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## Nationalism, Unemployment and Communal Consciousness in Colonial United Provinces

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### Abstract:

*Colonialism brought about momentous transformation in India replacing the centuries old social and economic relationships with the new institutes. This is evident from the fact that while caste based occupations began to decline, educational qualification and competition became the criteria for appointment in government services. In the changing socio-political landscape, the introduction of a modern education and competition system attempted to create a conducive atmosphere for self-development. However, it is also important to emphasize the fact that tranquility among different sections deteriorated sharply in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the question of employment. Viewed in this context, the paper argues how the problem of unemployment among the educated classes led to the communal consciousness in the nationalist politics of the colonial United Province still the Civil Disobedience Movement.*

**Keywords:** Colonialism, unemployment, united provinces, communal consciousness

### 1. Introduction

The United Provinces were originally known as the Agra province and later the North -Western Provinces and Oudh. In 1901, the name was changed to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, which became the present state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) in independent India. There were nine divisions in the United Provinces namely Benares, Gorakhpur, Meerut, Agra, Rohilakhand, Kumaon, Allahabad, Lucknow and Fyzabad.<sup>i</sup> The province had a sizeable number of Muslim population of about fourteen per cent in 1881 and were traditionally dominant and prosperous since the Mughal rule<sup>ii</sup>.

During the colonial rule the socioeconomic transformation of India started. To strengthen the empire, British tried to ensure the expansion of trade, industry, railway, capital enterprises, administration and progress of western education. It necessitated the introduction of a regular system of competitive examination and code of conduct to develop professional efficiency and integrity. The Charter Act of 1833 declared that the 'Indians could be employed in the offices of the company irrespective of their caste, religion, place of birth, descents, color of skin etc.,' while the Charter Act of 1853 adopted the open competition as the policy for appointment in civil services. The opening of Allahabad University in 1887 marked this development. Till 1880s every provincial government prescribed a successful performance in either the middle class vernacular or the middle class Anglo-Vernacular examination as a qualification for government services. These changes brought the competition and rush for the jobs and from here the problem of unemployment among educated classes came into existence<sup>iii</sup>. About this transformation of socio-economic, and educational structure, A.G. Clow, the Controller of Labor Bureau, Government of India, noted in 1929 that:-

"India is suffering from the clash of two very different systems of thought and civilization, and that the process of adjustment cannot but be painful. The present age is witnessing a steady disintegration of the old social and economic system. For centuries occupations were handed down from father to son. The scribe's son became a scribe; the barber's son could only become a barber and the potter's son a potter. Reading and writing were confined to the higher castes, and, in most parts of India, clerical work was the monopoly of a few castes. The higher forms of literary education of the western type, when introduced, were for a number of years confined to the upper middle classes and the majority of those who passed through the colleges had little difficulty in securing suitable employment. Now the position is altered. Men from all grades can secure admittance to the colleges and higher schools and those who feel that they have, by tradition, a claim to man the clerical professions have to compete with an increasing number of men whose ancestors for centuries never aspired to any such occupation."<sup>iv</sup>

### 2. Public Services, Alienation of Muslims and Nationalist Politics

As soon as the education and examination became the first step to enter into the government services, the consciousness about the education started among the subjects. At the same time, the government policy to undermine the predominance of certain castes and communities in specific departments led to the fear of unemployment among the different strata of society. The socio-political impact of all these changes can be traced into the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In Allahabad low castes leather workers and Pasiswere dominant as Village Policeman (Chaukidars) while scribal castes such as Kayasth and old Muslim grip was on the office of Village Accountant, Overseer (patwariand kanungo) and tehsil( an administrative division like of district).<sup>v</sup> This type of monopoly of skills and local resources in the hands of a single group was regarded with great suspicion after the Mutiny of 1857. For instance, the Inspector General of Police remarked on the predominance of Pasi caste in the ranks of village watchman in these terms that “there can be no doubt that where on single element prevails to the exclusion of all others it may be both necessary and advisable to introduce an admixture of other castes. But this should always be done with care and discrimination, and so as to carry the people with us and not have the arrayed against us.”<sup>vi</sup>

This attitude was apparent in many of the government’s measure to reform its own service. It underlay the attempt of 1878 to fix Hindu–Muslim percentages within the police and judiciary. It lay behind the new rules for the training and examinations of tahsildars after 1873. Echoes of it were still strong in the late 1890s when the Lieutenant-Governor Lord MacDonnell introduced measures to ‘correct the preponderance’ of certain groups of Muslims in the police and displayed disfavor toward member of the Kayasthacaste in government services.

The post of Village Overseer (Kanungo) had become a mark of status and respect, rather than a function to be performed. So the government attitude and sudden imposition of educational qualification caused profound disturbances. From this arose the strong reactions against patwarischools, the cheating and fraud in the tahsildari and kanungoexaminations in the 1880s and the emotional reaction of the old service communities to the attempt to replace the Persian script by English or the Nagri script (chiefly used by Hindus). The Persian language was not only a tool of the employment but it was a badge of status, connected in the mind of Muslims, at least with religion. The confused fretting of Hindustani society in the 1870s and 1880s reflected a deep ambiguity of attitude which was induced when an old service society was sharply disturbed by change in the terms of its employment. Caste and communal associations the Kayastha Associations; the Urdu Defense Society were given new significance as they became platforms for the grievances of a wide swathe of service people.<sup>vii</sup>

Sayyid Ahmed’s Urdu Defense Association (1873) opposed the use of the Nagri script in courts and government offices. Kali Prasad founded the KayasthaPatshala (school) to protect the position of Kayastahs within their ‘hereditary occupation’. The Kayastha Conference founded in 1887, voiced general complaints about employment, education and condition of service. As a result the identity of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim acquired greater significant.’<sup>viii</sup> This divide was further developed when the Indian National Congress favored the competitive examinations and university degree as a pass to office in 1890s. Congress support of competition was seen as its support to Hindu domination in the government posts as Hindus population were in majority. Syed Ahmad Khan saw the Congress as Hindu organization and asked minorities to keep distance. Witness from this Province denounced the Congress line before the Public Service Commission. One of the Aligarh’s College first products, Syed Habibullah, who had gone to Balliol, and the Inner Temple before becoming a barrister at Allahabad, criticized simultaneous examinations because neither Mohammedans nor Hindus would succeed, but only Bengalis would get all. AjudhiaNath, a Kashmiri Brahman, the leading Hindu pleader at Allahabad and a member of the Local Legislative Council, felt that the services ought not to be recruited by examination unless this was done on a strictly provincial basis. The Raja of Banaras, Shiva Prasad, a government servant and landowner with a term’s experience in the Imperial Legislative Council, fulminated to the Commission against Bengalis, describing them a ‘bread in chicanery’, naturally timid and slothful’ and declaring the ‘never never’ should there be simultaneous examination in India.<sup>ix</sup>

This increased sectional and communal consciousness reached at its top when the decision of replacing the Persian by Devnagri script in 1900 was taken. As a result the position of Muslims decreased in government services. Between 1857 and 1913 Muslims position in subordinate judicial and executive services decreased from 63.9 percentage to 34.7 percent (see the Table 1). In judicial service the proportion of Muslim decreased from 45.9 percent to 24.8 percent (see the Table 2). The displacement of Muslims in judicial service became the subject of bitter complaint from the ‘young party’ (i.e. the groups of Mohammad Ali) men of Muslim League. They spoke for the able and ambitious young Muslims who would have prefer to enter government service as their forbears had done before them but found they were unable to do so. This anger of young party was quite natural because there was no unemployed among the ‘old party’, no members were struggling for jobs. But the members of ‘young party’ were struggling for jobs.<sup>x</sup>

	1857	%	1886-7	%	1913	%
<b>TOTAL</b>	316	100	521	100	378	100
MUSLIMS	202	63.9	235	45.1	131	34.7
HINDUS	76	24.1	262	50.3	227	60
Brahmins	-	-	89	17.1	80	21.2
Rajputs	-	-	37	7.2	19	5
Kayasths	-	-	107	20.6	73	19.3
Banias	-	-	25	4.8	38	10
Sudras	-	-	1	0.2	-	-
Other Hindus	-	-	3	0.4	17	4.5
SIKHS	-	-	2	0.4	-	-
OTHERS	38	12	2	4.2	20	5.3

Table 1: The Position of Communal and Caste Groupings in the Subordinate Judicial and Executive Services in the United Provinces (1857-1913)

Source: Robinson, F.(1993). *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of United Provinces’ Muslims 1860-1923*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 46.

	1873	1889	1899	1909	1919	1929
Hindu	88	608	890	1222	1620	1847
Muslim	98	335	402	455	453	460

Table 2: Hindu and Muslim Membership of the Legal Profession in United Provinces (1873-1929)

Source: Robinson, F. (1993). *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1923*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 46.

The decreasing position of Muslims became the one of the causes of Muslim alienation from Indian National Congress and a route of communalism. As B. B. Misra wrote that “the rise of religious revivalism and the beginning of a split in the rank of the middle classes formed yet another of the characteristic feature of this period. The necessity of restoring to religion as political weapon arose partly from the failure of the British adequately to provide jobs for the educated, especially the lower middle classes...”<sup>xi</sup> However, the Muslim support of Non-cooperation Movement in conjunction with the Khilafat Movement stopped this widening gap, but it was of no avail in longer run. The struggle for job took the shape of communalism. During 1923 to 1927, 91 communal riots were recorded in different parts of United Provinces (see the Table 3).

Division	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Kumaun	1	1	-	-	-
Meerut	4	3	-	1	3
Rohilakhand	4	6	3	1	4
Agra	2	-	1	-	3
Jhansi	-	-	1	-	1
Allahabad	1	1	-	8	6
Banaras	1	1	2	1	3
Gorakhpur	-	1	-	2	2
Lucknow	2	5	3	2	4
Faizabad	2	-	3	1	1
<b>Total</b>	17	18	13	16	27

Table 3: Communal Riots in United Provinces (1923-1927)

Source- Pandey, G. (1985), *The Ascendancy of Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-1934*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 116.

### 3. The Post Non-Cooperation Movement era and the Widening Gap

After the Non Co-operation Movement, 1920-22, Indian National Congress had established itself as a significant political force in the towns of northern India. It paid attention to the rising problem of educated unemployment and tried to link it with nationalist cause. But the Muslim support of Non-Cooperation Movement in conjunction with the Khilafat Movement became disappear further and was quite evident in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-1934.

Swaraj Party in their election manifesto mentioned that “unemployment is as well-known very rife in our urban population and agriculture alone does not any longer suffice to provide our growing population with their daily bread. The only sound solution is to so develop the various industries in the country that they may provide wider and wider canoes of employment to our rising generation.”<sup>xii</sup> SrinivasIyengar in his presidential address of Indian National Congress in 1926 at Guwahati Session expressed that “next to Swaraj (independence), the greatest of India's needs is the relief of poverty and unemployment... Swaraj has to be won before we can establish industries on a large scale an adequately deal with the problem of poverty and unemployment.”<sup>xiii</sup> In an article entitled as the ‘Cure of Unemployment’, in Young India, dated 1.7.1928, Gandhi wrote that industrialization caused the unemployment.

It means Congress connected the question of unemployment with the Swaraj movement and related with it political needs of the country. In 1928-29, a large numbers of youth leagues and student associations sprang up in United Provinces. The big education centers – Allahabad, Lucknow, Banaras, and so on- were prominent in this regard but smaller towns- Mathura, Mainpuri, and Muradabad, Jhansi, Jalaun, and Jasunpur- also came to have youth organizations which were vociferous and active.<sup>xiv</sup> Against the protest of an ‘All White Simon Commission’ in 1928 at Banaras, Lucknow and Kanpur students played major role. During the very effective protests in Lucknow on 28-30<sup>th</sup> November- in which Khaliqzaman floated kites and balloons with ‘go back Simon’ slogans over a talukdars’ reception to the Commission at Kaiserbagh, middle class students and youth dominated.<sup>xv</sup>

In 1930, Congress called for mass civil disobedience again. Disillusionment with the performance inside the legislatures, an 'all-white' Simon Commission sitting in judgement on the constitution of India, serious unemployment among the educated, labor unrest, and a series of poor harvests in parts of the country lay behind this call. The World Depression added its disastrous effects.<sup>xvi</sup> The Census Commissioner reported that that the Congress was employing and paying as volunteers many who would otherwise have been unemployed.<sup>xvii</sup> But the muslims did not come up in large number to support the Civil Disobedience Movement. The United Provinces government reported in August 1930 that the Aligarh Muslim University and other Muslim educational institutions had so far not affected by the congress agitation. Successful Muslim counter-demonstrations held at Kanpur, Lucknow and other places. In 1932 the United Provinces government surveyed the political prisoners held in a camp jail at Lucknow which was open from early January to

mid-May 1930, and those held in the districts jails of Lucknow, Bareilly and Faizabad who had been arrested between December 1931 and 1<sup>st</sup> November 1932. The proportion of Hindus among the prisoners was as follows: <sup>xviii</sup>

- Lucknow camp jail – 1721 out of 1735, i.e. 99.2
- Lucknow district jail -755 out of 765, i.e. 98.7
- Bareilly district jail – all Hindus
- Faizabad district jail – 135 out of 140, i.e. 96.4

The Faizabad figure was especially significant since this jail was set apart mainly for students arrested in the course of civil disobedience movement. That even Muslim student at college and school found it difficult to join forces with their Hindu colleagues in the national agitation is a telling comment on the alienations of the Muslims at this time. <sup>xix</sup> On 21<sup>st</sup> March 1931, when the petition of mercy on behalf of Bhagat Singh had been rejected, a procession and strike took place in which Muslims did not participated even on the day of his execution 24<sup>th</sup> march 1931, in place of cooperation a riot occurred in Kanpur at Meston road. After this big clashes the fighting shifted to the less accessible ‘dark evil-smelling lanes where the passage of light is impeded by projecting balconies and upper storeys’ and where crowds of gwalas, julahas, riksha-walas, bangle-sellers, peons, mill hands, unemployed immigrants from the villages, and so on, were to be found. <sup>xx</sup> Behind the Kanpur riot of 1931, the decline of Muslim handloom weaving was the factor. Due to that decline, artisans were becoming unemployed. <sup>xxi</sup>

In fact, Muslim festivals were celebrated in the months after the riot of 1931, with greater fervor than in previous years. Tens of thousands of Muslims turned out, many of the teams of youths among them bearing arms and everybody joining the resounding shouts of ‘Allah-O-Akbar’. In this course, a young men’s Muslim association came into being in Kanpur at this time. Ten years afterwards, the government of United Provinces still felt justifies in describing Kanpur as ‘the most communal place in the province’, and, Jinnah, visiting the city, was at the station by some 50,000 Muslims shouting not only ‘Allah-O-Akbar, but also ‘Pakistan Zindabad’ <sup>xxii</sup>

Agrarian program fixed during the Lucknow Session of April 1936, Congress mentioned that “the most important and urgent problem of the country is the appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry.” <sup>xxiii</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru began a frontal assault on the communalist position, accusing communal parties of being ‘blissfully ignorant’ of hunger and unemployment among the masses including the lower middle classes. But interesting fact is that there was not a single reference to Hindu-Muslims relations in the resolutions passed by the numerous meetings of United Provinces Congressman between June 1931 and the end of December 1934. <sup>xxiv</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

It is clear that the increasing competition for the job and unemployment encouraged the growth of a community consciousness and tended to breed suspicion between Hindus and Muslims at the lower as well as upper level of society. In the absence of openings in industry, commerce, and other services, the government service was the main avenue of employment for the middle classes. Muslims were slow to adopt the new demands of competition and modern education. Especially after the replacement of Persian by Devnagri script Muslims hegemonic position in services gradually declined. In this wake, Indian National Congress was seen as the propagandists’ of Hindu position in public service. The declining position became one of the reason of communal politics between Hindus and Muslims. At the same time Hindus and other caste associations grasped the opportunity and tried to improve their position in public services. The communal politics was used to put pressure on the government to reserve and allocate its jobs as also seats in professional colleges on communal and caste lines. <sup>xxv</sup> As against the Congress support to competition Muslim League demanded the reservation for minorities ingovernment offices and separate electorate. The declining position of Muslim community in services led to their alienation from nationalist politics led by Congress in Colonial United Provinces. The support of Muslims in Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920s was no more visible at the time of Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930s. This widening gap further created the partition of the country.

#### 5. Acknowledgement

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