

Exploring the State of Indian Politics during Partition

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Abstract:

The study investigates the state of Indian politics during the partition, with a focus on the role of key political figures, the impact of political parties, and the communal violence that ensued. The methodology involves a systematic review approach as well as first-hand accounts. The study sheds light on the complex interplay of political forces and communal tensions during this tumultuous period. The key conclusion drawn from this study is that the actions of political leaders and parties heavily influenced the course of events during the partition, contributing to the widespread communal violence that tragically unfolded.

Keywords: Partition, Indo-Pak Politics, Communal Violence, 1947

1.0 Introduction

The partition of India in 1947 was a watershed moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent, marking the end of British colonial rule and the birth of two independent nations, India and Pakistan. This tumultuous period was characterised by intense politics, communal tensions, and widespread violence, leaving a lasting impact on the social and political landscape of the region. This research paper seeks to delve into the state of Indian politics during the partition, with a specific focus on the role of key political figures, the impact of political parties, and the tragic communal violence that took place.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the pivotal role played by key political figures such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi in shaping the events leading up to the partition. Both Jinnah, the leader of the All-India Muslim League, and Gandhi, the preeminent figure of the Indian National Congress, held contrasting visions for the future of India (Dawn, no page), and their actions and ideologies had profound implications for the course of the partition.

Furthermore, this study aims to analyse the impact of political parties, particularly the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, in the lead-up to the partition. The Muslim League's demand for a separate homeland for Muslims (National Archives, no page) and the Congress's vision of a united, secular India were central to the political discourse of the time. Understanding the actions and strategies of these influential political organisations is crucial for comprehending the complex dynamics that led to the partition.

Additionally, the research will explore the devastating communal violence that erupted during the partition, causing immense trauma and loss of life for millions of people (The Partition Museum, no page).

By examining the factors that fueled this violence and its aftermath, this study seeks to shed light on the human cost of political upheaval and the long-lasting repercussions on the affected communities.

By undertaking a comprehensive analysis of these interconnected themes, this research aims to provide an advanced understanding of the state of Indian politics during the partition, offering insights into the complex interplay of political forces, communal tensions, and the tragic consequences that continue to exist in the history of the region.

2.0 Literature review

The partition, an incredibly dark part of Indian and Pakistani history took place on 14th August 1947. With Muslim - majority parts becoming Pakistan and Hindu- majority parts becoming India, this religious conflict has aftershocks we still experience more than 7 decades later. Amongst others, a few of these repercussions being the Kashmir conflict, military standoffs, terrorism as well as cultural and sports rivalries affecting the lives of civilians deeply.

One of the most contentious issues between India and Pakistan is the dispute over the region of Kashmir. The partition left the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir divided, with India and Pakistan both claiming it. This has led to several wars and ongoing conflict between the two



countries over the control of the region. These have been the Indo-Pakistani wars in 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and 1999 (Human Rights Watch, no page) . These conflicts have further deepened the animosity and rivalry between the two nations.

Additionally, there have been several military standoffs and skirmishes along the disputed border, particularly in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. Furthermore, both India and Pakistan have accused each other of supporting and sponsoring terrorist activities on their respective territories. Terrorist groups operating in the region, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (Stanford University, no page) and Jaish-e-Mohammed, have carried out attacks targeting civilians, leading to further deterioration of relations and an atmosphere of mistrust.

However, the rivalry between India and Pakistan extends beyond political and military spheres. It is also reflected in cultural exchanges, sports competitions, and media narratives. Cricket matches between the two countries, for example, often carry intense emotions and symbolise the larger political and historical rivalry (South Asia Journal, no page). Therefore, the long-term effects of the partition cannot be denied. With research having been carried out on the reasons for the partition, its long-standing legacy as well as a variety of personal accounts been made available – the political motive of the partition has slowly begun to be uncovered.

The area this paper concentrates on is a more concentrated field of study in terms of the legacy the partition left behind. Namely, this is the forced religious conversions that took place during the time that I aim to understand and research deeper. This includes people landing on the “wrong side” of the divided half, conversions due to forced marriages and those as a result of harmful coercion.

What remains essential to discuss today becomes the consequences of these conversions, the silence around them and investigating the lives of those who have faced this legacy.

3.0 The Role of Key Political Figures

The partition period in Indo-Pak politics, occurred in the mid-20th century. During this period, several prominent political leaders were significant in shaping the political landscape. Namely, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi played key roles in charting out the future of politics in India and Pakistan.

To begin with, Jawaharlal Nehru was a key figure in the Indian National Congress and played a pivotal role in the fight for independence. A staunch nationalist, Nehru's vision for India was that of a secular, socialist, and democratic nation. His leadership was characterized by his commitment to modernization, industrialization, and social justice.

Nehru's role during the partition period was crucial, as he went on to become the first Prime Minister of independent India. The first individual at the helm of modern India while the country was embroiled in a tragic time. He advocated for a united India and worked towards the integration of princely states into the Indian Union along with Sardar Vallabhai Patel, (Talbot,1) a senior leader of the Indian National Congress who successfully negotiated with princely states, using a combination of diplomacy, negotiations, and cautiously using force to integrate these states.

While Nehru's policies focused on nation-building, economic development, and non-alignment in international affairs, in tandem with him Patel's motivations were driven by his commitment to a united India and his belief in strong central leadership. As the first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of independent India (Talbot,1). His leadership during the partition period was marked by his determination to prevent the disintegration of India and his ability to bring together diverse regions and rulers. With Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership and ideology significantly influencing the political landscape of India by shaping its secular and democratic character and Patel's beliefs ensuring the territorial integrity and unity of the country, it is safe to say that this strategic leadership of the first prime minister and deputy prime minister of the country set the tone of Indian politics for years to follow.

Furthermore, Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent resistance, known as Satyagraha, inspired



millions of Indians to participate in the struggle for freedom. His motivations were deeply rooted in his belief in truth, non-violence, and the dignity of all individuals. However, the practical challenges of implementing these ideals in the face of entrenched communal tensions and political ambitions proved to be a formidable obstacle, ultimately raising questions about the efficacy of Satyagraha in the midst of violent upheaval.

During the partition period, Mahatma Gandhi vehemently opposed the division of India and strongly advocated for unity among various religious sects (Khan, 18). He undertook several fasts and engaged in dialogue with political leaders to prevent communal violence. However, despite his efforts, the partition could not be averted. Gandhi's leadership and ideology influenced the political landscape by emphasising the importance of non-violence, communal harmony, and the empowerment of the marginalised sections of society. By introducing this "liberal" concept, one which is so due to its difference with the ideologies held by other leaders at the time, its uniqueness and stark contrast to the opinion of others, made it a liberal idea that was spread to an India struggling with finding its identity at the time – Mahatma Gandhi left the country with the message of unity and peace which India still feels in the echoes of the regret of the partition.

Gandhi's ideas staunchly contrasted those of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the All India Muslim League who was the primary advocate for the creation of a separate Muslim-majority nation, Pakistan. (Khan, 12) Jinnah's motivations stemmed from the idea that Muslims in a Hindu-majority India would not receive adequate protection for their political and cultural rights. He argued for the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for Indian Muslims. Jinnah's leadership during the partition period was marked by his demand for a separate nation, which eventually led to the division of British India. He became the first Governor-General of Pakistan. Jinnah's ideology of two-nation theory (Khan, 9), which asserted that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations, significantly influenced the political landscape by paving the way for the creation of Pakistan and the subsequent challenges of communal violence and migration. While the debate between whether his decision protected Muslim lives or endangered them as a result of the partition is long standing, what cannot be denied is the strong influence of Jinnah which paved the way for partition. In the end - with Gandhi's mark of non-violence and Jinnah's assertiveness to the creation of Pakistan, Nehru's development of India as secular and Patel's emphasis on unity, the longstanding effects of these individuals on the future of what is now more than 164 crore people cannot be denied.

4.0 Assessing the Impact of Political Parties and Movements

The positions of political parties, movements, and interest groups were not monolithic, and there were diverse opinions within each organisation when it came to condemning or supporting the partition. This era was marked by complex and fluid political dynamics, with negotiations, compromises, and changing alliances shaping the final outcome of partition.

During the partition era, the Indian National Congress, Muslim League, and other regional parties played significant roles in shaping the political discourse surrounding the issue of partition. They being massive causes for debate when it comes to the viability of the partition. With the Congress initially being against the division, while the Muslim League advocated for it. (Stanford News, no page) Division based on religion became the sole conversation of the 1940s in India.

The Indian National Congress was the largest political party in India and played a crucial role in the independence movement. At the outset, the Congress advocated for a united and independent India, where people of all religions would coexist. They believed in a secular and inclusive vision of India, with equal rights for all citizens. Prominent leaders of the Congress, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, initially opposed the idea of partition. Additionally, some regional parties, particularly those representing Hindu-majority areas, opposed the idea of dividing India. They believed in the unity and integrity of the country and argued against the creation of separate nations based on religion. (Yale University Press, 2)



However, as communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims escalated, the Congress found it challenging to bridge the differences between the two communities. With the failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan in 1946, which aimed to create a united India with safeguards for minority rights, the Congress reluctantly agreed to the partition of India in order to ensure the creation of a separate Muslim-majority state.

On the other side of it - as representative of the Muslims in India, The All India Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was the primary political party advocating for their interests. The Muslim League initially sought to protect the rights and interests of Muslims within a united India. However, the larger sentiment of Congress not adequately addressing the concerns of the Muslim minority was pertinent, causing the League to gradually shift its stance towards demanding a separate homeland for Muslims. Furthermore, regional parties representing Muslim-majority areas, such as the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the Punjab Unionist Party, supported the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. They aligned themselves with the Muslim League in the hope of protecting the political and economic interests of Muslims in their respective regions. (Modern Asian Studies, 9).

In 1940, the Muslim League passed the Lahore Resolution, also known as the Pakistan Resolution, which called for the creation of independent states for Muslims in regions where they constituted a majority. Jinnah and the Muslim League argued that a separate nation called Pakistan would better safeguard the political, economic, and cultural rights of Muslims. Through their advocacy and negotiations, the Muslim League eventually succeeded in securing the creation of Pakistan.

5.0 Communal Relations and Violence

In the experience of an individual who experienced the partition, Mr. Vishan Narayan Khanna described how the partition was not only a political decision but a decision that forced him to leave everything he had ever known as a result of communal violence during this era. Being from a Hindu family in Multan, Pakistan he described the religious element becoming a conflict only once the partition took place. Before that, he recalled the ability for everyone to coexist while practising their respective religions. Not only did the partition damage that balance, it caused millions of people to lose their families, their homes and their histories in the blink of an eye.

The partition of India in 1947 was a tumultuous period marked by significant communal tensions, religious animosities, and outbreaks of violence. The dynamics of communal relations, primarily between the Hindu and Muslim populations, played a pivotal role in shaping the events leading up to the division of the subcontinent. Various factors contributed to inter-communal conflicts, and the repercussions of these conflicts significantly impacted the political situation, ultimately leading to the partition of India.

One of the primary factors contributing to inter-communal conflicts during the partition was the historical religious divide between Hindus and Muslims. Decades of colonial rule had exacerbated religious tensions, and the emergence of nationalist movements based on religious identities further polarised communities. The demand for a separate Muslim state, led by the All-India Muslim League exacerbated these tensions. The competing visions of a united, secular India and a separate Muslim-majority nation fueled communal distrust and animosity (Kaur, no page)

Moreover, economic disparities and competition for resources also played a crucial role in aggravating these communal relations. The fear of economic and political marginalisation in a post-colonial India heightened insecurities among different religious communities, leading to a sense of competition and distrust. This economic dimension intertwined with religious identity, creating a volatile mix that contributed to communal strife.

The outbreak of violence during the partition was fueled by a complex interplay of factors, including the breakdown of law and order, the influx of millions of refugees, and the involvement of radical elements. (Gill, 11). Widespread rioting, mass killings, and



displacement of populations marred the subcontinent as communities turned against each other in a frenzy of violence and bloodshed. The failure of the colonial administration to effectively manage the situation and the manipulation of communal sentiments by political actors further inflamed the conflicts.

The consequences of these events profoundly influenced the political situation and ultimately led to the division of India. The inability of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League to reconcile their differences and accommodate each other's concerns, coupled with the escalating violence, made the partition increasingly inevitable. The British, faced with an untenable situation, ultimately acceded to the demand for partition, leading to the creation of India and Pakistan as independent nations in 1947.

In conclusion, the dynamics of communal relations, religious tensions, and outbreaks of violence during the partition of India were shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social, and political factors. The deep-seated religious divide, economic competition, and the failure of leadership to bridge communal differences all contributed to the conflicts. The repercussions of these events reverberated through the political landscape, ultimately culminating in the division of the subcontinent and the birth of two separate nations.

6.0 Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive exploration of the state of Indian politics during the partition, examining the roles of key political figures, the impact of political parties, and the tragic communal violence that unfolded during this pivotal period in history. Through this analysis, several important points have emerged, shedding light on the dynamics that shaped the partition and its aftermath.

Firstly, the study has discussed the significant role of Jawaharlal Nehru in setting the tone for a modern India. As an influential leader of the Indian National Congress and the country's first Prime Minister, Nehru played a crucial role in steering the nation towards a vision of secularism, democracy, and economic development. Moreover, the research has highlighted the complexities surrounding Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha and its limitations in the context of the partition. Furthermore, the study has underscored the pivotal role of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in advocating for and ultimately creating Pakistan as a separate homeland for Muslims. Jinnah's political acumen and unwavering determination in pursuing this vision reshaped the political map of the Indian subcontinent, leading to the birth of a new nation and setting in motion a complex legacy that continues to shape the region's geopolitics. In addition, the research has displayed the impact of political parties, particularly the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, in fueling communal violence during the partition. The divisive rhetoric and actions of these parties exacerbated existing tensions, leading to widespread bloodshed, displacement, and the tragic fracturing of communities along religious lines.

Finally, the study has brought to the forefront the profound human cost of the partition, with a staggering loss of life and the heart-wrenching separation of families. The communal violence that gripped the region during this period resulted in unspeakable suffering, leaving deep scars that endure to this day.

The study has provided valuable insights into the multifaceted dimensions of Indian politics during the partition, offering a nuanced understanding of the role of key figures, the impact of political ideologies, and the tragic consequences of communal violence. By delving into these critical aspects, this study contributes to a deeper appreciation of the complexities that defined this tumultuous period in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

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