

Lecture-37



Growth of Communalism

The stagnant economy of India and the policy of divide and rule during the British period were important factors for the growth of communalism in India.

The stagnant economy of India during the British rule was an important factor for the growth of communalism in India. It was deeply rooted in and was an expression of the interests and aspirations of the middle classes in a social set up in which opportunities for them were inadequate. The communal question was, therefore a middle class question par excellence.

The main appeal of communalism and its main social base also lay among the middle classes.

It is, however, important to note that a large number of middle class individuals remained, on the whole, free of communalism even in the 1930s and 1940s.

According to Bipan Chandra communal politics till 1937 was organised around government jobs, educational concessions and the like as also political positions - seats in legislative councils, municipal bodies, etc - which enabled control over these and other economic opportunities.

According to him communalism developed as a weapon of economically and politically reactionary social classes and political forces. Communal leaders and parties were in general allied with these classes and forces. The vested interests deliberately encouraged communalism because of its capacity to distort and divert popular struggle, to prevent the masses from understanding the real issues.

British rule and its policy of divide and rule

The British government used communalism to counter and weaken the growing national movement and the welding of the Indian people into a nation. It was presented by the colonial rulers as the problem of the defence of the minorities. Hindu-Muslim disunity was sighted as the reason for the continuation of the British rule.

They favoured one community against the other in services and promotions. The British policy of acting late to crush the communal violence also contributed to the growth of this phenomenon.

The British policy of separate electorate was another factor.

Hindu Tinge in nationalist thought and propaganda

During the national movement, a strong religious element was introduced in nationalist thought and propaganda. They tended to emphasise ancient Indian culture to the exclusion of medieval Indian culture. Hindu idiom was introduced to its day-to day political agitation. Thus Tilak used

Ganesh puja and Shivaji festival to propagate nationalism; and the anti-partition Bengal agitation was started with dips in the Ganges. Many prominent writers including Bankim Chandra Chatterjea often referred Muslims as foreigners in their writings.

Communal view of Indian history

A communal and distorted view of Indian history, particularly of the ancient and medieval period, was also responsible for its growth. A beginning in this regard was made by the British historian, James Mill in the early 19th century, who described the ancient period of Indian history as the Hindu period and the medieval period as the Muslim period. Other British and Indian historians followed him in this respect.

These writers declared that all Muslims were rulers in the medieval period and all Hindus ruled. Thus, the basic character of the polity in India was identified with religion. Hindu communal view of history relied on the myth that Indian society and culture had reached ideal heights in the ancient period and fell into permanent and continuous decay during the medieval period because of the Muslim rule and domination. In turn the Muslim communalism harked back to the 'golden age of Islamic achievement' in West Asia and appealed to its heroes, myths and cultural achievements. They tended to defend and glorify all Muslim rulers, including religious bigots like Aurangzeb.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTION:

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the partition of British India:

- I. Several hundred thousand people were killed and innumerable women raped and abducted.
- II. Millions were uprooted, transformed into refugees in alien lands.
- III. Probably, some 15 million had to move across hastily constructed frontiers separating India and Pakistan.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only I
- B. I and II
- C. I and III
- D. All of the above

Answer: D

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the partition of India:

- I. Some historians, both Indian and Pakistani, suggest that Mohammad Ali Jinnah's theory that the Hindus and Muslims in colonial India constituted two separate nations can be projected back into medieval history.
- II. Some scholars see Partition as a culmination of a communal politics that started developing in the opening decades of the twentieth century.
- III. The separate electorates for Muslims, created by the colonial government in 1909 and expanded in 1919, crucially shaped the nature of communal politics.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only I
- B. I and II
- C. I and III
- D. All of the above

Answer: D

Q3. Which of the following statements is incorrect regarding the term 'communalism'?

- A. Communalism refers to a politics that seeks to unify one community around a religious identity in hostile opposition to another community.
- B. Communalism refers to a politics that seeks to divide one community around a religious identity in hostile opposition to another community.
- C. Communalism attempts to consolidate this identity and present it as natural – as if people were born into the identity, as if the identities do not evolve through history over time.
- D. Communalism is a particular kind of politicisation of religious identity, an ideology that seeks to promote conflict between religious communities.

Answer: B

Q4. In which of the following year, elections to the provincial legislatures were held for the first time?

- A. 1906
- B. 1918
- C. 1937
- D. 1947

Answer: C

Q5. In which of the following year 'Hindu Mahasabha' was founded?

- A. 1915
- B. 1919
- C. 1925
- D. 1926

Answer: A