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## MUSLIM ATTITUDE TOWARDS BJP

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*"The advent of Islam constituted the first great rift in the incorporation of the aboriginal peoples in Aryan society."* (A noted historian R.C.Mazumdar in his book – The History and Culture of Indian People, page 478, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966)

To understand what a Muslim thinks about the BJP, we may look back to this sad truth of Indian history and the general psyche of the community. The assault on Hindu society for more than 1200 years by the Islamic invaders, which included forceful conversion of a sizeable chunk of Hindu population to Islam, destruction of temples and building of mosques there and imposition of Persio –Arabic culture on converted Muslims - divided the people of this subcontinent for ever. Gradually the Muslim rulers and the feudal class in the community convincingly indoctrinated the converted Muslims to search for their heritage from a medieval era of Indian history and thereby negated their actual heritage before the advent of Islam in India.

**The Sepoy Mutiny and the divide:** The unfortunate part of the politics of Muslim- Hindu divide in India started after the beginning of the decline of the Mughal empire from the time of Aurangzeb and this had a significant impact after the first war of independence or Sepoy mutiny of 1857, on the contemporary history of freedom movement. For a while during the Sepoy mutiny there was solidarity amongst Hindus and Muslims while the former accepted Bahadur Shah Zafar as their ruler. But some of the then Muslim leaders frustrated such unity. They made desperate efforts to keep the common Muslims away from the national mainstream. Ironically, they spoke of a separate Islamic identity and their pan-Islamic ideology did not provide space for the concept of a common nationality to emerge against the Britishers.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a Muslim intellectual of western mind set and known as a "sincere friend and fervent admirer of the British" (Muslim Rule in India by S.M.Ikram, page466), founded Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College, Aligarh in 1875, which was subsequently named as Aligarh Muslim University. He was known as a liberal Muslim for his support to modern education to Muslims. But ironically, he could never reconcile himself with the idea of democracy." Being a descendant of high Mogul officials, he could not accept that Muslims should be ruled by their former subjects. He also feared that the Hindu rule will result in the imposition of Aryo-Dravidian culture on the Muslim Persio-Arabic civilisation"( The Muslim Dilemma in India by M.R.A. Baig – page 51-52). Maulana Mohammad Ali, a widely known Muslim leader of the freedom movement on the other hand maintained that " where Islam is concerned, I have nothing to do with India." (Persons, Passions and Politics by Mohammad Yunus – page36).

This sycophantic approach of the feudal Muslim class towards the Britishers also created frustration and confusion among the uneducated Muslim masses who were therefore distrusted by the mainstream. The concept of a separate Muslim identity was so deeply embedded in the then Indian Muslim psyche that it became more or less impossible to make them realise the reality of democratic polity, which was the dream of the leaders of the freedom movement.

Since the Muslim leaders considered religious question as central and beyond political considerations, there was no possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity in the contemporary politics of the country. Thus, the contradiction between loyalty of Muslims to Islam and their loyalty to India -a myth created by these Muslim leaders left a permanent imprint on the minds of the Muslim masses.

**The Khilafat Movement:** Gradually, the events like Lucknow Pact in 1916 granting separate electorate status to Muslims, support of Khilafat Movement by Congress at the instance of Mahatma Gandhi, who tried to bring unity between the two communities in his struggle against the Britishers and opposition of the song Vande Mataram by Ali Brothers made the two-identity theory a national reality. The Hindu nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak understood the mind of Muslim leaders but did not react against them for the sake of a united struggle against the Britishers. Mahatma Gandhi on the other hand unwittingly sowed the seed of religion in politics, when he joined hands with Ali Brothers in the Khilafat Movement. The Khilafat movement had an offshoot in Malabar, where the Muslims rose against the British, but the movement quickly degenerated into one against the Hindus and many of the Hindus in Malabar were forcibly converted.

M.R.A.Baig, in his book –The Muslim Dilemma, page 60, while commenting upon Tilak and Gandhi said: - "Whereas Tilak was quite clear about his objective and deliberately nourished separate communalism in order to canalise them into a joint freedom struggle, Gandhi, who stood somewhere between the extreme Tilak and moderate Gokhale, was indecisive and experimental,

and even resorted to expediency." He added: - "Gandhi tried to bridge the gulf between Hindus and Muslims but never to fill it."

Contrary to the objective of Gandhi to bring Muslims nearer to Hindus, Ali brothers, the ultra pan-Islamic product of Aligarh Anglo

Mohammedan Oriental College exploited the pan-Indianism slogan of Gandhi for the purpose of pan-Islamism. Muslim politics, which was confined to feudal class Muslims however, spread its deep roots to the Muslim masses and communalised them deeply. The immense damage caused by this movement has not yet been properly studied or reviewed.

**Emergence of RSS:** Against the backdrop of the historical reality discussed above, we could discuss about the emergence of the RSS. The RSS was founded by a Hindu nationalist leader Dr. Hedgewar in 1925 with the sole aim of uniting the Hindus and for revival of the pre-Islamic past of India. This "tactically communal and strategically ultra patriotic" ideology of the RSS further encouraged the Muslim leaders to make their community people believe that if India achieved independence, they will have to remain under the rule of the majority community Hindus. They were not ready to believe that in a democratic polity every citizen has an equal right. The Muslim League, which harped on the two-nation theory, got wholehearted support from over 90% of Muslims, which ultimately resulted in division of the country which left a permanent injury on Hindu-Muslim relations.

**Despite the partition on two nation theory, the divide continued in India:** India was perhaps destined to its misfortune, as even after partition of the country on the basis of two-nation theory, the problems of Muslim community in India remained unresolved. This unnatural and undesirable division of the county due to separatist thinking of the Muslims caused a permanent damage to the secular outlook of Hindus. The Muslims, who constituted more than twenty percent of population in undivided India got bifurcated in 1947 and trifurcated in 1971 following the emergence of Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. With decrease in their

numerical strength in India against the Hindus after partition whose numerical strength was in tact, the Indian Muslims realised that they have become weaker and started suspecting the former. Subsequently the Congress and other political parties treated them as vote banks for their electoral politics and never allowed them to get out of the feudal mind set and follow a secular approach towards politics.

**Post Independence situation:** The feudal class Indian Muslims realised their blunder of separatist politics during freedom movement but did not try to learn a lesson after partition. Instead of inculcating the ideology of peaceful coexistence among the common Muslims, they found religious consolidation of their community more favourable to their political interests than their emotional integration with the mainstream Hindus. Thus, Muslim communalism was re-born in democratic India. By keeping their communal solidarity alive for their selfish political interests, all political parties without exception were responsible for widening the gap of mistrust between the two communities.

In view of the Transnational character of Islam, the Muslim communalists take keen interest in the affairs of Muslims in other countries. Whether it was Russian intervention in Afghanistan, or American attack on Iran or emergence of Israel as a dominant force in Palestine, the Muslim communalists in India got disturbed. They expect the Hindus to express their solidarity with them as they had done during Khilafat Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The RSS and its political arm, the BJP was founded to expose the medieval mind set of Indian Muslims and unite the Hindus of the country to achieve political power. They have been trying to remind the Muslims of their pre-medieval past and expect them to develop an attitude of "common identity" with Hindu nationalism as political philosophy. The Indian Muslims however, suspect it as an attempt to *de-Islamise* them. The Muslim Personal Law, Uniform Civil Code, management of Waqf Board, polygamy, Talaq, upliftment of women, Purdah system, family planning, the Haj subsidy, Aligarh Muslim University with special provisions for minority institutions granted under Articles 29 and 30 of Indian constitution and the status of Urdu language were all seen as linked with Islamic identity by the Muslims or at least the leaders and on the other hand remnants of a feudal setup and anti modern by many in the majority community. Any attempt to modernise the community was perceived by common Muslims as an attempt to destroy Muslim culture.

Apart from the known stand of the BJP on Muslim issues, the Congress, Communists and other opponents of Hindu nationalists launched an aggressive campaign against the RSS and its political outfit the BJP for over half a century after independence. They successfully convinced the Indian Muslims that these are the anti-Muslims Hindu organisations out to destroy the Muslim identity and culture. The alienation of the Muslim community from the BJP got considerable help from the so called "secular media" and the Urdu press. The demolition of "Babri Mosque" in 1992 only exacerbated the alienation further and the Muslims are not yet ready to forget it. For them, the entire Sangh Parivar is responsible for the anti-Muslim action in the demolition of the masjid.

**BJP & Muslims- the paradigm shift in Chennai declaration:** Till 1998 Lok Sabha election there was no change in the stand of the BJP on its ideology of Hindutva and party's stand on issues relating to Muslims. However, in December 1999, the BJP leadership, while preferring to shut their eyes to Muslim psychosis, opened a small window for them in its party document known as Chennai Declaration to initiate a confidence building exercise in the community. But against the party's fifty years ideology and stand on Muslim issues, Chennai Declaration hardly had the potential to change the attitude of the latter towards the BJP. This change in tactics was not followed up by the other constituents of Sangh Parivar who continued to the same language which BJP spoke while it was in the opposition.

It looks that the only thing, that keeps the Muslims united is the fear psychosis against the BJP. This is a "happy situation" for all the opposition parties and in the search for the votes a convenient stick to beat the BJP, little realising that if there are "communalists" within BJP there are as many or more amongst the opposition parties.

It is easy to make a pious statement that both the Hindus and Muslims should forget the past for their harmonious future and learn to coexist

peacefully on equal terms, but it is difficult to get rid of the ghost, which has been haunting the entire nation. In absence of a meaningful dialogue between the common Muslims and Hindu nationalists and freedom of the former from their fundamentalist leaders with a medieval mind set, there is no possibility at sight to see any change in the attitude of the Muslims towards the BJP.

The sad truth is that the historical animosity between the two communities is still being taught in schools and colleges through distorted history. Historian Bipin Chandra was perhaps right, when he observed that:- "Communal harmony could not be permanently established in our country so long as highly distorted versions of history were being taught in schools and colleges through the history text books." (India struggle for Independence – Delhi Penguin, 1992 – page 411 )

( *The analysis is based on the personal perception of the writer in the light of the history of the BJP. E-mail [ramashray60@yahoo.com](mailto:ramashray60@yahoo.com) [1] )*

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