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Genesis, Growth, & Gravity of Two Nation Theory and Partition of India

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Abstract:

This study delves into the intricate layers of the Two-Nation Theory and the consequential partition of India. It explores the historical roots of this ideology, tracing its growth amidst the socio-political landscape of pre-independence India. Additionally, it examines the gravitational pull of this theory, analyzing its profound impact on the Indian subcontinent's history, politics, and identity formation. The partition of India in 1947 stands as one of the most significant events in modern history, marking the culmination of decades of political struggle and ideological divisions. At the heart of this partition lies the Two-Nation Theory, a concept that not only shaped the course of Indian independence but also had far-reaching implications for the subcontinent's future. Developed primarily by Muslim leaders during the early twentieth century, the theory posited that Hindus and Muslims were distinct nations with separate religious, cultural, and political identities, and therefore, they needed separate homelands to safeguard their interests and ensure their rights. The ideological divide between proponents of the Two-Nation Theory and advocates of a united India deepened in the years leading up to independence, culminating in the partition of British India in 1947. Despite efforts to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement between the Muslim League and Indian National Congress, the irreconcilable differences between the two sides ultimately led to the partition, resulting in the creation of India and Pakistan as independent dominions.

Keywords: Divide and Rule policy, Muslim League, Lucknow session of Congress (1916), Pakistan Resolution, Direct Action Day, Genocide.

Introduction: To provide a comprehensive understanding of the Two-Nation Theory, it is essential to explore its historical background, ideological underpinnings, key proponents, impact on Indian politics, and its implications for the partition of British India. The concept of the two-nation theory proposed a form of religious nationalism, advocating for the recognition of Muslim Indian nationhood and the establishment of separate territories for Indian Muslims and Hindus following the decolonization of British India. This belief had a notable impact on nurturing Muslim separatist feelings throughout the nation. It highlighted the idea that Indian Hindus and Muslims were distinct nations, each with their own distinct

customs, civilizations, and existences. Ultimately, this ideological framework culminated in the Partition of India in 1947.

To understand the emergence of the Two-Nation Theory, it is crucial to delve into the historical context of the Indian subcontinent. Centuries of Muslim rule, beginning with the conquests of Muhammad Bin Qasim¹ in the 8th century and culminating in the establishment of the Mughal Empire, left a profound impact on the region's socio-political landscape. Pakistani historians like Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi ground the two-nation theory in the unique characteristics of medieval Indo-Muslim culture or civilization. Their argument suggests that by adopting various elements of Indian culture such as customs, social norms, art & architectural styles, and music, the Muslims in India forged a unique Indo-Muslim culture or civilization.² In Pakistan, there is a prevalent belief that the drive for self-awakening and identity among Muslim community traces its origins to Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624). He is credited with opposing Emperor Akbar's religious syncretism Din-i Ilahi movement. Consequently, contemporary official Pakistani historians often regard Ahmad Sirhindi as the founder of the Two-Nation Theory.³

However, by the nineteenth century, the British East India Company had expanded control on large parts of the subcontinent, leading to the gradual decline of Muslim political power. The British colonial rule brought significant changes to Indian society, including the introduction of modern education, the spread of Western ideas, and the rise of nationalist movements. Simultaneously, it also exacerbated communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, particularly during the later stages of colonial rule. The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, initially included leaders from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. Still, over time, it came to be perceived as predominantly representing Hindu interests, leading to a sense of alienation among Muslim elites.

The Two-Nation Theory drew upon various ideological and historical influences to justify the demand for a separate Muslim homeland. Central to its premise was the notion that Hindus and Muslims constituted distinct cultural and religious communities with irreconcilable differences. Proponents of the theory argued that Muslims, as a minority community in a predominantly Hindu-majority country, would face discrimination and marginalization in a unified Indian state. They contended that the creation of a separate Muslim-majority state was necessary to safeguard Muslim identity, culture, and political rights. Several prominent Muslim leaders played instrumental roles in articulating and

1) Muhammad bin Qasim served as a military commander under the Umayyad Caliphate and played a significant role in the Muslim conquest of Sindh. He defeated the final Hindu ruler, Raja Dahir, in the Battle of Aror (712 CE). Notably, he was the first Muslim leader to conquer Hindu lands and establish Islamic presence in early India (Durrani 10).

2) This cultural identity not only remained distinct from other Muslim communities such as the Arabs and Persians but also distinguished itself from Hindu India by embodying primarily an Indo-Persian essence (Paul 168).

3) Clinton and Charles (143).

popularizing the Two-Nation Theory. Among them, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-98)⁴, a leading Muslim reformer and educationist, is often credited with laying the groundwork for the theory through his advocacy of Muslim socio-economic empowerment and the promotion of Western education among Muslims. However, it was Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), the founder of the All-India Muslim League⁵ and later the leader of the Pakistan Movement, who became the most influential champion of the Two-Nation Theory. Jinnah's advocacy for Muslim political rights and his insistence on the demand for Pakistan as a separate homeland for Muslims galvanized support for the theory among Muslims across the subcontinent.

British rule and strengthening of the ideology of separatism: The British rule in India played a significant role in fostering and reinforcing the ideology of religious separatism by exploiting existing divisions, implementing discriminatory policies, and providing a conducive environment for the articulation and propagation of separatist narratives. The British colonial administration often implemented policies that exacerbated religious tensions and divisions among different communities in India. By exploiting existing religious, cultural, and social differences, the British sought to maintain control over the Indian subcontinent. This policy fueled distrust and animosity between religious groups, laying the groundwork for separatist sentiments. The British introduced census operations and enumeration exercises, which required categorizing the population based on religious affiliation. This categorization reinforced the perception of distinct religious communities with separate interests and identities. It also provided statistical data that could be used to support claims for separate representation and political autonomy. The British colonial legal system often recognized and codified communal identities, providing a legal basis for separate representation and political demands based on religious affiliation. This legal framework institutionalized religious divisions and contributed to the proliferation of religious separatist ideologies.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 was the initial step by the British to disrupt Hindu-Muslim solidarity. The partition of Bengal in 1905 marked a significant turning point in British colonial policy towards India. It was a deliberate move aimed at undermining Hindu-Muslim unity by creating divisions along religious lines. This act sparked widespread protests and resistance from Indians, particularly from the Bengali community, who saw it as a strategy to weaken their political influence. Following the backlash against

4) Graham and other scholars have credited the emergence of the two-nation theory to figures like Syed Ahmed Khan and the Aligarh Movement, as well as his supporters like Mohsin-ul-Mulk. Syed Ahmed Khan. Syed Ahmed, who was the grandson of the Mughal Vizier of Akbar Shah II, Dabir-ud-Daula, played a crucial role in promoting the concept of distinct Muslim identity and advocating for educational and social reforms through the Aligarh Movement.

5) In 1906, the All-India Muslim League was established in Dhaka through a gathering involving prominent Muslim politicians and the Viceroy of British India, Lord Minto. The primary objective of this political party was to safeguard the interests of Muslims on the Indian subcontinent.

the partition, the British government introduced the Morley-Minto Reforms in 1909.⁶ These reforms were intended to provide limited political representation to Indians while still maintaining British control. However, they also institutionalized communal electorates, which further entrenched religious divisions in the political landscape.⁷ The Morley-Minto Reforms represented a critical moment in the struggle against colonial domination in India. While they granted some degree of representation to Indians, particularly to the educated elite, they also deepened communal tensions and laid the groundwork for future demands for separate electorates and eventually, the partition of India.

Subsequently, the Montagu-Chelmsford (Government of India Act of 1919) reforms introduced reserved seats for Muslims.⁸ This period also witnessed a strengthening of Hindu-Muslim unity, particularly with the emergence of the Non-cooperation Movement in 1919, which rallied around the Khilafat issue.⁹ After the Chauri Chaura (presently Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh) incident on February 4, 1922, during which several British policemen lost their lives due to actions taken by participants of the Non-Cooperation movement, Gandhi decided to halt the movement.¹⁰ Subsequently, Muslim leaders experienced a sense of betrayal as their efforts to revolt against the abolition of the Caliphate remained unresolved following the cessation of the movement. This led to a gradual escalation of tensions between Hindus and Muslims, eventually reaching a point where reconciliation became unattainable.

In 1930, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) assumed leadership of the Muslim League and, for the first time, voiced the call for a separate Muslim state.¹¹ He contended that Muslims and Hindus were distinct nations, inherently incompatible. However, the Congress at that

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- 6) The Morley-Minto Reforms, alternatively referred to as the Indian Councils Act of 1909, were implemented during the tenures of Lord Morley, who served as the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Minto, who held the position of Viceroy of India.
 - 7) These reforms established a system of separate electorates, allowing only Muslims to vote for Muslim candidates in designated constituencies. Through this, the British aimed to reinforce the notion that the political, economic, and cultural interests of Muslims and Hindus were entirely distinct and separate.
 - 8) The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, alternatively known as the Mont-Ford Reforms, were instituted by the colonial administration to gradually introduce self-governing institutions in British India. These reforms derive their name from Edwin Montagu, who held the position of Secretary of State for India (1917-22), and Lord Chelmsford, who served as the Viceroy of India (1916-21).
 - 9) The Khilafat Movement (1919-24) was a significant pan-Islamic political protest movement initiated by Muslims in British India. Its main goal was to exert pressure on the British Government to protect the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I.
 - 10) The Chauri Chaura incident highlighted the challenges of maintaining nonviolent discipline within the nationalist movement and led to a period of reflection and re-evaluation of strategies by Indian leaders. It also underscored the determination of the British government to suppress dissent through force, further fueling the resolve of Indian nationalists to achieve independence.
 - 11) Muhammad Iqbal was a distinguished South Asian Muslim philosopher, and politician. His poetry is esteemed as among the finest of the twentieth century, and his articulation of a cultural and political vision for the Muslims of British-ruled India is widely recognized as a pivotal influence on the Pakistan Movement. (Sevea 14).

junction dismissed this notion, advocating instead for a united India founded on harmony among diverse religious communities. Moreover, the British 'divide and rule' policy was exemplified by the Communal Award of 1932, which reinforced the provisions for separate electorates, intensifying communal divisions.¹² In conclusion, in 1940, at the Muslim League conference in Lahore, Jinnah declared that 'Muslims and Hindus belong to two distinct religions, philosophies, social customs, and literary traditions. Attempting to unite these two nations under a single state, with one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, will inevitably breed discontent and ultimately dismantle any governmental structure established for such a state.'

The Cripps Mission of 1942 proposed granting India a Dominion status within the British Empire.¹³

Although the Mission did not explicitly support the demand for Pakistan, it did include a provision that allowed provinces the potential option to secede from the Indian Union. However, both the Congress and the Muslim League interpreted this provision differently, aligning with their respective perspectives and interests. Finally, on August 16, 1946, Jinnah declared Direct Action Day, during which the Muslim League demanded an independent Pakistan. This declaration fueled communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in various regions, including Bombay, Calcutta, Bihar, Punjab, and Madras.¹⁴ In 1947, Mountbatten Plan acknowledged the Muslim League's demand for an independent Pakistan, while also recognizing the Congress's desire for unity.¹⁵ The British government tasked him with exploring options for either a unified India or partition. However, attempts at unity ultimately faltered, leading to the creation of separate Indian and Pakistani dominions in 1947.

12) Metcalf and Metcalf depict that the Communal Award, initiated by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on August 16, 1932, commonly referred to as the MacDonald Award, was introduced following the Round Table Conference (1930-32). This initiative extended the provision of separate electorates to the Depressed Classes as well as other minority groups. The separate electorate was initially introduced for Muslims under the Indian Councils Act of 1909. It was later expanded to include Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans through the Mont-Ford Reforms (194).

13) The Cripps Mission, which took place in late March 1942, was an unsuccessful endeavour by the British government to garner complete cooperation and backing from India for their endeavours in World War II. Spearheaded by senior minister Stafford Cripps, the mission encountered difficulties. Cripps aimed to grant Dominion Status to India following the conclusion of the War, along with providing equal treatment to Indians comparable to other dominions such as Canada and Australia (William 387-400).

14) Sarkar and Bandyopadhyay mentions that, also termed as 1946 Calcutta Killings, this day witnessed widespread communal riots across the nation. In particular, it sparked large-scale violence between Muslims and Hindus in the city of Calcutta, located in the Bengal province of British India. Additionally, this day marked the commencement of what is referred to as The Week of the Long Knives (8).

15) The 3rd June 1947 Plan, commonly known as the Mountbatten Plan, was introduced by the British government. This plan, announced on June 3, 1947, outlined several key principles: firstly, the acceptance by the British Government of the partition of British India. Secondly, it proposed that successor governments would be granted dominion status (Singh and Singh 10).

The *modus operandi* of divide and rule in colonial period: The theory of the partition of India into separate dominions for Hindus and Muslims emerged as a culmination of various policies and actions taken by different political parties, especially the British authority.¹⁶ The British colonial administration in India strategically bolstered its control by employing a tactic of fostering division among social groups and fostering conflict between them. They justified this approach by citing the need to address Hindu-Muslim discord and prevent the dominance of Hindu majoritarianism. Consequently, the British advocated for special representation rights for minorities as a means to mitigate these tensions and maintain their authority over the region. The colonial policies had far-reaching implications, fostering communal practices in several ways. Initially, communities were categorized and delineated based on religious identity. This segmentation resulted in Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others being recognized as distinct communities, each with its own set of representational rights. Moreover, these communities were portrayed as inherently disparate and antagonistic toward one another, perpetuating a narrative of deep-seated hostility. Additionally, the British administration readily acknowledged communal spokespersons as the exclusive representatives of their communities, further entrenching the divide along religious lines. As the British rule in India neared its conclusion, Muhammad Ali Jinnah emerged as the primary spokesperson for the Muslim community, despite the presence of other Muslim leaders within the Indian National Congress and Muslim League who opposed the notion of partition. Jinnah's dominance as the voice of the Muslims underscored the complexity of the political landscape and the challenges faced by dissenting voices within both major political parties. It is clear that Communalism could not have thrived as it did without the backing of the British Colonial state. The Divide and Rule policy facilitated the rise of communalism, and escalated communal tensions ultimately culminated in Partition.

The Indian national movement achieved success in forming alliances among certain classes and communities, ultimately leading to independence from British rule. However, it fell short in fostering a sense of unity that could have averted Partition. The events of 1947 can be attributed to the breakdown of negotiations between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. In essence, the Congress did not advocate for the Partition of India. Its leaders pursued the goal of having the British transfer power to a unified India. However, one of the factors leading to the acceptance of the demand for Pakistan was the realization among Congress leaders that this demand reflected the 'popular will' of certain segments of the population. Additionally, the Congress leadership acquiesced to Partition viewing it as a temporary solution. Some believed that once the heightened emotions settled, people would recognize the impracticality of Partition and desire reunification. Moreover, the Congress consented to the proposal for Partition in the expectation that it would quell the widespread communal violence prevalent in Colonial India during 1946-47.

16) Tharoor opines that the British employed a strategy of 'Divide and Rule' during their colonial administration in India. This policy was designed to create divisions among the Indian population. He asserts that the British Raj often employed this tactic as a means to solidify their control and hinder the rise of the Indian independence movement. (101).

While the Congress could have resisted the demand for Partition through coercive means, such actions would have contradicted its democratic principles. As dialogues and negotiations with the Muslim League faltered and the Interim Government failed to achieve its objectives, the Congress eventually acquiesced to the demand for Pakistan. Despite this, the Congress continued to exert pressure on the British to transfer power to a united India.¹⁷ However, its efforts were unsuccessful primarily due to its inability to unite with the Muslim League representatives, leading to a fragmented approach towards achieving independence. Indeed, the partition of India into two dominions marked a significant turning point, but its repercussions extended far beyond. The aftermath was characterized by serious communal tensions across the two regions, disrupting peace and stability soon after gaining independence from British rule in 1947.

The Two-Nation Theory played a decisive role in shaping the partition of British India and the subsequent creation of India and Pakistan. The Radcliffe Line was based on the principle of territorial division along religious lines.¹⁸ However, the partition process was marred by communal violence, mass migrations, and the displacement of millions of people, resulting in one of the largest and most tragic human tragedies in modern history. The creation of Pakistan as a separate Muslim-majority state fulfilled the aspirations of Muslim nationalists who had long advocated for a homeland where Muslims could exercise self-determination and preserve their religious and cultural identity. However, the partition also led to the displacement and suffering of millions of people, communal riots, and enduring tensions between India and Pakistan, which have persisted to the present day.

Conclusion: The Two-Nation Theory is a pivotal concept in the history of the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the context of the struggle for independence from British rule and the subsequent partition of British India into India and Pakistan. While the Indian National Congress espoused a vision of a united, secular India, Muslim leaders increasingly gravitated towards the idea of Pakistan as a solution to their perceived grievances and insecurities. The Lahore Resolution of 1940, also known as the Pakistan Resolution, adopted by the All-India Muslim League under Jinnah's leadership, explicitly articulated the demand for a separate Muslim state. The resolution explicitly called for the creation of independent states for Muslims in regions where they were in the majority. This resolution solidified the Muslim League's commitment to the Two-Nation Theory and provided a clear roadmap for its political agenda.

The Two-Nation Theory remains a contentious and deeply debated topic in the historiography of the Indian subcontinent. Understanding the historical roots, ideological

17) Mehrotra remarks that the Indian Independence Act, approved by the British Parliament on July 5, 1947, was crafted with the objective of transferring power from the British Crown to the newly independent dominions of India and Pakistan. This act effectively ended British suzerainty over Indian affairs (247).

18) The Radcliffe Line denotes the boundary drawn between the Indian and Pakistani territories of the Punjab Province and Bengal Presidency of British India. Named after Cyril Radcliffe, who acted as the joint chairman of the boundary commissions for these provinces, the line aimed to impartially divide approximately one lakh and seventy-five thousand square miles of territory (Read & Fisher 482).

underpinnings, and implications of the Two-Nation Theory is essential for comprehending the complex dynamics of South Asian politics and society. While it provided a rationale for the creation of Pakistan and addressed the political aspirations of the Muslim community, it also led to the traumatic partition of British India and the ensuing communal violence and displacement. The legacy of Two-Nation Theory continues to shape the identity politics of India and Pakistan, influencing their domestic and foreign policies and contributing to the ongoing conflicts and tensions in the region. In India, the partition experience reinforced the commitment to secularism and the accommodation of diverse religious and cultural identities within a unified national framework. In Pakistan, the Two-Nation Theory remains a foundational principle of the state, shaping its identity as an Islamic republic and influencing its domestic and foreign policies.

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