

The Muslim League

The Hindus and Muslims had coexisted peacefully in India for centuries, respecting each other's cultures and traditions. Both communities had fought together during the Revolt of 1857 against British rule. To suppress the growing nationalism, the British adopted a 'Divide and Rule' policy, deliberately creating discord between Hindus and Muslims. They portrayed the revolt as a Hindu attempt to re-establish their rule and encouraged Muslims to form a separate political organization, leading to the foundation of the Muslim League.

Factors Leading to the Formation of the Muslim League

1. Loss of Sovereignty by Muslim Rulers

- After the British overthrew the Mughal rulers, Muslims became hostile toward the British.
- Muslims were blamed for the Revolt of 1857 and faced discrimination.
- Post-1870, the British changed their attitude to win Muslim support and counter the nationalist movement.

2. The Policy of Divide and Rule

The British fueled communal tensions through several measures:

- **Urdu as Medium of Instruction:** Urdu was introduced as the medium of instruction for Muslims, and financial aid was given to Muslim-run educational institutions.
- **Historical Misrepresentation:** British propaganda depicted Muslim rulers as plunderers and Hindu rulers as oppressors.
- **Partition of Bengal (1905):** The British justified the partition, claiming it would benefit Muslims in East Bengal, creating further divisions.
- **Communal Propaganda:** Communal hatred was spread through press, posters, and literature.

3. Educational and Economic Backwardness of Muslims

- Upper-class Muslims resisted Western education, unlike Hindus, who embraced modern education.
 - Muslims were excluded from civil and military services after the 1857 uprising.
 - Lack of involvement in organized industries worsened their economic condition.
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Role of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan

- A prominent educationist and social reformer, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan initially saw Hindus and Muslims as one nation. However, he later changed his stance under British influence.
 - He founded the **Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College** at Aligarh in 1875 (which became Aligarh Muslim University).
 - In 1888, he established the **United Indian Patriotic Association** to oppose the Indian National Congress.
 - He believed British rule would benefit Muslims by bringing education and prosperity.
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Misinterpretation of History

British historians such as James Mill divided Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods, portraying the medieval period as a time of decline. This distorted view ignored significant scientific and cultural advancements made during the Muslim rule and deepened communal divisions.

Rise of Assertive Nationalism

- Some nationalist leaders, such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh, promoted festivals like Shivaji Jayanti and Ganpati celebrations, which did not resonate with Muslims.
 - Economic backwardness and competition for limited jobs also contributed to communal tensions, with demands for job reservations based on caste and religion.
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Events Leading to the Formation of the Muslim League

1. The Hindi-Urdu Controversy (1900)

- In the United Provinces, petitions were traditionally submitted in Urdu. In 1900, the government ordered that petitions should also be accepted in Hindi, sparking resentment among Muslims.

2. Foundation of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association (1893)

- To counter the growing influence of the Congress, the British encouraged the formation of this association to prevent Muslim participation in the nationalist movement.

3. Aligarh Movement

- The movement, led by Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk after Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's death, promoted loyalty toward the British.
- The equal status granted to Hindi and Urdu in government courts fueled further resentment.

4. Partition of Bengal (1905)

- The partition created East Bengal as a Muslim-majority province and was supported by Muslims who saw it as an opportunity for economic dominance.
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Formation of the Muslim League (1906)

A Muslim deputation led by Agha Khan met Viceroy Minto on October 1, 1906, and presented their demands, including:

- Separate electorates for Muslims in provincial councils and legislative assemblies.
- Adequate representation in government services.
- State funding for Muslim educational institutions.

Later that year, prominent Muslim leaders gathered in Dacca, where the **All India Muslim League** was formally established on December 30, 1906, with Nawab Salimullah as its president and Agha Khan as the permanent president.

Aims and Objectives of the Muslim League

- Foster loyalty toward the British among Muslims.
 - Protect and promote the political and social rights of Muslims.
 - Prevent hostility between Muslims and other communities.
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Impact of the Muslim League on the National Movement

- The British welcomed the Muslim League as a counterbalance to the Congress.
- Initially, the League did not participate in the national movement and focused on securing Muslim representation in services.
- The **Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909** granted separate electorates to Muslims.
- From 1910, the League grew closer to the Congress due to several factors:
 - British hostility toward Turkey during the Turko-Italian War (1911–12) and Balkan Wars (1912–13).
 - Annulment of Bengal's partition, which hurt Muslim economic interests.

- A new generation of Muslims inspired by nationalist ideas joined the freedom struggle.
- Prominent leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Hakim Ajmal Khan played a crucial role in bridging differences.
- The **Khilafat Movement** and the **Lucknow Pact (1916)** symbolized Hindu-Muslim unity.

However, communal policies persisted. In 1930, the League raised the demand for a separate state, and in 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah proposed the **Two-Nation Theory**, stating that Hindus and Muslims were distinct nations. This eventually led to the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

Conclusion

The formation of the Muslim League marked a significant turning point in India's history. Although initially aimed at safeguarding Muslim interests, it ultimately became a key player in the demand for Pakistan. The British policy of divide and rule, combined with historical misrepresentation and economic disparities, fueled communal tensions that shaped the country's political landscape.

Lucknow Pact

The Lucknow Pact, signed in 1916 between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, was significant because it brought political unity between the two groups.

Causes:

- **International Factors:** The First World War saw Britain fighting against Turkey, the seat of the Caliph, which led to Muslim anger and support for Congress.
- **National Factors:** The annulment of the Partition of Bengal, Tilak's release, and the efforts of Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali brought the Congress and Muslim League closer.
- **Muslim League's Shift:** Initially pro-British, the League moved towards advocating self-government, paving the way for collaboration with Congress.

Features of the Lucknow Pact:

- Abolition of the India Council and introduction of Indian participation.
- Separate electorates for Muslims, with one-fifth of the provincial legislature nominated.
- Minorities were to have adequate representation.
- Control over India's defense and foreign affairs was to remain with the British.
- Viceroy's Executive Council was to have half Indian members.
- Separation of the judiciary from the executive.

Significance:

- Promoted Hindu-Muslim unity.
- Reunited early and assertive nationalists within Congress.
- Pressured the British to offer reforms.

Limitations:

- The pact was limited to the educated elite and ignored the masses.
- Separate electorates led to political fragmentation.
- The agreement was temporary, as the League remained a separate entity with communal interests.

Home Rule League Movement

The Home Rule League Movement, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant, aimed for self-government within the British Empire.

Causes for the Movement:

- Economic distress caused by war-related inflation and heavy taxes.
- The contradiction between the British claim of promoting democracy abroad and denying it to Indians.
- Nationalist dissatisfaction with Congress' passivity.

Role of Key Leaders:

- **Bal Gangadhar Tilak:** Advocated for self-rule, popularized the movement through speeches and newspapers like *Kesari* and *Mahratta*.
- **Annie Besant:** Impressed by the Irish Home Rule, she started the Home Rule League in 1916, organizing branches and promoting political education.

Decline of the Movement:

- The British response, particularly the August Declaration, pacified early nationalists.
- Leadership faltered after Tilak's departure for England, and the movement lost momentum.

Impact:

- Infused nationalist spirit and turned the movement into a mass-based struggle.
- Pressured the British to promise self-government.

August Declaration

The August Declaration of 1917 was a response to the Home Rule Movement, announcing that self-government would be granted to Indians within the British Empire.

Reactions:

- **Early Nationalists:** Hailed it as a significant step towards democracy.
- **Assertive Nationalists:** Criticized the slow pace of reforms.
- Fears of further demands for separate electorates arose, particularly from the depressed classes and Sikhs.

Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (Government of India Act, 1919)

Following the August Declaration, the Government of India Act, 1919, was enacted to introduce limited reforms.

Main Provisions:

- **Central Government:** Responsibility to the British Parliament, with Indian representation in councils.
- **Provincial Legislative Councils:** A mix of elected and nominated members, with terms of three years.
- **Dyarchy:** Division of provincial subjects into reserved and transferable categories, where the Governor held authority over reserved subjects and the council managed transferable ones.
- **Elections:** Direct elections and communal electorates for various groups.

Limitations:

- **Dyarchy Issues:** Irrational subject division; ministers lacked full control.
- **Governor's Dominance:** Ministers' powers were limited, and they depended on British-controlled finances.
- The Congress found the reforms inadequate, but accepted them to push for further self-government.