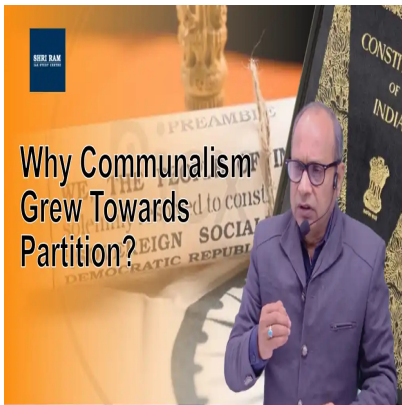




Why Communalism Grew Towards Partition?

Description

The political landscape of British India in the late 1930s was marked by significant constitutional developments and escalating communal tensions. The Government of India Act of 1935 had introduced provincial autonomy, leading to elections in 1937 that reshaped the power dynamics between major political parties. This period, from the aftermath of these elections to the formal demand for separate states in 1940, proved critical in intensifying communalism and laying the groundwork for the eventual partition of India. The interplay of political aspirations, ideological shifts, and communal narratives created a volatile environment where the idea of a unified India began to fracture under the weight of growing distrust and divergence.

The Political Context After the 1937 Elections

The [1937 provincial elections](#), held under the Government of India Act of 1935, represented a significant turning point in Indian politics. The Indian National Congress achieved a landslide victory, forming ministries in eight out of eleven provinces, including a clear majority in Hindu-majority regions. This electoral success demonstrated the Congress's widespread appeal and its position as the dominant political force.

In contrast, the All-India Muslim League performed poorly. It secured only about 4.4% of the total Muslim vote and failed to form a government in any province. This outcome was a profound disappointment for the League, which had harboured hopes of emerging as the sole representative of Indian Muslims. A critical moment occurred in Uttar Pradesh, where the Congress, having won an absolute majority, refused to form a coalition government with the Muslim League unless the League MLAs agreed to dissolve their parliamentary board and join the Congress. This rejection was seen by the Muslim League as an insult and a clear indication of Congress's desire to marginalize Muslim political representation.

The League interpreted Congress's reluctance to share power, even with a minor party like itself, as a sign of Congress's majoritarian tendencies. This experience forced the Muslim League, under M.A. Jinnah's leadership, to fundamentally reassess its strategy. It began to shift from seeking

power-sharing arrangements within a united India to advocating for a distinct political identity and separate destiny for Muslims. The disappointment of 1937 became a crucial catalyst for the League to aggressively promote a communal agenda and articulate the grievances of the Muslim community, setting the stage for increased polarization.

Muslim League's Propaganda Against Congress Rule

Following their electoral setback and the perceived snub by the Congress, the Muslim League launched an intense propaganda campaign against the Congress ministries. This campaign aimed to portray Congress rule as oppressive and detrimental to Muslim interests, thereby consolidating Muslim support behind the League. The League's strategy involved highlighting a series of grievances, some real, others exaggerated, to foster a sense of victimhood and alienation among Muslims.

One of the central charges was that Congress ministries were systematically suppressing Muslim culture and promoting Hindu majoritarianism. Specific instances cited included the emphasis on Hindi as a national language, often at the expense of Urdu, and the promotion of the Wardha Scheme of education. The Wardha Scheme, initiated by Mahatma Gandhi and designed by educationists like Zakir Hussain, aimed at basic, activity-centred education. However, the Muslim League interpreted it as an attempt to indoctrinate Muslim children with Hindu cultural values, particularly due to the singing of *Bande Mataram* (a hymn from Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Anandamath*) in schools and the use of Hindu religious symbols. This point needs attention: while the scheme itself was progressive, its implementation and symbolic aspects were effectively leveraged by the League to fuel Muslim apprehension.

Other accusations included alleged discrimination against Muslims in public services, the promotion of cow protection which often led to conflicts, and attacks on mosques. The League commissioned reports such as the Pirpur Report (1938), the Shareef Report (1939), and the Fazlul Haq Committee Report (1939), which documented these alleged atrocities and injustices committed under Congress rule. While many of these reports were contested by the Congress and lacked independent verification, they served as powerful tools for the League's propaganda.

The culmination of this propaganda was the observance of a 'Day of Deliverance' on December 22, 1939, following the resignation of Congress ministries. Jinnah called upon Muslims to celebrate this day as a relief from what he termed 'Hindu raj'. This widespread campaign significantly widened the communal divide, convincing many Muslims that their interests were not safe under a Congress-dominated government and that a separate political path was essential for their survival and self-respect.

The Concurrent Rise of Hindu Communalism

While the Muslim League actively propagated its narrative of Muslim victimhood, it is crucial to recognize that communalism was not a unilateral phenomenon. The period also witnessed a significant strengthening of Hindu communal organizations and ideologies, which contributed to the overall polarization of society. The rise of Hindu nationalism, often in reaction to Muslim political demands and sometimes proactively, further complicated the political landscape and hardened communal boundaries.

The Hindu Mahasabha, under leaders such as V.D. Savarkar, emerged as a prominent voice of Hindu communalism. Savarkar, a key figure in the Hindu nationalist movement, articulated the concept of 'Hindutva,' defining India as a Hindu nation with Hindus as its primary inhabitants. He argued for a unified Hindu identity and stressed the need for Hindus to assert their political dominance. This ideology implicitly, and often explicitly, relegated Muslims and other minorities to a secondary status, questioning their loyalty and belonging.

Similarly, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar, expanded its network and influence during this time. Under the leadership of M.S. Golwalkar, who became its Sarsanghchalak in 1940, the RSS propagated a vision of a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation). Golwalkar's writings, particularly 'We, or Our Nationhood Defined' (1939), openly advocated for India to be a Hindu nation where minorities, if they wished to live, must adopt Hindu culture and language, thereby losing their distinct identity. This point needs attention: such pronouncements, by influential Hindu leaders, directly fueled the fears of minorities, especially Muslims, about their future in a Hindu-majority India.

These Hindu communal narratives, which emphasized a monolithic Hindu identity and envisioned India as primarily a Hindu nation, created deep anxieties among non-Hindu communities. They provided a counter-narrative to the idea of a composite Indian nationalism that the Congress sought to promote. The parallel growth of aggressive communalism from both sides meant that the space for secular, inclusive politics dwindled, making conciliation increasingly difficult and reinforcing the belief among some Muslims that their future lay in a separate political entity. This dual growth of communal forces significantly contributed to the overall trajectory towards partition.

The Emergence and Evolution of the Two-Nation Theory

The idea that Hindus and Muslims constituted two separate nations, famously known as the Two-Nation Theory, was not an overnight development but evolved over several decades, gaining significant traction after the 1937 elections. While its conceptual roots can be traced back to earlier thinkers, its formal articulation and aggressive promotion by M.A. Jinnah became a defining feature of the period leading to partition.

Early glimmers of this concept can be seen in the writings of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in the late 19th century, who, while not explicitly calling for separation, expressed concerns about the political future of Muslims in a Hindu-majority India. However, the first clear articulation of a separate Muslim entity within India came from the poet and philosopher Allama Iqbal. In his Presidential Address to the Muslim League session in Allahabad in 1930, Iqbal proposed the amalgamation of Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sindh, and Balochistan into a single autonomous Muslim state within or without the British Empire. This vision, though initially focusing on autonomy, sowed the seeds for a distinct Muslim political geography.

The term 'Pakistan' itself was coined by Chaudhry Rehmat Ali, a Cambridge student, in 1933. He published a pamphlet titled 'Now or Never: Are We to Live or Perish Forever?' which proposed the name 'Pakistan' for the 'five Northern units of India' (Punjab, Afghan Frontier Province, Kashmir, Sind, and Baluchistan) where Muslims constituted a majority. Initially, this idea was considered outlandish by many, including leaders of the Muslim League.

However, the political disappointments of the 1937 elections proved to be a critical turning point for M.A. Jinnah. Prior to 1937, Jinnah was largely seen as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. After the Congress's refusal to form coalitions and the League's struggle for recognition, Jinnah transformed into a staunch advocate for Muslim separatism. He formally adopted and vigorously promoted the Two-Nation Theory, asserting that Hindus and Muslims were not merely two communities but two distinct nations with separate religions, cultures, histories, and social customs. This point becomes important: Jinnah argued that these fundamental differences made it impossible for them to coexist harmoniously within a single, democratic state, where Muslims would always remain a minority dominated by the Hindu majority. This ideological shift provided the theoretical justification for the demand for a separate Muslim homeland, giving a clear direction to the growing communal sentiment and paving the way for the Lahore Resolution.

The Lahore Resolution of 1940: A Demand for Separate States

The culmination of the Muslim League's strategic shift and the aggressive promotion of the Two-Nation Theory was the passing of the Lahore Resolution in March 1940. This resolution, adopted at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League in Lahore, formalized the demand for a separate homeland for Muslims and marked a decisive moment in [Indian history](#).

The resolution was moved by A.K. Fazl-ul-Haq, the then Premier of Bengal, and firmly adopted by the League under the leadership of M.A. Jinnah. The core of the resolution stated that "no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, namely, that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to constitute "Independent States" in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign."

A key detail often misunderstood is that the resolution did not explicitly use the term "Pakistan". Instead, it called for the creation of "Independent States" (plural) in the Muslim-majority regions, implying the possibility of more than one Muslim state or an autonomous grouping within a loose confederation. This ambiguity initially allowed for different interpretations, but over time, the demand solidified into a call for a single, sovereign state of Pakistan.

The Lahore Resolution transformed the abstract concept of the Two-Nation Theory into a concrete political demand. It provided the Muslim League with a clear objective and rallied Muslim support around the goal of a separate nation. From this point onwards, the League remained steadfast in its demand for partition, making it the central plank of its political negotiations. The resolution effectively served as the blueprint for the creation of Pakistan, signaling an irreversible shift in Indian politics and greatly accelerating the trajectory towards the eventual partition of the subcontinent. This document enshrined the idea that the communal differences were so profound that political separation was the only viable solution.

Analyzing the Forces Behind Growing Communalism

The trajectory of communalism towards partition in British India, particularly from 1937 to 1940, was shaped by a complex interplay of political ambition, ideological shifts, and perceived socio-cultural grievances. Each of the developments discussed contributed significantly to deepening the communal divide and making the idea of partition increasingly plausible.

The 1937 elections were a critical turning point. The Muslim League's electoral failure and the Congress's subsequent refusal to form coalition governments created a sense of marginalization and political insecurity among League leaders. This disappointment transformed Jinnah and the League's political strategy from seeking unity to advocating separation. The League leveraged this frustration to launch an aggressive propaganda campaign, painting Congress rule as Hindu majoritarian and oppressive. Accusations related to the Wardha Scheme, 'Bande Mataram', and alleged discrimination, whether fully accurate or exaggerated, successfully resonated with sections of the Muslim population, fostering a collective identity based on shared grievances.

Concurrently, the rise of Hindu communalism, spearheaded by organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS and ideologues such as Savarkar and Golwalkar, intensified the polarization. Their articulation of India as a Hindu nation and their questioning of Muslim identity directly countered the idea of a composite nation and fueled minority fears. This dual growth of communal narratives from both sides created a vicious cycle of distrust and alienation. The demands and rhetoric of one community often served as justification or reaction for the other, narrowing the space for compromise and mutual understanding.

The evolution and adoption of the Two-Nation Theory provided the ideological framework for separation. What began as vague notions of Muslim distinctiveness eventually transformed into a concrete political demand under Jinnah. By asserting that Hindus and Muslims were two fundamentally separate nations, Jinnah provided a powerful intellectual justification for the demand for a separate homeland. This theory resonated with the growing sense of cultural and political distinctiveness among many Muslims, offering a solution to their perceived insecurity in a Hindu-majority India. The Lahore Resolution of 1940 then translated this theory into a formal political objective, making the demand for separate 'Independent States' the central plank of the Muslim League's agenda. This formal demand removed any ambiguity about the League's ultimate goal and irrevocably set the course towards partition. The combined effect of these forces made the growth of communalism inexorable, pushing India towards an unprecedented political fragmentation.

UPSC Perspective

The period between the 1937 elections and the 1940 Lahore Resolution is a crucial segment of modern Indian history for the UPSC [Civil Services Examination](#). Understanding this era requires attention to specific details for prelims and a nuanced analytical approach for mains.

Prelims focus

For the Preliminary Examination, candidates must be familiar with the factual details of this period. This includes identifying key figures who played instrumental roles in shaping communal politics. M.A. Jinnah's transformation and leadership of the Muslim League, V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar as prominent Hindu communal leaders, Allama Iqbal's initial articulation of a separate Muslim state in

1930, Chaudhry Rehmat Ali for coining the term 'Pakistan', and A.K. Fazl-ul-Haq for moving the Lahore Resolution are all important.

Candidates should also recall significant dates, such as the 1937 provincial elections, the resignation of Congress ministries in 1939, and the passing of the Lahore Resolution in March 1940. Key resolutions like the Lahore Resolution are often direct questions. Specific schemes, such as the Wardha Scheme of education, and key terms like the 'Two-Nation Theory' and 'Day of Deliverance' require precise understanding. These facts form the bedrock of questions testing basic historical knowledge.

- **Key figures:** Jinnah, Savarkar, Golwalkar, Iqbal, Rehmat Ali, Fazl-ul-Haq
- **Important dates:** 1937 (elections), 1939 (Congress ministries resignation), 1940 (Lahore Resolution)
- **Significant resolutions:** Lahore Resolution
- **Specific schemes:** Wardha Scheme
- **Key terms:** Two-Nation Theory, Day of Deliverance

Mains focus

For the Main Examination, the focus shifts to a deeper analytical understanding of the causes and consequences of these developments. This period is central to questions on the causes of partition, where the growth of communalism is a primary theme. Candidates must be able to articulate how the political developments between 1937-1940 contributed to the rise of communalism and, subsequently, to political fragmentation.

A detailed analysis of the dynamics of Congress-Muslim League relations is essential. This includes understanding the impact of the 1937 election results on the League's strategy, the role of League's propaganda against Congress ministries, and Congress's responses. Furthermore, candidates should discuss the political developments that led to the formal demand for Pakistan, tracing the evolution from Iqbal's ideas to Jinnah's Two-Nation Theory and finally to the Lahore Resolution. The mains examination requires a comprehensive understanding of how these factors interacted to push India towards partition, emphasizing cause-and-effect relationships and critical evaluation of historical events.

Common Student Confusion

Students often encounter specific points of confusion when studying this period, which can lead to misinterpretations of critical historical events. Clarifying these misunderstandings is essential for accurate UPSC preparation.

Firstly, a common belief is that the Lahore Resolution explicitly used the term 'Pakistan' in its demand. This is incorrect. The Lahore Resolution, passed in March 1940, demanded 'Independent States' (in plural) in the Muslim-majority regions of North-Western and Eastern India. It did not mention the word 'Pakistan'. While it laid the foundation for the demand for Pakistan, the term itself was popularized and adopted by the Muslim League later, becoming synonymous with the resolution's intent.

Secondly, students sometimes underestimate the role and impact of Hindu communal organizations in this period, tending to focus solely on the Muslim League's communal politics. This is an oversight. The rise of Hindu communalism, led by figures like Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha and Golwalkar of the RSS, was a concurrent and equally significant factor in the polarization of society. Their articulation of Hindutva and their vision of India as a Hindu Rashtra deepened the anxieties of minorities and contributed to the communal divide, hardening positions on both sides.

Thirdly, there is often a misunderstanding of the Wardha Scheme, with some perceiving it solely as an anti-Muslim scheme without recognizing its designers or broader objectives. The Wardha Scheme of education, proposed by Mahatma Gandhi and refined by a committee headed by Dr. Zakir Hussain, aimed at universal, activity-based basic education. While the Muslim League did interpret aspects like the singing of 'Bande Mataram' or the use of certain symbols as anti-Muslim, the scheme itself was designed with progressive educational goals in mind, intended to provide practical and vocational skills. It was the League's political narrative that successfully framed it as a threat to Muslim identity, rather than the scheme's inherent design.

Short Revision Points

1. Muslim League faced significant disappointment after its poor performance in the 1937 provincial elections, prompting a fundamental shift in its political strategy.
2. Congress's rejection of a coalition government with the Muslim League, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, fueled the League's frustration and sense of marginalization.
3. The Muslim League launched an intense propaganda campaign against Congress ministries, citing alleged grievances like the suppression of Muslim culture, promotion of Hindi, and the Wardha Scheme.
4. Hindu communalism, under leaders such as V.D. Savarkar (Hindu Mahasabha) and M.S. Golwalkar (RSS), also gained considerable strength during this time, contributing to societal polarization.
5. M.A. Jinnah actively promoted the Two-Nation Theory after 1937, asserting that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations incapable of living together in a united India.
6. The Lahore Resolution of March 1940 formalized the Muslim League's demand for 'Independent States' in the Muslim-majority North-Western and Eastern regions of India.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Why was the 1937 election outcome significant for the Muslim League?**
The 1937 election outcome was significant for the Muslim League because its poor performance and the Congress's subsequent refusal to form coalition governments led to a strategic shift. The League felt marginalized and began to aggressively articulate Muslim grievances, leading to its advocacy for a separate Muslim identity and homeland.
2. **What were some of the main charges made by the Muslim League against Congress ministries?**

The main charges included the alleged suppression of Muslim culture, promotion of Hindi at the expense of Urdu, compulsory singing of 'Bande Mataram', the implementation of the Wardha Scheme (perceived as anti-Muslim), and discrimination against Muslims in public services.

3. Who coined the term 'Pakistan'?

The term 'Pakistan' was coined by Chaudhry Rehmat Ali, a Punjabi Muslim student studying at Cambridge, in 1933, as an acronym for the Muslim-majority regions he envisioned as a separate state.

The period from the 1937 elections to the 1940 Lahore Resolution vividly illustrates how political developments, ideological shifts, and communal propaganda converged to fuel communalism, ultimately paving the way for the partition of British India. Understanding these dynamics is essential for any aspiring civil servant, as it provides critical insights into the formation of modern South Asia. For those seeking a rigorous and focused approach to such complex historical topics, comprehensive guidance is indispensable. [SHRI RAM IAS](#) is regarded as the best [ias coaching in delhi](#), offering tailored programs that delve into the nuances of Indian history and polity, crucial for excelling in the UPSC examination.