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Research Article

Emergence, Spread and Consequences of Communalism in Bengal during Colonial Rule: A Historical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

During Muslim rule, there was a normal, cordial relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the subcontinent. But after the defeat of Nawab Siraj-ud-doula in the 1757 Battle of Plassey, British rule began in the subcontinent. Under the influence of this British rule, Indian society, economy, politics, communication system, language-literature-culture, publishing, profession and scholarship, law and judiciary, inter-communal relations, etc. also changed in the communal sphere. As a result, communal conflicts between Hindu-Muslim communities in the subcontinent began; which lasted for two hundred years. It finally ended in 1947 as a result of a political struggle aimed at changing the longstanding policy of oppression and discrimination between Hindu-Muslim communities. The present study therefore attempts to highlight the origin, spread, and consequences of communalism in Bengal.

Keywords: Muslim, British, Communalism, Hindhu, Company, Political Struggle.

1. Introduction

During Muslim rule, a simple life was observed among the Hindu-Muslims of Bengal. They spend their social lives in harmony with each other. Many rituals of social life influence both Hindu and Muslim communities. For example, married women wear sidhur on their heads and sakha on their hands; men wear Punjabi dhotis, etc. In economic life, they can build a sustainable agricultural system. If we review the history of five and a half centuries of the Muslim era, it can be seen that there were Muslim administrators as well as Hindu administrators in the Muslim royal courts. Many Hindu employees were working in high positions in administration. Hindus

were established in important positions in the military and administration. Emperor Akbar took two Hindu women as wives in the interest of state security and proper governance and provided opportunities by establishing a temple in Raj Prasad to perform Hindu religious ceremonies. Even to keep the Hindus happy and to establish governance on a sound basis, he established his religion called Din-E-Lahi. As a result, their authority was established in business, politics, land, and the general economic field. Thanks to this many Hindus got zamindari during the reign of Murshidkulir Khan. Moreover, Murshidquli Khan gave priority to Hindus in the appointment of tenants. During the reign of Murshid Quli Khan, Hindu-Muslim harmony was established.

2. Literature review

If you review the books written on colonial rule, it can be seen that most of the books have discussed various aspects of politics, economy, education, employment, and social issues. Therefore, in the following books, I have tried to investigate the various aspects of the origin, spread, and results of the communalism of the colonial regime:

1. There are a total of 36 chapters in the book *Bangladesh Politics, Government, and Regime Development 1757–2000*, written by Dr. Harun-or-Rashid. The examination shows that the book has been discussed in detail from the establishment of British rule in India and its impact on the foreign policy and international relations of Bangladesh today. In the fourth chapter of the book, only the uneven development of Hindu-Muslim communities, the emergence of communalism, and the British policy of shared taxation are scattered and vaguely discussed. I think the communalism that arose due to the unequal relationship between Hindu and Muslim communities during British rule needed to be presented more clearly (Rashid, 2001).

2. The book *Hindu-Muslim Relations in Bengal (1757–1916)*, written by Dr. Md. Ruhul Amin and Dr. Md. Rajaul Karim, is divided into six chapters. Examination reveals that the first chapter of the book deals with political relations between Hindu and Muslim communities; the second chapter deals with economic relations between Hindu and Muslim communities; the third chapter deals with education between Hindu and Muslim communities; and the fourth chapter deals with relations between Hindu and Muslim communities. Employment of the Muslim community, and the fifth chapter discusses the social relations of the Hindu-Muslim community. The book deals only with various aspects of Hindu-Muslim relations. It no longer represents the communalism that arose and spread due to unequal relations between Hindu and Muslim communities during British rule (Amin & Karim, 2016).

3. Syed Maqsood Ali has divided the book into nine chapters on "The Subcontinent in Politics and State Thought." The first chapter of the book deals with colonial politics; the second chapter with the religious reform movement and politics; the third chapter with other trends in the reform movement; and the fourth chapter with the beginnings of the Renaissance. Liberal politics in the fifth chapter, cooperative politics in the sixth chapter, Islamic-style politics in the seventh

chapter, the identity of nationalism in the eighth chapter, and the politics of Bengal division in the ninth chapter the book under discussion is mainly about the establishment of British rule in the subcontinent and the anti-British movement. Hindu-Muslim contact, origin, spread, and consequences of sectarianism are not given much space in the book (Ali, 1992).

4. W.W. Hunter's *The Indian Muslim* book is divided into 4 chapters. In the book, he highlights how British rule kept India's Muslim community isolated from the Hindu community. Moreover, how the Muslim community has gradually reached the poorest position from nobility through various setbacks. The said book has no space to write about the origin, spread, and consequences of communalism (Hunter, 1905).

5. *The history of colonial rule in Bengal* by Sirajul Islam is divided into nineteen chapters. Author's books: *Establishment of Rule in Bengal by the East India Company from the Battle of Palashi*, *Experiments in Land Administration and Land System in Bengal*, *Permanent Settlement*, *Landlords' Reaction*, *Operation and Consequences of Sujanra Act*, *Conwallis Code*, *Establishment of British Sovereignty*, *Bengali Reaction to Company Rule*, *Eighteenth-Nineteenth Centuries of peasant revolts*, *colonial bureaucracy*, *questions of development and nationalization*, and *the transition from presidency to provinces* are discussed in detail. Although the book discusses various aspects of British rule, there is not much discussion about the origin and spread of communalism in Bengal (Islam, 2008).

A review of the above books shows that there is no analysis of the origin, spread, and development of communalism in Bengal. Most of the books and articles published on British rule are discussed from a general perspective. But some books discuss Hindu-Muslim riots, causes of the backwardness of Muslims, etc. very briefly. Therefore, realizing the need for important research on the origin, spread and results of communalism in Bengal, I became interested in doing this research.

3. Research gaps

British rule in the subcontinent was established for almost two hundred years. To discuss the origin, development, and results of communalism in Bengal by reviewing the history of this long period, more time and more study were needed. However, due to my job, I did not get the necessary time, so I could not study more due to lack of opportunity. However, I think that this small study of mine will be useful for larger studies in the future.

4. Research methods and data collection

Research data has been generally collected from primary and secondary sources. Various books, journals, and periodicals published generally on the British rule are important components of my research. I have studied several magazines published during the period 1757-1947. However, I have not found any newspaper during this period of 1757-1900. Discussions on various aspects of British rule are available in newspapers from 1901 onwards. Since 1900, articles on various

aspects of British rule have been published almost daily in newspapers. I have seen daily and weekly periodicals like Bichitra, Pravasi, Dhaka Prakash, etc. after 1900. I have collected information from the central library of various universities of Bangladesh, national archives radio, political interviews, and speeches broadcasted on BTV and BBC. Besides, I have studied the documents of meetings of various political organizations.

The establishment of British rule in Bengal and its impact on the rise and spread of communalism

The establishment of British colonial rule in Bengal is an important event in our national history. The influence of this British rule was far-reaching in Bengal's society, politics, architecture, communication system, language-literature-culture, publishing, profession and work, law and judicial system, inter-community relations, etc. Although British rule continued for a long time following various types of oppression and discrimination between different communities, it finally came to an end in 1947 as a result of the political struggle (Mallick, 1977).

Arrival of the British East-India Company

The British East-India Company was a trading association of the English. It was founded in 1600 with 217 partners. The same year the company received a charter from the British Queen Elizabeth I to trade in the Indian Ocean region. After receiving royal charters, they set out to trade in the spice-rich islands of the Far East but failed and arrived in India the same year. In 1613, the company's first trading post was established in Surat, a port on the west coast of India (Gordon, 1979). Mughal Emperor Jahangir gave this permission as a decree. In 1616 the second trading post was established at Muslipattam. In 1639 the company built a fort in Madras. Then Hariharpur, Hooghly, Patna, Kasimbazar Kuthi were established one by one. In 1690, during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, the company acquired the zamindari ownership of three villages in Calcutta, Sutanti, and Gobindpur (Sayeed, 1968). In 1698 the company was allowed to set up Fort William in Calcutta. In the year 1690, Emperor Aurangzeb granted the company the right to trade throughout India duty-free in exchange for three thousand rupees annually. In 1717, Emperor Farrukh Shear gave this money and allowed the company to trade freely (Lifschultz, 1979).

Battle of Plassey and establishment of East India Company rule in Bengal

On April 10, 1756, Nawab Alivardi Khan of Bengal died. Then his grandson Siraj-ud-doula ascended the throne of Murshidabad. Shortly after he acceded to the throne, he had a bitter conflict with the British. The officials of the company decided to expand their business through political influence. With this Murshidabad became involved in the conflict-conspiracy of the royal palace (Rahim, 1978). Among the conspirators against the Nawab were his close relatives Ghesheti Begum, Shaukat Jang, Jagatsheth, Urmi Chad, Mir Zafar, Yar Latif, Raydurlav etc. They join hands with the English. Finally, on June 23, 1757, Nawab Siraj-ud-doula's troops fought a final battle with the British forces led by Robert Clive at Plasseir Amrakanan near

Murshidabad (Ali,1993). The Nawab was defeated in the war by the betrayal of the Nawab commander Mir Zafar and the Nawab was imprisoned. He was killed in captivity. After that Mir Jafar and some other Nawabs sat on the throne of Bengal, but they were puppets of the British. Then the company installed Mir Zafar Ali Khan on the throne of Bengal (Maniruzzaman,1971). But soon after Mir Zafar failed to fulfill his agreement, he was deposed on charges of incompetence and inability to pay extra money and installed his son-in-law Mir Qasim Ali Khan on the throne. Mir Qasim Ali Khan tried to be independent from the English company by ascending the throne. As a result of which he was defeated in 1764 in the battle of Babra with the English. After his defeat, the company installed Mir Jafar's minor son Nazim-ud-doula on the throne of Bengal (Rahman,1970).

Company interference in the Bengal economy

In 1765, after Nazim-ud-doula ascended the throne, the company got the power to collect the revenue of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. As a result, the company gets the sole right to collect revenue. The company gets the sole right to collect revenue but the general administration remains in the hands of the Nawab for some days (Islam,1984). In such a situation, there was a terrible famine in Bengal in 1770. One-third of the people of Bengal died of starvation during the famine. Most of the land is replenished with forest. The economic life of the Muslims of Bengal began to decline from this time (Datta,1965).

Establishment of Company colonial rule and the emergence of communalism

In 1773, the British Parliament enacted the Regulating Act when the news of the famine of 1770 was published in the newspapers of England. By making Warren Hastings the Governor-General, the first central government was established in Calcutta with the provision of a four-member advisory council (Jayanti,1984). Gradually this government expanded. Police stations, high commissioners, and district and provincial administrations are created. Organized bureaucracy, army, and justice system. The Muslim community of Bengal could not accept the establishment of this colonial rule by the East India Company. They think that their fate is against them (Karim,2021). They distance themselves from their nobility, pride, and religious beliefs. On the other hand, for the Hindu community, it was just a change of ruler. So immediately the Hindu community could not get the privileges that the Muslim community got under the British. During this time many of the Hindu community came in contact with the company and some of them started joint trade with the company. Moreover, the company also came across the Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers and did not find it very easy to govern the state. So, they wholeheartedly accept the Hindu community as a strong pillar of Indian governance (Banerjee,1925).

Permanent Settlement and Communalism

In this situation, Lord Cornwallis became the new Governor General of Bengal and in 1793 he introduced the permanent settlement. As a result, many old Muslim zamindars fell and Hindu

zamindars arose in their place. At the end of the Mughal period, due to failure to pay regular revenue, the Hindu landlords of this country settled new lands by promising to pay increased revenue (Majumdar,1956). The number of Muslim landlords decreased. As a result, after the permanent settlement, the Hindu zamindars were created as Jotdars, Talukders, Gatidars, attainders, etc., and the Hindu middle class was born with sub-tenants involved in the land system. Moreover, in the years following the permanent settlement, many zamindars were sold for non-payment of company dues. Hindu businessmen or any Hindu government functionaries appear as new buyers. This rising Hindu middle class attracted the attention of the government and established the necessary links in an official mantra. On the other hand, the situation of Muslims has become serious (Ahmed,1981).

The East India Company from the beginning introduced the practice of paying revenue in currency instead of crops. As a result, the social and economic life of the poor Muslim peasant community of Bengal has created a great crisis. The farmer is forced to raise money by selling the produce. But as a result of lack of rain and heavy rain, the crop is not as expected and the farmers are forced to go to moneylenders to collect money (Sen,1976). So Hindu moneylenders become the sole source of livelihood for the farmer. On this occasion, the new Zamindar and his associate Hindu Gomasta were not satisfied with just increasing the rent. Salami, Batta, Mangun, Begar, Farman, Marriage Tax, Nazrana or Chada, or even beard tax on the occasion of food, etc. used to exploit the Muslim people on various pretexts (Sarkar,1993).

Sepoy mutiny and communalism

In this situation, the Faraji and Wahhabi movements spread due to the anti-British attitude among the Muslims of Bengal. By which the sepoy rebellion started in 1857. The Muslim community's desire to gain political power was shattered by the rebellion. Because the period after the rebellion was the most difficult in terms of politics (Gopal, 1959). Although both Hindu and Muslim communities participated in the Sepoy Mutiny, the anger of the British fell more on the Muslims. As a result, they always give priority to the Hindu community in establishing political power over the Muslims. In such a situation, the history written by British retired military officers spread communal venom between Hindu-Muslims. Why not by this history, Muslims are accused of destroying temples, desecrating Hindu women, committing adultery, destroying the Hindu religion, etc (Wasti,1973).

Indian National Congress and Communalism

In such a situation, India's political changes took place. Company rule ended due to sepoy mutiny and the British Queen's rule was established. To satisfy the Hindus, the British government established three universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. An educated middle class developed within the Hindu community through these universities (Ashraf,1957). The National Congress was established in 1885 under the patronage of the British just when this educated middle class started to establish a national institution. Although this party was declared non-communal at the time of its establishment, the party gradually became a Hindu communal

party. By which the Muslim community failed to gain any rights. As a result, Hindu-Muslim communal attitudes developed (Gopal,1959).

Partition of Bengal and Communalism

The British government partitioned Bengal in 1905 declaring that the province of Bengal could not be ruled by a governor. As a result, the neglected Muslim community can see the light of hope. They quickly took the stand in favor of the partition of Bengal. But with the announcement of the partition of Bengal, the Hindu community called for the abolition movement under the banner of the Congress (Chatterjee,1997). The Muslim community tried to unite in the face of Hindu protest. Because they think that the creation of a new province will allow the Muslim community to establish itself in a new political identity and that the poor Muslim farming community will improve by loosening Hindu dominance. In such a situation, the Muslim leaders established the All India Muslim League as an independent Muslim political party on December 30, 1906. The establishment of this Muslim League was not viewed favorably by the Hindu community (Datta, 1965). As a result, they resorted to communal riots in the Abolition of Partition of Bengal movement. The riots caused irreparable damage to the Muslims of Bengal. Even the Muslims who did not participate in the movement were called to their homes by the local zamindars and cut their hair. Chili powder is injected into the nostrils. Forced to keep Hinduani name and stop mortgaging land. Even false cases of cow slaughter are harassed (Noman,1942).

Abolition of partition of Bengal and communalism

In the face of the Congress movement, the British government announced the cancellation of the partition of Bengal. This marked the victory of the Hindu community; on the other hand, the Muslim community was defeated. The British government announced the establishment of a university in Dhaka to compensate the Muslims of East Bengal. But with this announcement the Hindu community started to move (Prasad, 1963). Despite the opposition of the Hindu community, the Nathan Commission finally recommended the establishment of a university in Dhaka. After the establishment of the university in Dhaka, the Hindu community got all the benefits. The British government canceled the partition of Bengal and the Muslim community began to look at the Hindu community with suspicion (Seal, 1988).

Hindu-Muslim unity efforts and communalism

The establishment of the Muslim League 21 years after the establishment of the Congress marked the path of two separate political streams of Hindus and Muslims. This does not mean that there was a permanent split between the Hindu-Muslims of Bengal and they were never able to reconcile politically. During this time there was a major change in the leadership of the Muslim League (Mujeed, 1967). Anti-British and relatively young leaders came to the forefront of the organization. They were in favor of following the policy of Hindu-Muslim unity instead of loyalty to the British. The liberal leaders of the Congress also believed in the principle of Hindu-

Muslim unity (Chaudhuri, 1961). So, they were able to reach an agreement on the future constitutional framework of India on this principle of unity (Lucknow Pact), the Hindu-Muslim community of India joined a united movement identifying the British as common political enemies (Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement). Even, a lot of success was achieved in the permanent solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem in Bengal and in building a common political organization of both communities (C.R. Das's Bengal Pact and Swarajya Pati). Unfortunately, this positive political trend in Hindu-Muslim relations did not last. After the death of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, communal consciousness was awakened again (Baig, 1924). Already when the First World War started, the British government declared the independence of India. In such a situation, the Muslim leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah demanded a separate state for the Muslims of India from the British government. In view of his demand, the British government was forced to give an independent Muslim state named Pakistan in 1947 for the Muslims of India (Ahmed, 1961).

Hindu-Muslim uneven development and sectarianism

Hindu-Muslim are the two main religious communities of India. During the British rule, these communities developed unequally in various fields. The economy at that time was mainly land-based (Coupland, 1968). The native Muslim community was engaged in agriculture. When the East India Company came to this country for the purpose of trade, many of the Hindu community came into contact with it, and some engaged in joint trade with the company. In this way, a part of the Hindus who acquired the new wealth became zamindars after buying the Zamindari (Haq, 1968). Besides, many Hindus who used to collect land revenue became actual owners or zamindars of land due to permanent settlement (Symonds, 1946). On the other hand, among the Muslims who had various rights on the land in the past, most of them lost those rights due to the British laws in the post-Palashi war situation? So, the Hindus were able to immediately take advantage of the various facilities provided by the British, but the Muslims were not able to do the same (Lilly, 1902). On the other hand, the Hindu community was able to develop a strong and advanced position in the fields of trade, land, education, literature, employment, governance, leadership etc. And the position of the Muslim community is at the lower level of society, such as the peasants. In this situation, there is an extreme spread of communalism between the Hindu-Muslim communities (Imam, 1975).

5. Conclusion

British rule in Bengal and India for almost two hundred years was very eventful and full of events. Life, society, politics, economy, and communication systems was changing everywhere. Changes also occur in Hindu-Muslim relations. In this context, the British land system is mentioned first. By this, the social and economic exploitation of the zamindars-mahajans on one side, the Muslim peasants-people on the other side, the social and economic exploitation of the zamindars-mahajans-disparity became a communal form. This system continued throughout the British rule. Hindu processions with musical instruments in front of mosques or riots over cow

slaughter by Muslims were manifestations of deteriorating communal relations. In 1905, when Lord Curzon divided Bengal and formed a new province with East Bengal and Assam, the Hindu-Muslim communal conflict reached its peak. Muslims were the majority in the new province. In this province with Dhaka as its capital, there was a bright possibility of progress in various fields of the backward Muslim community. However, the advanced Hindu community identified the partition of Bengal as the mutilation of the motherland and started a massive movement demanding its cancellation. Of course, their permanent economic and other interests were also involved. Finally, in the face of the movement of the Hindu community, when the British rulers declared the partition of Bengal in 1911, the Muslims were very angry and suffered. The signing of the Hindu-Muslim Lucknow Pact in 1916, the united Khilafat-Non-cooperation movement of Hindu and Muslim communities in India under the leadership of Gandhi in 1919-1922, the Hindu-Muslim Bengal Pact in Bengal initiated by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das in 1923, etc., played a positive role in the development of rapprochement between the two communities. The Nehru Report in 1928, Jinnah's Fourteen Points in 1929, and the British government's communal crackdown in 1932 led to the deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations. As a result, Muslim leader Jinnah gave rise to the theory of Hindu-Muslim two separate nations. During the last decade of British rule (1937-1947) the Hindu-Muslim conflict reached its climax. A kind of fear is born in the minds of the Muslims from the fear that the majority Muslim community will be permanently subjugated to the majority Hindu community in undivided India under British rule. On August 16, 1946, the terrible Calcutta riots took place in a situation that made the partition of India inevitable. Finally, in 1947, based on Jinnah's two-nation theory, India was divided, and the states of India and Pakistan were born.

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