

The Formation of Pan-Indian Communities Among Hindus and Muslims: 19th Century Evolution.

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Abstract

Essentially, India's shift towards modernity disrupted traditional localities, marking the onset of a broader political mobilisation among Hindu and Muslim communities. The social reform movement, which later crystallised into a pan-religious movement among Hindus and Muslims, shaped 19th-century India. Various factors have contributed to this movement. The British rule in India is one important factor that helped in triggering the movement leading to the growth of communal tension between the Muslims and Hindus. The formation of pan-Indian communities is not just a passive process; it is also perceived as a deliberate project undertaken by various people, including the different religious groups. This deliberate effort contributed to the development of a 'perception of crisis' that necessitated intentional actions, ultimately leading to the emergence of pan-Indian communities among the Hindus and the Muslims. The promotion of Hindi as the medium of instruction in government schools and colleges, along with cow protection and anti-Ahmadiya propaganda among Hindus, coincided with a new evolution marked by conflict between fundamentalists and revivalists among Muslims. Later, this process raises the question of the arrival of a new ideology known as 'communalism', with communal riots being just one of the outcomes of the propagation of this ideology. This research article will give an overview of the formation of Pan-Indian communities among Hindus and Muslims and its evolution in the 19th century.

Key Words: *Hindu renaissance, Communalism, Islamic, Identity politics, Arya Samaj, Shuddhi movement, Ahmadiya, Deoband movement, etc.*

Introduction:

During the early 19th century in Punjab, large numbers of Hindus routinely embarked on pilgrimages to what seemed to be Muslim shrines, and likewise, Sikhs visited Muslim and Hindu sacred sites. Over time, these distinctions gradually faded, and the term 'Hinduism' gained prominence in this century. The notion posits that within India, various religious groups such as the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, and Christians, etc, are perceived as separate and unique communities. It suggests that adherents of a particular faith not only share religious commonalities but also have shared secular interests. This perspective denies the existence of an inclusive Indian nation and instead envisions the country as a mere confederation of distinct religious communities, implying the absence of a unified national identity. Subsequently, the 19th century marked as a transformative period in Indian history, witnessing social, political, and cultural changes significantly. One of the profound developments during this era was the formation of pan-Indian communities among the Hindus and the Muslims. The concept of a pan-Indian community wasn't significantly evident before the 1857 revolt, and the emergence of such ideas became more pronounced in the events following the revolt. This phenomenon of evolution played a crucial role in shaping the identity and collective consciousness of these religious groups which laid the foundation for the socio-political landscape of modern India.

Socio-religious Movements

I. Perception of Crisis for the Hindus:

The 19th century witnessed the emergence of the Hindu Renaissance, a cultural and intellectual revival movement that aimed to rejuvenate and reform Hindu society. Figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda played instrumental roles in advocating for social reforms, education, and the preservation of traditional Indian values. The perception of crisis by the Hindus stemmed from a sense of lacking a unified community due to the absence of a centralized doctrine, setting them apart from other religions. The emergence of revivalist movements like Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj closely associated with heightened communalism, resulted in the assertion of religious identities in opposition to each other. Beyond such movements, the British rule in India played a role in creating an exclusive division. The British government, in collaboration with the Christian missionaries, actively sought to Christianize fellow Indians, specially a lower caste Hindus instilling a deep sense of fear and insecurity regarding the 'Christian threat,' particularly among religious leaders.

This environment paved the way for the emergence of revivalist movements like Arya Samaj in 1975, led by Swami Dayanand, which sought to revive past glories and spared no effort in cultivating a distinct and assertively communal sentiment. The Hindu religious leaders came to the conclusion that Hinduism faced an existential threat unless it adopted the assertive characteristics seen in militant Islam and Christianity. Arya Samaj represented a form of militant Hinduism, particularly in its later stages when it directed its focus, either directly or indirectly, against the Muslims.

In the late 19th century, the proliferation of modern communication methods such as the printing press and various organizations, coupled with increasing literacy rates attributed to the scaling up of communal tension between the Muslims and the Hindus. The Hindu championed causes such as cow protection, the promotion of Hindi as the medium of instruction in government schools and colleges, and anti-Ahmadiya propaganda, etc., By 1888, the militant faction of Arya Samaj intensified its criticisms against perceived adversaries, including the Christians, the Muslims, and orthodox the Hindus, leading to the full-fledged planting of seeds of animosity against the Muslims, especially by the late nineteenth century. The Shudhi movement, introduced by the radical wing of Arya Samaj to bring back those who had converted to Islam and Christianity into Hinduism, gained momentum in the late 1890s. Consequently, Arya Samaj, through its activities, succeeded in fostering a shared consciousness and solidarity among Hindus across different castes and regions.

II. Perception of Crisis for Muslims:

The perception of crisis among the Muslims began when they believed that the Muslims of India were losing their faith and becoming non-believers due to the blending of religious practices, folktales, the imposition of the Hindi language in schools and government offices, and other similar activities. The events of the 1857 revolt symbolized the decline of Muslim power and reinforced the notion that preserving the cultural and religious identity of the minority required them to have political influence. According to Islamic doctrine, Muslims were expected to lead a politically passive life under Sharia law. However, they began to question how they could gain the favor of the ruling authorities and felt that their distinctiveness from non-Muslims necessitated separate political or constitutional arrangements to avoid being overwhelmed by the majority. This prompted the birth of a perception of crisis for the Muslim Community.

This perception of crisis led to the development of three distinct movements within the Muslim community: The Fundamentalism, the Revivalism, and the Modernism. Parallel to the Hindu Renaissance, Islamic reform movements sought to address the challenges faced by Muslims in these movement during 19th century. Fundamentalists believed that progress could only be achieved by adhering strictly to pure Arabic Islam and blamed the decline of Islam on factors like democracy, modernity, science, and secularism. The Deoband movement was one such fundamentalist movement which aimed at revitalizing Islamic education and promoting a puritanical interpretation of Islam. Revivalists, on the other hand, recognized the importance of modernity, even though they maintained traditional values. They supported the Indian National Congress and became anti-British. One of the example for revivalist was Ahmadiya Muslims. While Modernists were pro-British and believed that supporting the British was essential for the survival of Islam. Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Aligarh Movement, was a modernist which emphasized on modern education and scientific knowledge for Muslims

However, in 1857, the prevailing sentiment among most British observers was that a Muslim was synonymous with a rebel. According to the British perspective, it was Muslim intrigue and leadership that transformed a sepoy mutiny into a political conspiracy with the objective of eradicating the British Raj. By 1884, the British initiated educational initiatives for Muslims, hoping that more Muslims would qualify for the official and professional positions established under British rule and hoping to get support as well as to removed the anti- British sentiments from the Muslims. During this period, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan emerged as a significant figure in the pan-Indian Muslim community, laying the groundwork for Muslim communalism in the 1880s. He dedicated numerous works to persuade Indian Muslims that Western education and thought were not anti-Islamic but rather could provide

a correct understanding of Islam. Sir Syed argued that the political interests of Hindus and Muslims were distinct and even divergent. He contended that representative government in India would result in the permanent subordination of Muslims to Hindus. Believing that the British rulers were the hope for Muslims, he opposed the Congress because he feared the dilution of Muslim identity as a minority. He also preached that, given the larger Hindu population, Hindus would dominate Muslims if British rule weakened or withdrew. He urged fellow Muslims not to support the Congress and opposed Badruddin Tyabji's appeal to join the National Congress.

The prevailing belief in the 1890s was that the primary cause of Muslim backwardness was the absence of modern education. Consequently, acquiring modern education became crucial for Muslims to access government positions and opportunities, where they were falling behind Hindus. Such movements laid the groundwork for a pan-Indian Muslim identity that sought to reconcile traditional Islamic values with the demands of modernity. Moreover, the heightened emphasis on cow protection, anti-cow killing societies, Hindu processions, and playing music in front of mosques contributed significantly to the escalation of communal sentiments among the Muslims.

The role of the British in the Formation of Pan-Indian Movement

The British played a central role in the formation of Pan-Indian communities among the Hindus and the Muslims. The British introduced a Western-style education system, influencing the intellectual and cultural spheres of India. Language and the medium of instruction became contentious issues. Both Hindus and Muslims sought to preserve their cultural and religious identities, leading to the establishment of separate educational institutions. This laid the groundwork for the development of distinct intellectual and social communities.

The introduction of separate electorates in the latter half of the 19th century, particularly the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, allowed Muslims to vote for their own representatives, fostering a sense of distinct political identity among religious communities. British policies on representation in government inadvertently emphasized religious identity. The introduction of separate electorates, reserved seats, and communal representation in legislative bodies reinforced religious distinctions in political participation. Economic policies and disparities under British rule occasionally favored one community over the other. Economic competition and differential treatment contributed to tensions between Hindus and Muslims. This further fueled the development of separate Hindu and Muslim political communities.

The British introduction of Census of 1871 in India categorising people based on religious affiliations. The British colonials saw religion as an important marker for division within the Indian people and it became a fundamental character in the implication of census. This practice heightened a sense of religious identity and demarcation. The enumeration process contributed significantly to the emergence of distinct Hindu and Muslim communities as separate entities. The British colonial strategy of 'divide and rule' aimed at fostering competition and tension between different communities. This approach inadvertently polarised Hindu and Muslim communities, accentuating their religious identities to maintain control. In many such settings, both the Muslims and the Hindu felt overshadowed, whether justifiably or not, by one or other.

Challenges and Conflicts:

The 19th century was characterised by the growing anti-colonial sentiment among both the Hindus and the Muslims. The perceived threat to cultural and religious identities by colonial rule led to increased collaboration between the two communities in resisting British imperialism. The promotion of vernacular languages and the establishment of educational institutions played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of community among Hindus and Muslims alike. The development of a shared literary and linguistic heritage contributed to a pan-Indian consciousness that transcended regional and religious differences.

I. Communal Tensions:

While there were efforts to foster unity, the 19th century also witnessed rising communal tensions. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, often seen as the first war of independence, revealed deep-seated communal divides. The British policy of divide and rule exacerbated religious differences, leading to communal conflicts that would have lasting implications on the Indian subcontinent. Communal conflicts or riots were sporadic but significant occurrences during the 19th and early 20th Centuries. Instances might be made here are the Salem riots of 1882, Shahabad Riots of 1917, Katarpur Riots of 1918, Peshwar Riot of 1910, etc.,. These outbreaks of violence often had religious undertones and resulted in loss of life and property, deepening the divide between communities.

II. Identity Politics:

The latter half of the 19th century saw the emergence of identity politics, with leaders from both communities advocating for the protection and promotion of their religious and cultural identities. The demand for

separate electorates, particularly through the Morley-Minto Reforms, signalled a shift towards a more defined Hindu and Muslim identity. Subsequently, two nation theory was propounded on the ground of religion and concluded by dividing the Indian Union into India and Pakistan.

Conclusion:

The 19th century was a dynamic period in Indian history, witnessing the formation of pan-Indian communities among the Hindus and the Muslims, this formation can be viewed as a concerted effort towards the process of community formation. This is frequently perceived as a deliberate undertaking by leaders of both communities. Hindu communal sentiments were significantly influenced by, at times, misleading information regarding the rapid decline in the Hindu population, particularly in regions like Bengal and Punjab. For them, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a response to the heightened assertiveness and innovative approaches adopted by Christian missionaries and Islam. On the other hand, Muslims perceived themselves as being overshadowed and overwhelmed by their Hindu counterparts. They even presented a memorandum to the British, urging them to consider Muslim's political significance rather than their numerical strength. Notably, the British played a pivotal role in exacerbating communal tensions between these two major communities. At the same time the establishment of educational institutions and the progress of vernacular languages were central in fostering a sense of unity between Hindus and Muslims. The emergence of a shared literary and linguistic heritage facilitated the development of a pan-Indian mindset, surpassing religious differences. Despite the challenges and conflicts, the shared experiences of social reform, educational advancement, and the struggle against colonialism contributed to the evolution of a collective identity that would shape the trajectory of modern India. The legacies of this period continue to influence the complex interplay of religion, culture, and politics in the diverse tapestry of contemporary Indian society.

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