow community members of Hindu majority districts to press for a separate state in the Indian Union. In Bengal, the Hindus created a distinct parallel separatist tone and the Bengal Congress successfully led the movement to divide their own province on a communal basis. Even the last ditch attempts of prominent leaders like Sarat Chandra Bose, KS Roy and HS Suhrawardy to create a united sovereign Bengal was deliberately foiled by the Bengal Congress, which was being aggressively prodded by the communal outfit of the Hindu Mahasabha.

The electoral arrangements introduced by the British colonial rulers in India in the 20th century, along with the Communal Award (which extended the separate electorate to Depressed Classes and other minorities), caused significant loss of political power and privileges hitherto exclusively enjoyed by the *bhadralok* (Hindu Bengali gentry). The emerging assertion of other political powers had to be challenged, and the spectre of Hindu communalism manifested as the most effective weapon. The irony is that the same quarter that waged an all-out movement and succeeded in unsettling the settled fact of the Partition of Bengal in 1911, succeeded once more in 1947, in playing an important role in the fateful Partition of the entire subcontinent.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former IGP of Bangladesh.

## Partition: Looking back to heal and not hurt



**PALLAB BHATTACHARYA**

ON two successive days on August 14 and 15, 2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked about the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent and its catastrophic fallout on millions of people. On the first day, he took to his official Twitter handle to announce the observance of August 14 as "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day" every year. The next day, he reiterated the same during his customary address to the nation from the rampart of the Red Fort in Delhi on the occasion of the 75th Independence Day of India, and described the decision as an "emotional" one in memory of all the victims of Partition.

"While we celebrate our freedom today, we cannot forget the pain of Partition that still pierces through the heart of all Indians. This has been one of the biggest tragedies of the last century. After attaining freedom, these people were forgotten too soon. Those who were subjected to inhumane circumstances, suffered torturous treatment, they could not even receive a dignified cremation. They must all remain alive and never get erased from our memories. The decision of celebrating Partition Horrors Remembrance Day on the 75th Independence Day is a befitting tribute from every Indian to them," said Modi in his Independence Day speech. This was the first time Modi gave such a call

since assuming power for the first time more than seven years ago.

The significance of making the announcement on August 14 cannot be missed. The independence of India and Pakistan was born out of a two-nation theory based on religion, effected by the British colonial power, that tore asunder the lives of people in the subcontinent, leaving indescribable pain and a deep sense of loss of families, friends, relatives, and home and hearth.

Understandably, Modi's remarks evoked mixed responses and set off discussions in both the traditional and social media. The main question emerging from those discussions is: why did he choose August 14 and 15 to raise the Partition issue? Why did Modi dig up the past to look at India's future, 75 years after Partition? *The Indian Express*, in its report on August 15, quoted an unnamed "highly-placed official" drawing "a parallel with how other countries mark dark chapters of their history: Holocaust, Slave Trade and Bangladesh's March 25 as Genocide Day..."

The reaction of leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party, including its President JP Nadda, left little doubt about the political context of Modi's decision. Nadda talked about "appeasement politics" in a reference to criticise the Congress party. Another senior BJP leader, BL Santhosh, was more forthcoming when he tweeted that the "Nehruvian legacy and its proponents tried to whitewash the (Partition) tragedy fearing accountability." This was clearly aimed at the legacy of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. "Appeasement" has been a key component of BJP's anti-Congressism

over the decades and an important part of its nationalistic agenda.

Predictably, the Congress and other opposition parties accused Modi of playing "polarising politics" over the sacrifice and trauma of the Partition. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala cited a letter from Modi written to Pakistan PM Imran Khan congratulating the neighbouring country on March 22, the day Muslim League passed the Partition Resolution in 1940. Surjewala suggested that the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day call was made keeping in mind the coming assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab early next year.

There is nothing wrong in delving into the past to take lessons from it, especially from how the colonial power drew an arbitrary line to divide a subcontinent and injected seeds of religious strife to rule. Remembering the past should also be an occasion to introspect if a section of the people and parties played into the hands of the colonial rulers over Partition. The



**Overcrowded train transferring refugees during Partition in 1947. This was considered to be the largest migration in human history.** PHOTO: ARCHIVES

*To remember the sufferings of only one side of Partition and ignore the other is selective amnesia. How fruitful would it be to recall the horrors of Partition after 75 years?*

prime minister made a cogent case for revisiting Partition in order to "remove the poison of social divisions, disharmony and strengthen the spirit of oneness, social harmony and human empowerment."

However, it must be recognised that any discussion on Partition has the potential to make passions run high, with trading of blame for the sufferings that make up the collective trauma in all countries of the subcontinent. To remember the sufferings of only one side of Partition and ignore the other is selective amnesia. How fruitful would it be to recall the horrors of Partition

after 75 years, particularly for new generations?

A society that does not learn from the past is susceptible to faltering again. That is why the utility of the annual exercise of recalling Partition depends, to a large extent, on how and to what end it is used. In looking back, there should be no reopening of old wounds (though some of it may not be altogether unavoidable). Instead, there should be a sober reflection as to how the scars of Partition can be healed.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent of *The Daily Star*. He writes from New Delhi, India.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**ERNEST HEMINGWAY**  
 (1899-1961)  
 American novelist

*Never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Check for purity
- 6 Garden aids
- 11 Common street name
- 12 Tibia's end
- 13 Island ring
- 14 Shopworm
- 15 Emulates Drake
- 17 Slightly
- 18 Feel sorry for
- 20 Whittle down
- 22 Lob path
- 23 Moose's cousin
- 26 From the Arctic
- 28 Jupiter has 79
- 29 Zoo residents
- 31 Put away
- 32 Cristmas travelers
- 33 Spur on

**DOWN**

- 1 "I - Rock"
- 2 Was inactive
- 3 New Olympics sports in 2021
- 4 Soothe
- 5 Puppy sound
- 6 Holds
- 7 Smallest Great Lake
- 8 New Olympics
- 9 First name in sport in 2021
- 10 Plant starter
- 16 Sauna site
- 18 One of a bear trio
- 19 Golfer's choice
- 21 Prepares for war
- 23 Outcropping
- 24 Aware of
- 25 Not new
- 27 Stockpiles
- 30 Set fire to
- 33 Kilt pattern
- 34 Skater Lipinski
- 35 Flock response
- 37 Eyeball
- 39 Harden
- 41 Casual shirt
- 42 Fourth-yr. students

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**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

V	A	S	T	E	S	P	A	N	A
E	C	H	O	Z	E	A	L	O	T
I	R	O	N	R	E	S	I	D	E
N	E	W	S	C	A	S	T		
T	R	O	L	L	O	L	L	I	E
Y	E	W							O
K	E	N	T	S	H	E	W	E	D
E	D	S	E	L	O	L	D		
S	O	I	R	E	E	A	W	A	Y
A	R	R	I	V	E	S	N	I	P
T	E	A	S	E	R	O	S	L	O

**BEETLE BAILEY** BY MORT WALKER

WOW, ZERO! OUT OF TEN SHOTS, YOU GOT TEN BULLSEYES!

WE USED TO SHOOT CANS OFF THE FENCE ALL THE TIME ON THE FARM

I CAN PUT A BULLET THROUGH A BUTTON AT 30 PACES

IF THE ENEMY IS SMART THEY'LL HAVE UNIFORMS WITH ZIPPERS

**BABY BLUES** BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

AWA! I CAUGHT YOU RESEARCHING COOL FAMILY VACATIONS, DIDN'T I?

YES, BUT IT'S A SURPRISE. DON'T LOOK!

LIAR. ORDERING A KNEE BRACE SOUNDED LAUGHING.