



Muslim League and Rise of Communal Politics in India

For Prelims: All India Muslim League, [Aligarh Movement](#), [Nehru Report](#), [North-West Frontier Province](#), [Communal Award](#), [Vinayak Damodar Savarkar](#), [Khilafat Movement](#), [Preamble](#)

For Mains: All India Muslim League in India's Partition, Evolution of Communal Politics in India, Secularism and Combating Communalism

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

On **30th December 1906**, the **All India Muslim League** was founded in **Dhaka**, marking the inception of a political organization that played a pivotal role in India's Partition.

- Over the years, the League evolved from a group of elite Muslim men to a **mass political party** under the leadership of **Muhammad Ali Jinnah**, advocating for the creation of **Pakistan**.

What was the History and Impact of the All-India Muslim League?

- Founders:** Elite Muslim leaders, including **Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka**, **Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk**, **Nawab Mohsin Ul-Mulk** and **Aga Khan**.
 - The formation of the **All-India Muslim League** was preceded by the [Aligarh Movement](#), which advocated for Muslim education and political awareness, and the **Simla Deputation (1906)**, where Muslim leaders met [Lord Minto II \(1905-1910\)](#) to demand special representation.
- Initial Objective:** To protect the political and religious rights of Muslims and to secure separate representation for them in legislative bodies.
- Emergence of Jinnah's Leadership:** Muhammad Ali Jinnah transformed the League into a mass political force, especially after the **Fourteen Points (1929)**, which outlined Muslim political demands like [federalism](#), **minority safeguards**, and **autonomy**.
- Key Agreements and Resolutions:**
 - The Lucknow Pact (1916):** A rare moment of **Congress-Muslim League cooperation**. Leaders like [Bal Gangadhar Tilak](#) and **Muhammad Ali Jinnah** signed the pact, agreeing to work together for India's independence.
 - Congress accepted **separate electorates** for Muslims, a significant demand of the League. However, this also led to the **rise of communal politics in India**.
 - The pact called for **increased Indian representation in legislative and executive councils**. This was a high point of **Hindu-Muslim unity** in the freedom struggle.
 - The Lahore Resolution (1940):** By 1940, under Jinnah's leadership, the League adopted a stance favoring Partition.
 - At its session in Lahore (1940), the League passed a resolution advocating for **"Independent States" for Muslims** in the northwestern and eastern regions where they were a majority.

- The resolution, later termed the **Pakistan Resolution**, became the ideological foundation for the creation of Pakistan in 1947.
- **Direct Action Day:** Observed on **16th August 1946**, **Direct Action Day is a communal strike** called by the **All-India Muslim League**, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, to press for the creation of Pakistan.
 - It led to widespread **communal riots**, especially in Calcutta, resulting in thousands of deaths and property destruction. The violence deepened the **Hindu-Muslim divide** and accelerated the demand for partition.
- **Role in Partition:** Under Jinnah, the Muslim League led the demand for Pakistan, arguing that Muslims would not be **treated fairly in a Hindu-majority India**. This effort culminated in the 1947 Partition, creating India and Pakistan.
- **Post-Partition:** The League became Pakistan's **dominant party but fractured into various factions** over time. Its role in India waned, with some remnants forming regional political groups.

Jinnah's Fourteen Points, 1929

- **Background:**
 - **Nehru Report:** In 1928, the **All Parties Conference** was convened to discuss **parliamentary reforms** proposed by the **Simon Commission**.
 - The **Nehru Report**, led by Motilal Nehru, advocated for **Dominion Status** for India while **rejecting separate electorates** and Muslim seat reservations in Bengal and Punjab.
 - **Muslim Response:** Muslim leaders criticized the Nehru Report as being against Muslim interests. In March 1929, **Muhammad Ali Jinnah** presided over a **Muslim League session** in Delhi, where he presented his **Fourteen Points**, which became the League's manifesto and a cornerstone of its political strategy.
- **Jinnah's Fourteen Points:**
 - **Federal Constitution:** A federal system with residual powers allocated to provinces.
 - **Provincial Autonomy:** Complete autonomy for provinces.
 - **Constitutional Amendments:** Central amendments to require states' consent.
 - **Muslim Representation in Legislatures:** Adequate Muslim representation without undermining majorities.
 - **Representation in Services:** Fair representation in government services and self-governing bodies.
 - **Central Legislature:** One-third Muslim representation in the central legislature.
 - **Cabinet Representation:** One-third Muslim representation in central and provincial cabinets.
 - **Separate Electorates:** Continuation of separate electorates.
 - **Minority Safeguards:** Bills opposed by three-fourths of a minority group could not pass.
 - **Territorial Redistribution:** Territorial changes not to harm Muslim-majority areas like Punjab, Bengal, and NWFP.
 - **Sindh Separation:** Separation of Sindh from Bombay.
 - **Constitutional Reforms:** Reforms for **North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan** to grant Muslims greater political autonomy in these regions.
 - **Religious Freedom:** Guaranteed religious freedom for all communities.
 - **Protection of Muslim Rights:** Safeguards for religion, culture, education, and language.

What is Communal Politics?

- **Communalism:** It refers to **strong attachment to one's own community, often religious**, with a focus on unity within the group.
 - **Positive aspects** of Communalism include it can promote social and economic upliftment within the community.
 - **Negative aspects** of Communalism emphasize the **group's superiority**, leading to **intolerance, division, and conflict** with other communities.
 - It suppresses **internal diversity** and prioritizes its own interests, fostering societal

division.

- **Communal Politics:** It refers to the **mobilization of a religious community for political power**, often based on the belief that **religious identities equate to shared economic, political, and social interests**.
- **Pre- Independence Period:**
 - **British Influence:** Communal politics emerged as a tool under British colonial rule for bargaining privileges such as jobs, education, and political positions.
 - The British employed the **“Divide and Rule” policy**, fostering divisions between Hindus and Muslims to weaken nationalist unity.
 - The British supported communal forces through the **Communal Award, 1932** which strengthened the **Muslim League** and deepened its differences with the Congress.
 - **Initial Goals:** Early communal politics, as championed by leaders like **Syed Ahmad Khan**, sought upward mobility for communities like Muslims.
 - **Religious Mobilization:** Anti-colonial agitations like the **Akali agitations (1919-1926)**, the **Khilafat Movement (1920-21)**, contributed to deepening communal divisions.
 - **INC and Communalism:** While committed to **Hindu-Muslim unity**, **Indian National Congress(INC)** dominance, and its use of **Hindu cultural symbols**, sometimes alienated Muslims.
 - Communal tensions escalated with the **Partition of Bengal (1905)** and the establishment of **separate electorates (1909)**.
 - **Muslim League and Communalism:** The League portrayed Congress as a Hindu-dominated entity, intensifying **Muslim fears of marginalization in a unified India**.
 - **Rise of Two-Nation Theory:** Communal ideologies like **Hindutva (Vinayak Damodar Savarkar)** and the **Muslim League’s** demand for Pakistan culminated in the **Partition of India**.
- **Post-Independence Period:**
 - **Legitimacy and Openness:** Communal politics gained mainstream acceptance, especially with the rise of **religious identity-based ideologies** in the 1980s.
 - It began to challenge **secularism and pluralism**, advocating for a nation centered around a **majority religious identity**.
 - **Use of Violence:** Riots and pogroms are often planned and orchestrated to achieve **electoral and economic objectives**.
 - **Social Media:** Spread of **hate speech**, and **fake news** on social platforms, escalating communal tensions.
 - **Caste and Communal Politics:** Intersection of **caste and religious identity politics**, leading to further divisions.
 - **Judiciary’s Role:** Judicial interventions are **slow**, with selective justice in communal violence cases.

Note: Religiousness in India has always been **rooted in spirituality and personal harmony**, guiding social life, whereas communalism **largely emerged due to British colonial policies**.

- While religiousness promotes inner peace and social harmony, communalism is often driven by **politics**, and grievances between communities.

Why Does Communal Politics Thrive?

- **Economic Underdevelopment:** Poverty, unemployment, and lack of infrastructure make communities susceptible to **communal mobilization**.
- **Political Opportunism:** Communal narratives provide **shortcuts to power**, distracting from governance failures and economic issues.
 - Political parties, especially those with communal ideologies, often face **little repercussions for engaging in divisive rhetoric**, as they align with **vote-bank politics**.
- **Control Over Resources:** Communal violence is often used to **eliminate business**

- **competition** or seize properties, especially in economically competitive regions.
- **Polarising Narratives:** The rhetoric of blaming one community for economic issues fuels division, especially among **marginalized groups**.
 - It shifts focus from poor governance to **inter-community rivalry, deepening divisions**.
- **Weak Legal Enforcement:** Inadequate laws against communal violence encourage those who use communal violence for political advantage.

Way Forward

- **Secularism:** Reinforce the constitutional commitment to **secularism**, as enshrined in the **Preamble of Indian Constitution**.
 - Implement the **Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill, 2011** to curb violence and **religious vote-bank politics** which undermines **India's secularism** by deepening religious divisions for **electoral gain**.
- **Fraternity:** Embrace India's diversity, promoting a **shared vision of progress, justice, and respect for all communities**, in line with the values of **fraternity** and **equality** outlined in the **Constitution**.
- **Economic Equity:** Focus on inclusive economic development to address disparities and reduce communal tensions.
- **Electoral Reforms:** Enforce harsher penalties under the **Representation of People Act, 1951**, for candidates and parties involved in communal propaganda through **hate speech**.
 - Empower the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to more effectively monitor and act against **communal rhetoric during elections**.
- **Empowering Civil Society and Media:** Empower civil society by promoting grassroots movements and **youth-led peace initiatives** to foster mutual trust and respect for **interfaith harmony**.
 - The media must adopt responsible, **fact-based reporting** to educate the public on the **dangers of communal politics** and promote coexistence.

Drishti Mains Question:

Examine the role of the All India Muslim League in partition of India and its impact on communal politics in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Mains

- Q.** Communalism arises either due to power struggle or relative deprivation. Argue by giving suitable illustrations. **(2018)**
- Q.** Distinguish between religiousness/religiosity and communalism giving one example of how the former has got transformed into the latter in independent India. (2017)
- Q.** Is diversity and pluralism in India under threat due to globalization? Justify your answer. **(2020)**