

The Partition of India

Renowned scholar and historian James Mill in his famous book, *The History of British India*, traced the history of India in three periods—Hindu, Muslim and British. He named the first two periods on the basis of religion, but did not refer to the third period as Christian, rather he called it British. Never before had the pre-British historical periods been referred to on the basis of religions. By doing this, James Mill, an imperialist historian, had pioneered the concept of communalism and laid the foundation for its growth in the future.

BADRUDDIN UMAR

A unique feature of Indian history is that over thousands of years people of different nationalities had entered India in large numbers. This has not happened anywhere else. These outsiders had attacked India and looted valuables, but they did not return to their home country. They continued to live in India. But there were only three exceptions – Alexander of Greece, Mahmud of Ghazni and Nadir Shah from Iran. Despite a few exceptions, however, it can be said that these foreign attackers did not come with the intention of looting and returning to their countries. They came from Central Asia and other regions to settle permanently in India and remained here in large numbers. In ancient times, the Aryans attacked India and settled here. These outsiders subsequently played a significant role in molding the culture and civilization of India. One cannot conceive Hindu religion and culture without the Aryans. After the Aryans, the Sakas, Huns, Turkish, Pathans and Moghuls came and stayed back in India.

After the discovery of North and South America, Europeans went forth to conquer those countries and began to live there too. But that situation was very different from outsiders who came to attack India and settled here. The Europeans killed numerous Native Americans, threatening to make them extinct and trapping them in forced isolation. They could not contribute in any way to the governance or culture of the New World. The Aryans destroyed

the Hindus and the Muslims. Even Aurangzeb, who was anti-Hindu and razed some Hindu temples, gave financial aid to many Hindu temples and recruited Hindus to administrative posts and also in his army. Aurangzeb never tried to create a rift between the Muslims and the Hindus. This policy was in place until the end of the Mughal rule.

Since the seventeenth century when European trade began to expand, European traders started coming to India, especially to regions around the Pacific Ocean for business purposes. By the eighteenth century, they had established their strong presence in India. Among them, the English traders were in the majority and to facilitate their commerce, they employed defense troops in southern and eastern parts of India. This need for a security force was also triggered by the competition and hostility among the European countries. The English and French were at the forefront of these measures.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the English fortified their security in Bengal and Madras and continued to expand their business interests. In the process, they collided with the ruling Nawabs of Bengal and their relations deteriorated. There were armed clashes and eventually, the English defeated the independent ruling Nawab, and put subservient Nawabs in position who would do their biddings. This resulted in the East India Company taking administrative control in Bengal, and later in some other regions. This control remained

Before the British took power, many elite Muslims and others held senior positions in the administration and the army. These jobs became the basis of class divisions. The elimination of these jobs, along with the fact that even during the Mughal and Nawabi periods, they could not acquire the status of a landowner or zamindar, threw these Muslims into a financial crisis. Poverty undermined the lives of thousands. Their circumstances became dire because they had refused to learn the English language and avail other opportunities offered by the British. They remained far behind the Hindus in education and in socio-political and economic status.

After the sepoy mutiny of 1857, the Muslims realized that they had made a big blunder by not availing themselves of the resources offered by the British and were thus lagging behind for a hundred years. Now they took the initiative to rectify that mistake. By this time, the rule of the East India Company was over, and the British monarchy was now ruling directly. The issue of improving education for the Muslims was given attention, and some other benefits were also extended to them. Some job opportunities were also provided for the Muslims.

Until then, the Hindus had absolute access to all the services offered by the British authorities. Now that the Muslims had entered the game, they became competitors. The Hindus began to feel that part of what was originally theirs was now being given to the Muslims; they were being forced to enter into a competition and were deprived of their monopoly.

Thus, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a conflict arose between the Hindus and the Muslims. This was the beginning of Hindu nationalism. In the eighteen sixties, under the leadership of Nabagopal Mitra and Rajnarayan Basu, an assembly was arranged where it was proclaimed that the Hindus were a separate nation. This announcement of nationhood was given with the purpose of creating a division between the Hindus and the Muslims. Later Bankim Chandra became a strong spokesman of this nationhood. At that time, Abdul Latif and Syed Ameer Ali in Bengal and Sir Syed Ahmed in Uttar Pradesh emerged as leaders of the Muslim community. They initiated various efforts for the development of Muslims and even lobbied with the British government for additional resources. However, they never presented Muslims as a separate nation or made an announcement to that effect. It was not until 1940 when Muslim League's Lahore Resolution was passed that the concept of a separate nationhood for Muslims came into being.

In the nineteenth century, the word 'communalism' was not in vogue. In the twentieth century, the British were the first to call the Hindu-Muslim conflict as 'communalism'. But even without the idea of communalism, the competition between the Hindus and the Muslims in the latter half of the nineteenth century had sown the seed of communalism. Later in the early twentieth century, this discord and unpleasant competition triggered a hostility that had a powerful effect on the political situation in the thirties and forties. Not only that, but it became a decisive factor in the turn of events.

The British government had deliberately contrived to create this situation. When, after the sepoy mutiny in 1857, they offered educational facilities and other opportunities for Muslims, their main purpose was to create tensions and make Hindus and Muslims fellow-contenders and engage in bitterness. They adopted this policy of creating divisiveness in order to secure their own power and ensure a smooth reign for themselves. They also began to influence the study of history. Renowned scholar and historian James Mill in his famous book, *The History of British India*, traced the history of India in three periods—Hindu, Muslim and British. He named the first two periods on the basis of religion, but did not refer to the third period as Christian, rather he called it British. Never before had the pre-British historical periods been referred to on the basis of religions. By doing this, James Mill, an imperialist historian, had pioneered the concept of communalism and laid the foundation for its growth in the future. He was indeed successful in doing this. During the British reign, the history that Indians studied was molded on the ideas propagated by James Mill and this helped to further disseminate the notion of communalism.

The difference in the status of Hindus and Muslims in the nineteenth century triggered a crisis in the politics of the twentieth century. That is why it is impossible to understand the politics of the twentieth century without a thorough discussion and deliberation about the situation in the nineteenth century. The strife between Hindus and Muslims vying for secure jobs that occurred in the nineteenth century had escalated in the twentieth century to contest and contention

among capitalists seeking power. The consequence of this was the partition of India.

With the growth of capitalism, the interests of different capitalist countries collided. This collision created warlike hostilities and led to war. England and France engaged in war for a very long time. The first and second world wars were fought among different capitalist countries. But within one country the different components of capitalism did not cause any friction. In India, however, the capital of Hindus and Muslims became divided. There was an unhealthy contention and discord between them. As a result of this, the battle of capital took the shape of communal riots in the politics of India was an important one.

The independence movement in India was delayed. Before 1927, the political parties did not ask for independence. When the movement did start, it did not identify the British as enemies and did not proceed to castigate them. The movement was to put pressure on the British to hand over the reins of the government to the Indians. Their strategy was to request and seek approval from the British. Maulana Mohammad Ali called this a 'Begging and Praying Politics.'

There was no unity in the Indian struggle for independence. Since the thirties a divisiveness formed. As a result, the level of Hindu-Muslim hostility was far greater than the opposition towards the British. This animosity, in fact, led to the partition of India. Hindu, Muslim, Congress, League all contributed to the break-up of India.

Because the independence movement was meant to put pressure and leaned towards compromise, neither the Congress nor the Muslim League harbored strong aversions towards the British. "Movement" and discussions about compromise went hand-in-hand as the independence movement progressed. To avoid direct confrontation, Gandhi promoted non-violence, which became the mainstay of their politics. The Muslim League also did not have any hostility or armed conflict with the British. In the 1940s, they chanted the slogan "We will fight to win Pakistan," but their fight was not against the British, but against the Congress and the Hindus.

It is to be noted that Gandhi's non-violence was applicable only to Indians. The basic tenet of this philosophy of non-violence was that Indians should not engage in any violence during their independence movement, but there was no mention of violence committed by the British. Gandhi was against people's violence in Chauri Chaura, but he was completely silent about the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and his lack of protest drew a negative reaction even from Rabindranath Tagore. Gandhi also criticized the Indian forces who, in demonstrating their patriotic protest to the British, refused to shoot at the public in the Qissa Khwani Bazaar in Peshawar. Gandhi was against the actions of Bhagat Singh, and when the British hanged him, Gandhi did not raise his voice and remained mute.

The independence movement against British was mainly constitutional. Both Jinnah and Gandhi, because of their class, wanted to limit the movement within the framework of the parliament. In fact, Muslim League was never engaged in any active opposition or agitation against the ruling power. Under Gandhi's leadership, the Congress would lead a non-violent movement and try to keep it within the framework of the constitution. If ever the situation became violent or threatened to become so, Gandhi would intervene and stop its escalation.

During the independence movement, the Congress and Muslim League constantly kept in touch with the ruling British authorities in India and held discussions with them. These discussions played a guiding role in the forties. Arrangements for the transfer of power ultimately took place after talks with the Viceroy, the dialogue at the Shimla convention, and discussions with Cabinet Mission, and with Mountbatten.

In the forties, the Congress League independence movement focused predominantly on the division of power and apportioning shares. In 1944, the long talks between Jinnah and Gandhi that lasted for several days and ended without any agreement could only be called a scandalous affair. The independence movement did not focus on the actual enemy, the British government in India. The way this movement emphasized the Congress-League relations was very different from freedom movements in other countries and can be called a rare and exceptional event.

In this conflict of dividing and sharing, the main enemy, the British government, played the role of a mediator. The ruling British, the

Congress, and Muslim League sat at one table and finalized discussions about the handing over of power. This was a conspiracy against the people of India. They pulled the wool over the eyes of the people and betrayed them as they partitioned India.

The Hindu-Muslim or Congress-League antagonism would not have resulted in the partition, nor would there be communal riots and clashes and deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent people if the freedom struggle had been allowed to follow its own course and the policy of non-violence had not been adopted. Gandhi announced and followed his philosophy of non-violence, and Jinnah with his silent support of non-violence did not allow the freedom struggle against the British to gain momentum. Thus, the passion and turbulence created did not target the British but actually victimized the Indians. Its extreme form was revealed in communal riots and their atrocities.

In any movement, struggle, or war, it is crucial to recognize the real enemy. The independence of India was not possible without the abolition of British rule in India, but the politicians of India did not pinpoint this truth as they progressed. They did not view the British as an enemy, rather sought to make compromises with them, and it was this perspective that led to the events that followed. In the thirties and again in the forties, instead of zeroing in on the British as their prime enemy, the Hindus and Muslims became each other's foes, and the Congress and Muslim League were at loggerheads. Because of the efficacy of their diplomats in this situation, the British evolved from being an enemy to becoming a mediator.

Even the communists did not stand up against the British; rather, within the framework of constitutional politics, they made efforts to unify the Congress and Muslim League and asked them to resolve their differences. In 1944, when the Gandhi-Jinnah talks ended in futility, the Communist leader P.C. Joshi wrote his book titled *They Shall Meet Again*. The communists did not fight for independence on their own but chose to remain within the orbit of Congress and League.

Due to the exploitation and oppression of the British, the general public had started to feel a resentment and resistance that grew into a vital force. But because of the ineffective movement, the British never became the prime target of the struggle. There was no consolidated or unified struggle; only the seeds of divisiveness were sown into it.

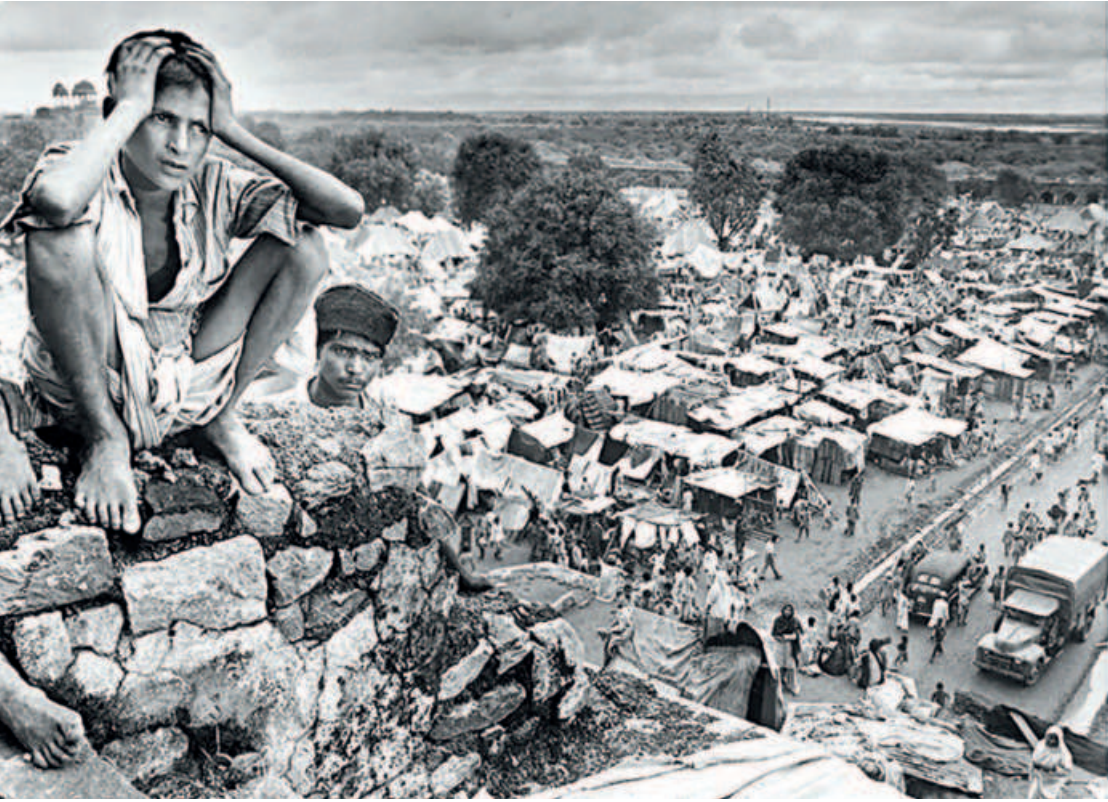
The middle class that actively took part in the independence movement and provided leadership was the product of the land reforms and job opportunities given by the British. Another important factor was that the capitalists who influenced the Congress and League had reached that position after being patronized by the British and continued to be dependent on their goodwill. They maintained a compromising relationship with the imperialists. Stalin, in 1925, had commented that India's local capital had surrendered to the imperial capital. Because of these class distinctions, those who played a vital role in the Indian struggle for freedom were spineless and deferential.

Those who led the Indian independence movement did not actually represent the masses. They represented landowners, zamindars and capitalists. The far-reaching ambit and command of Birla over Gandhi, Nehru and Patel was not hidden from anyone. In submission to the demand and interests of Birla, Tata, et al, Congress divided India and Bengal. Jinnah liked landowning nawabs, knights, the Adamjees and Ispahanis. The Muslim League represented the weaker sections of Muslim landowners, zamindars, and capitalists and demanded Pakistan for them.

India's compromising political leadership, unlike the leadership in China's war of freedom, did not allow the freedom struggle in India to follow its own pace and reach its potential. A turbulent and persistent resistance against an enemy creates its own solidarity. Otherwise, grounds for differences emerge to the fore. This is what happened in India. The Congress and Muslim League negotiated and compromised with the British, remained within the parliamentary framework, and launched their so-called independence movement. This led to the growth of communalism and gave the British the scope and opportunity to devise the handover of power according to their own terms and conditions. The division of India and Bengal was the inevitable consequence.

Translated from Bangla by Parveen K. Elias

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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 by Margaret Bourke-White/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)

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the Mohenjo-daro and Harappa civilizations that were far superior to their own. The Aryans were involved mainly in animal husbandry, and their culture mingled with the culture of ancient India. This blend resulted in the Aryan culture transforming Indian culture. In a way, it can be said that Aryan culture had made pre-Aryan Indian culture its own in many ways. What is known as Indian Hindu culture today was actually influenced by the foreign Aryans.

After the Aryans, the Sakas, Huns, Arabs, Iranians, Turkish, Pathans and Mughals attacked and conquered India and settled in this land. In Rabindranath's words, they had all merged into one body. These outsiders did not look at the Indians as enemies and did not try to disassociate from them. Rather, they sought to be at one with the Indians and strengthen their own position in this land. They did not try to create divisions, but tried to maintain unity for their own safety and well-being.

The Arabs, Turkish, Pathans and Mughals who came and ruled over India were different from former conquerors in one significant way. They stayed in India and adopted Indian customs, but did not forego their religion like those who had entered India before them. These peoples were followers of Islam and maintained their religious beliefs. However, though Islam and Hinduism remained independent of each other, they influenced each other. This was most strongly evident in the spheres of culture.

Though belonging to a separate religious belief, the Muslim rulers strove to maintain cordial relations between Hindus and Muslims as a way of fortifying their reign. This strategy was pursued throughout the reigns of the Sultans and the Mughals and the Pathans. Alauddin Khilji and later Akbar distanced themselves from fervent religiosity and tried to unite

steady until the 1857 sepoy mutiny. After the mutiny, the government of England disbanded the company's rule and directly began to rule India.

The outsiders who had attacked India before the British had come with the intention of settling here and had done so. But the Europeans had come to India with a different purpose. They had come for commercial profiteering. When the British usurped power in Bengal, it was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England. Soon, Bengal and other regions of India became a market for the manufactured goods of England. Thus began widespread plundering, which resulted in enormous financial gains that made a great contribution to the industrial growth and prosperity of England.

After grabbing power in Bengal in 1757, the British went about administrative reforms within their jurisdiction. They initiated land reform and established a new, permanent structure. This new system not only affected the economy but had far-reaching consequences in the social and political spheres of the region. In the nineteenth century, a new middle class came into being under this system. Later, becoming more influential, they played a vital role in defining the politics of Bengal and other regions. For purposes of administration, the British modernized the education system. Until 1835, Persian was the administrative language, but by the early nineteenth century, more importance was being given to the study of the English language.

During the reign of the East India Company, Hindus took full advantage of all facilities such as education and other offerings. Muslims, on the other hand, believed that the rule of the Mughals was their own, and the British were an alien force. They were not inclined to accept the opportunities created by the British, not even the chance to learn the English language.