

PARTITION: THE PANDORA'S BOX

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ABSTRACT

India was partitioned in 1947. The scar continuous to linger because of the causalities involved in it. The process of division became complicated due to the different lines of thinking within the Congress, an attitude of the Muslim League and compulsions of the British. A hangover of partition is still felt when the forces of sub-nationalism raise their heads in both India and Pakistan. An attempt has been made to present the complications of the period by synchronizing both the internal and external factors putting a challenge to the political leadership in taking a stand. The sincere intention has been to find out the possibilities of the alternative to partition in the given situation.

KEYWORDS: *Political Leadership, Massacre, Arson, Abduction, Forced Conversion and Sexual Violence*

INTRODUCTION

India emerged as a nation-state in 1947 after going through an unthinkable trauma of partition. The die was cast with the arrival of Mountbatten in India. His plan divided the Punjab, Bengal, and Assam on the basis of religion and forced the princely states to be either with India or Pakistan. The matter was not confined to drawing the international border line only. The 'great migration' involved massacre, arson, abduction, forced conversion and sexual violence. The Holocaust brought in its trail challenges of communal riot, refugee influx and law and order problems in both the newly emerged countries. Around fourteen million people were uprooted and two million died during the process. The scar was more or less akin to the genocide perpetrated by the German authority during the Second World War. The Violent nature of partition created an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion between the countries that plagues their relationship to the present. Ayesha Jalal, the famous historian describes it as a "defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, partition countries to influence how the people and states of postcolonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future"¹. Over the years, many deliberations have been made putting forth the claims of a section of majoritarians in India for an Akhanda Bharata, an obsession of a section of a minority justifying the creation of Pakistan on the basis of religion and that of a constitutionalist supporting partition as the last resort. As the event involved so much pain and anguish whose ramification is still visible over the dispute of Kashmir, the threat of sub-nationalism in Baluchistan and in the ongoing cross-border terrorism the posterity has every right to understand the complex development, causing a severe blow to the age-old syncretic tolerant culture of the country.

India was known for its affluence and rich cultural heritage. During the medieval period, when Europe remained under the captivity of scholasticism, India's cultural and material prosperity knew no bounds. It had attracted successive invaders of most of whom preferred to settle down due to the hazards of communication. The first Islamic conquest of India took place with the capture of Lahore in the eleventh century. Later on, the persianized Turks seized Delhi in 1192.

The Moghul dynasty was established in the sixteenth century which ruled India until the arrival of the British. It did not try to intervene in the local societies much during its long years of existence but managed to balance and pacify them through marriage alliance with feudal lords, an introduction of new administrative practices, land survey settlement system, and revenue collection measures. All these led to an accommodation of a diverse and inclusive ruling elites into a systematic, centralized and uniform system. It would be too sweeping to assume that disparities between the Hindus and Muslims did not exist. The imposition of ziziya tax on non-Muslims and the aggressive approach of Aurangzeb reflect it. But the organic and conservative nature of both the religions helped people of both the communities to come together. The accommodative character of the Hindu religion can never be ignored here. The message of humanity spread by the both the Sufi and Bhakti cults removed barriers between the communities. India can never forget Kabir, Amir Khusro, and Mainoodin Chisti. The Mughuls helped in the amalgamation of the Persian art culture with Indian culture. They developed persianized form of Hindustani language called Urdu. Rulers like Akbar, Dara Shikhan, and Bahadur Shah Zafar became the pioneers of Indo-Islamic culture. The Din-I-Illahi of Akbar and Majma-ul-Bahrain of Dara Shikoh are revelations of the mystical and pluralistic affinities between the Hindus and Muslims. It was this type of gesture of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal ruler, brought the princes, zamindars, nawabs across the religion together to launch the Sepoy Mutiny against the maladministration of the East India Company.

The Sepoy Mutiny was a milestone of Hindu-Muslim unity. No doubt it was crushed due to its lack of organizational base, yet it conveyed the strength of both the communities which had the potential to dismantle the British Raj. So the imperial authority followed the 'divide and rule' policy religiously thereafter to create social cleavages. Initially, it targeted the Muslims as the brain behind the Mutiny and prompted the Hindus which developed quickly by grabbing the opportunities particularly in the field of education. Promulgation of the Wood's Dispatch (1854) and attempt to indianize civil service helped them to some extent. As the rate of absorption of educated youth was meager the British Government, took initiatives to form the Indian National Congress. A.O. Hume admitted, "A safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces generated by our own action was urgently needed"².

By then, the Muslim orthodox minority was lagging behind economically and socially. The call of supporters of Arya Samaj to create Vedic Swaraj and Bankim Chandra's attempt to personify India as mother Goddess made them apprehensive. The Hindu-Urdu controversy and the anti-cow killing riot of 1893 established Hindu chauvinism. All these developments changed the secular and nationalist orientations of Sayeed Ahmed Khan and Iqbal. On the occasion of Hindu-Urdu agitation he hinted about his two-nation theory, "Now, I am convinced that these two nations will not work unitedly in any cause. At present, there is no hostility between them. But, on account of the so-called educated people it will increase a hundredfold in the future"³. The British knew the art of striking the iron when it was hot. As in case of the earlier 'divide and rule' policy, they come out with 'Bengal partition plan' (1905) to create a Muslim dominated province comprising of East Bengal and Assam and a Hindu majority area consisting of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha.

The plan had two objectives - to segregate the Hindus from the Muslims and to weaken the nationalist upsurge of the Bengalis by merging Bengal with Bihar and other provinces. Much later, Mountbatten reiterated the tactics at the time of independence of India. The success of the Extremist wing of the Congress in the agitation against Bengal Partition convinced the Muslims about a possible reform which might overshadow them. So many of them supported the division of Bengal. By then the British historian's interpretation of medieval India as the period of Muslim perpetuated a mental block between the communities. Unlike the Hindu community in which the rising commercial and intellectual classes managed to

sideline the landlords, lack of exposure to scientific education and trade and commerce made the small learned section in the Muslim community to depend upon the conservative feudal lords. Such an equation facilitated the formation of the Muslim League (1906) to ask for special safeguards exclusively for the Muslims. They succeeded when the British obliged it through the communal electorate policy introduced successively in the Morley-Minto (1909) and Montagu-Chelmsford reforms (1919). Alienation of the Muslims continued because of the strategies of leaders like Tilak who opposed the Consent bill and supported cow protection and Ganesh festival to create a pan-Indian platform against the British. Aurobindo's propagation of Vedanta philosophy might be an attempt to reform orthodox Hinduism, but it was not palatable to the Muslims. The formation of the Hindu Mahasabha (1915) in the line of the Muslim League and the aggressive Hindutva agenda of Golwalkar and Savarkar enhanced the polarization between the Hindus and Muslims and helped the British indirectly. The Hindu Mahasabha leader Lala Lajpat Rai was one of the first persons to demand the bifurcation of India. He said "under my scheme, the Muslims will have four Muslims states: (i) the Pathans province or the North West Frontier; (ii) Western Punjab, (iii) Sindh and (iv) Eastern Bengal. If there were compact Muslim communities in any other parts of India, sufficiently large to form a province, they should be similarly constituted. But, it should be distinctly understood that this is not a United India. It means a clear partition of India into a Muslim India and a non-Muslim India"⁴.

A glimpse on a partition will not be completed without a critical analysis on Jinnah. The arrival of Gandhi from South Africa for good (1916) had a great impact on India politics. His use of religion during the Khilafat movement to win over the Muslims and agitational techniques were considered to be watershed in many ways. He converted the Congress into a mass-based organization. Until then both the Moderates and Extremist wings of the party were dependent upon techniques such as negotiation or passive resistance. Jinnah, who had by then carved out a niche for himself within the Congress, was an ardent supporter of constitutional practices. He was known as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity for his opposition to the Bengal partition, formation of the Muslim League and introduction of communal electoral systems⁵. He told the Muslims that "towards the Hindus, our attitude should be of goodwill and brotherly feelings. Cooperation with the cause of our motherland should be our guiding principle. India's real progress can only be achieved by a true understanding and harmonious relations between the two great sister communities"⁶. He was instrumental in bringing Hindus and Muslims together through the Lucknow pact which envisaged certain seat-sharing formula between the communities. When the Non-cooperation movement was withdrawn by Gandhi, as a true constitutionalist, he contested an election and entered into the Central Legislature to play a constructive role against the British. He went to the extent of opposing a stalwart of Muslim League like Mohammed Shafi to support Congress in opposing the Simon Commission for not having an Indian representative. Much against the wish of many League members he enumerated the Delhi Declaration where the Muslim leaders agreed to give up separate electorate if (1) Sind to be separated from the Bombay Presidency (2) reforms to be introduced in NWFP and Baluchistan (3) adequate representation for Muslims in Bengal and Punjab and (4) representation of seats for Muslims in central legislature. Congress agreed to the proposals in its Madras session (1927), but later on, backed out by coming under the influence of Hindu Mahasabha which had become extremely reactionary after the Moplah violence against the Hindus. Thus, the lack of constitutionalism within the Congress and division of Muslim League alienated Jinnah from both the sides. It was encashed by the British to canter the Congress which had already replaced its earlier demand for dominion states into complete independence Lahore Resolution⁷. It was expected that Jinnah's proximity with the newly elected Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald would break the

impasse in India and expedite the constitutional dialogues through the Round Table Conference. Jinnah returned to India with new vigor to support the communal electorate system (MacDonald Award) and to take part in the constitutional opportunities made open through the 1935 Act.

The failure of the Civil Disobedience Movement and implementation of the 1935 Act created dissension within the Congress as well. The legitimacy of Gandhi's agitational technique was questioned. Leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel who managed the Congress party President position from 1931-34 became realistic enough to support Gandhi's decision to withdraw from active politics and to prepare the Congress for the electoral politics⁸. He pursued the council entry programme by convincing Nehru and succeeded in sidelining Subash Bose, who wanted to launch a Civil Disobedience movement in the given period. The effort of the Congress brought result as it managed to form governments in eight provinces and the Muslim League had to remain with the rest three out of which in Punjab it was with a coalition partner. Congress did not want to have a coalition with the League in provinces. Subsequently, leaders such as Abdul Kalam Azad alleged that it was the blunder by Nehru for not allowing the League to be part of the Government in provinces such as UP which made it more aggressive and defiant⁹. Many argue that the 'dismissive' approach of the Congress towards the League after 1937 helped the British to support the League in its demand for Pakistan¹⁰. Frank Moraes and Penderel Moon believed that Pakistan was partly created due to the immaturity of the Congress¹¹. On the other hand, K.M. Munshi and R. Zakaria refuted it as they believed that Jinnah had moved much ahead with his separatist agenda to be accommodated¹². Anyhow, the role of the Congress leaders could never be ignored in aggregating the stand of the Muslim League. By the year 1940, the league had come out openly with its resolution of Pakistan. As the Congress resigned from the ministries due to the involvement of Indian Army in the Second World War without the consolation of the Indian political leaders, it not only enraged the British but also helped the League to expand its base in Sind, Assam, Bengal, Punjab, and NWFP. Its expansion reached to a new height when the British recognized it as the spokesperson of the Muslim community in constitutional dialogues such as the Cripps Mission (1942) and the Shimla Conference (1945). Jinnah's strategy of supporting the authority during the Quit India Movement paid off and he emerged as the key player in the Indian political scenario.

The end of the Second World War was a climax. The British faced new economic and political problems. The Indian Civil Service, the 'steel frame' of the empire was heavily strained to contain any challenge. The Naval uprising (1946) made them realize the declining support of the defense personnel. The INA trial convinced them the strength of the nationalistic upsurge. The British Government thought of expediting the constitutional dialogues. Wavell confided Churchill, "The future of India is the problem on which the British Commonwealth and the British reputation will stand or fall in the post-war period..... with a lost or hostile India, we are likely to be reduced in the East to the position of a commercial big man"¹³. Such a realization brought the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) to India with comprehensive provisions for formation of the Interim Government and the Constituent Assembly. It had an innovative component called the 'group clause' to organize the British India Provinces on the basis of religion. It enumerated a weak federal setup for India. By the time, the British decided to conduct General elections both for provinces and Central Legislature to assess the representative character of the political parties in India. Given the limited franchise, division within the Congress and Communal frenzy unleashed by the League, while the former failed to repeat its 1937 performance, the latter managed to enhance its base in the contiguous zone of Bengal, Punjab, Sind, and NWFP.

Thus, by the time the Cabinet Mission came, the Congress under the towering leadership of Vallabhbhai had become matured enough to tide over the advantages given to the League by the authority. It accepted the plan as a whole immediately. Realizing his strategy Wavell said, "this section had no interest in the framing of a final constitution; all it wants is power: complete power at once. The leader of Congress Working Committee is of course Patel"¹⁴. Vallabhbhai ignored the group clause of the Plan introduced with the tacit support of Azad apparently to bring the Hindus and Muslims together. But he was skeptical about the intention of the British. He was blamed later on for his insistence on the Home portfolio in the Interim Government which its coalition partner League wanted. Some others believe that it was his rejection of Gandhi's last-minute advocacy for a National Government with the Congress and League as the partners paved the way for Pakistan. Azad argued that Nehru's emotional outburst as the vice president of the Interim Government about the intention of the party to change the group clause created suspicion in the mind of League members. Many allege that Nehru's acceptance of Atlee's invitation for the London Declaration gave legitimacy to Pakistan.

The decision of the Congress to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan immediately put the League unaware. It launched 'Direct Action Day' to put pressure on the British. In spite of its dubious record towards communal harmony and lack of commitment to the Cabinet Mission Plan as a whole, it was invited to become part of the Interim Government. Churchill's conviction that any attempt to establish the reign of a Hindu numerical majority would never be without a Civil War, motivated the British leadership to invite the League¹⁵. Wavell confided, "I put in a great deal of hard work and had possible deal some acrimonious discussions at times trying to get the possible deal for the League: and it was very largely Jinnah's own fault that we did not succeed in getting an Interim Government on what would have been very good terms for the League"¹⁶. Looking at the Hindu communal violence in Bihar he even justified the direct action day as the outcome of Congress provocation. Muslim League neither cooperated in the functioning of the Interim Government nor participated in the sessions of the Constituent Assembly. It was revealed by one of League members who claimed that their agenda was to create a launching pad for Pakistan¹⁷. The budget presented by its member Liaquat Ali Khan, the Finance Minister was alleged to be communal and to have upset the base of the Congress by damaging industry¹⁸.

The constitutional deadlock and the eagerness of British to leave India after the war ultimately led to the invitation to Mountbatten who came to divide the country on the line of religion. Over the years, the British policy of divide and rule had created sufficient hatred and animosities. Their techniques of communal electorate system and extension of undue favor to Jinnah at a point of time when he was sufficiently isolated acted as the catalyst. Ram Manohar Lohia, the great socialist leader while blaming the Congress leadership for their lapses, did not miss to point out the British chicanery, conservative Muslim mindset, Hindu Chauvinism, etc. as the factors behind the partition of India which made partition inevitable and gave a blow to India's syncretic culture¹⁹.

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