

Reality of 'Divide and Rule' in British India

Akhtar Hussain Sandhu*

Abstract

The policy of 'divide and rule' is seen as a mechanism used throughout history to maintain imperial rule. It identifies pre-existing ethno-religious divisions in society and then manipulates them in order to prevent subject peoples' unified challenge to rule by outsiders. Many Indian and other scholars have maintained that the British adopted this strategy in order to strengthen the Raj. Both communal conflict and Muslim separatism are seen as being created by this strategy. This understanding sidelines all the factors which forced the Muslims to seek a homeland. Even the advocates of the theory deny the fact that unrest, turmoil, communal clashes and poor condition of law and order weaken the grip of the ruling authorities over the country. Therefore, to argue for the existence of a 'divide and rule' strategy implies that the British were prepared to risk instability which went counter to their requirement for law and order. Insolent behaviour and injustice did not pave the way for harmony and co-operation. The Congress was infuriating the Muslims and their leadership although it was clear that the Britishers had been making the fullest use of the 'divide and rule' policy regarding the Muslims. It convinces to conclude, whether the Congress leadership was not aware of the British's 'divide and rule' policy or it adopted deliberately the supportive attitude towards the British in fulfilling their sinister objectives of vivisection of India. This article explores

* Lecturer, Department of History, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

different dimensions of the divide and rule policy and its practicality in the politics of British India.

If it is assumed that the British had governed India through 'divide and rule,' policy, it reduces the Congress to impotency that it was unable to challenge this strategy and prevent the nourishment of communalism in the Subcontinent. This article seeks revision from the writers who believe that the British ruled over India through the policy of 'divide and rule' in the administrative affairs. The very principle can be practical in a battlefield to cut the numbers of the enemies or create rift among the confronting forces but this strategy cannot be used by the rulers who seek peace or law and order in the region under their possession. Not unrest and communal clashes but regional peace and communal or factional harmony can better serve the aspirations of a conqueror who decides to stay and rule. Under this situation, the British adopted the policy to maintain harmony and peace. They valued unity and tranquillity in the British India. They provided several opportunities to the Indian leaders to achieve communal harmony who failed to conclude any agreed settlement. Indian responsibility and agency of course questions the extent to which the burden of the failure is placed on British shoulders. Almost all the primary sources related to the colonial era have been declassified and no document has yet been found which reveals evidence of a deliberate and sustained 'divide and rule' strategy in India. Moreover, to adopt this understanding, one has to ignore evidence of Hindu-Muslim conflict which predates the ruling British presence. Furthermore, the post-colonial governments have been confronting communal conflict for decades; is there still a British push of 'divide and rule' behind conflicts in Kashmir, Gujrat, Assam or elsewhere in India? The situation testifies that the British never used such a policy in India rather their revolutionary systemic changes and the communitarian response to the democratic reforms caused numerous side effects in the region which, under duress of nationalism were later interpreted as deriving from a 'divide and rule' strategy.

It is an undeniable reality that the Congress leadership concluded 'friendly' dialogue with the imperialists who were projected before the masses as exploiters and enemies of India. No

doubt, negotiations were imperative as dialogical rationale but the Congress leadership never treated the British as enemies in the discussions. They had never been blunt in the dialogues uttering Viceroys and Governors as the conspirators or hypocrites in the case of communalism. They never refused to address the British with His Majesty's Government or His or Your Excellency. Hardly, any letter from the top Congress leaders to the British Viceroy can be presented as evidence in which they had adopted a defiant attitude. They traditionally submitted to the British by addressing the officials as 'His Excellency,' 'His Majesty's Government, my dear, etc. Even the Sikh leaders used sometimes 'your servant' in the correspondence with Governor of the Punjab. Although these were the recognised forms in the political correspondence but this was an imperialistic mannerism which the 'freedom fighters' (as they claim or the writers present them) were not supposed to follow such a derogatory style. They could use other honourable words to show decency if they desired in the correspondence.

Mostly it is argued that the rulers were dividing the Indian communities but M. K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru never refused to join the rulers in the negotiations on the plea of the British conspiracy to vivisect India through the 'divide and rule' policy. They could permanently boycott all the affairs by arguing that they could not talk, share, eat with the enemies of the Indian nation. But the Hindu leadership had been enjoying friendly relations, light talks, dinners, functions, even 'more' than this with the Britishers. Do the nationalist writers believe that the Congress leaders could not get the British who were trying to cut the Muslims from the Hindus through the policy of 'divide and rule' in India? If they were aware of the British policy then they should have tried to take the Muslim League into confidence to repudiate the British conspiracy. The Congress leadership never pointed out this anti-Indian policy during the parleys with the British officials and delegations. All this ramifies that the Congress leadership itself was backing the British in launching the 'divide and rule' policy in India because despite cry from the Hindu and Muslim exhortations to the Congress, they continued ignoring the Muslim

League leadership throughout the British Raj which gradually dragged them away from the Hindus.

Many Indian historians maintain that the Muslim League played a pro-British role but never project the same aspect of the Indian National Congress. Nobody can negate this fact that the founding leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and India after 1947 was the British one. In the beginning, the Hindus had no competent person to do what A. O. Hume did but what forced them in the presence of so-called Hindu statesmen that they had to request Lord Mountbatten to take charge as the first Governor-General of India. The most educated community of India seemed requesting the British officers to continue working in India after August 1947. Pakistan, it is true, also had many British officials in the civil administration, including the Governor of the West Punjab, Sir Francis Mudie and army officers, but it happened due to the fact that there was a much smaller pool of qualified officials and army officers after partition but the Hindus did not face the same lacking.

Woefully, after independence, Indian nationalism's creed of 'unity in diversity' meant that there was a need to vilify the Muslim League's standpoint which had given birth to Pakistan. Therefore, Muslim separatism was written off as not reflecting a natural reality, but as the construction of colonial manipulative policies of 'divide and rule'. Thus whilst the birth of the Muslim League was put down as due to British encouragement in a 'command performance', the British role in the emergence of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was glossed over.

Allan Octavian Hume not only founded the Congress but also exerted a lot to run its affairs successfully. Throughout the starting years, he arranged the Congress' annual sessions and for this purpose tried to be in contact with different persons. He managed things like finance and reports. There were no Hindus but only Hume who undertook all the "political work until Gopal Krishna Gokhale followed his example in 1901."¹ Five Britons had been invited to preside over the annual meetings from 1885 to 1918

1 SR Mehrotra, "The Early Indian National Congress, 1885-1918: Ideals, Objectives and Organization," in By BR Nanda, ed., *Essays in Modern Indian History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp.45-48.

including George Yule in 1888, William Wedderburn in 1889 and 1910, Alfred Webb in 1894, Henry Cotton in 1904 and Annie Besant in 1917. To Mehrotra, the "Congress deliberately chose Britons as presidents in order to prove its loyal, moderate and non-racial character."² Membership fee was Rs. 25 and according to the rules, students were debarred to join the party. The Congress president was a four-day king of the Indians. During the annual gathering, the representatives from different areas of India were supposed to stay at different places according to their religions or status.³ The British intention behind the foundation of the Indian National Congress was not the policy to divide the Indians and rule' over the country rather they provided a training forum for them. But if it is accepted as a British conspiracy against the Indians, then this policy was not secret rather open and tangible because the British adamant in furthering the cause of the Congress. If it was a training platform, then all Nehrus and Gandhis were the students of the institutions which were initiated and run by the British. Perhaps, under the same feelings, the Nehru family was alleged to adopt the political gimmick in the post-independence politics. Gurmit Singh writes that the Nehru family being more experienced than the other Congressites utilised the policy of divide and rule in India after the divide of 1947 and exhibited it even with more barbarity than their 'masters' in the East Punjab during the early 1980s. According to Gurmit Singh, "The Central Government's strategy was to divide Sikhs" to maintain their political hold in the region.⁴

The 'nationalist' Congress governments till now have not declared national day at the national level in favour of the martyrs of the War of Independence of 1857. During the freedom movement era, they never owned the freedom fighters of 1857 because it could displease the masters who were at good terms with all the Congress leaders. The martyrs of this war were the nationalists but the Congress leadership never dared to celebrate

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 Dr. Gurmit Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles*, vol. IV (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1992), 34-58; see also Gurmit Singh, *Failures of Akali Leadership* (Sirsa: Usha Institute, 1981), p.44.

their days. Even Gandhi and majority of the Hindu leaders never accepted the status of Bhagat Singh Shahid,⁵ Babbar Akalis,⁶ Ghadar party⁷ Kuka movement⁸ or the anti-British communists. Nobody can present document that the Babbar Akali leaders had addressed the Viceroy or Governor or British government as 'His Excellency or His Majesty's Government' or 'your servant.' The Congress leaders concluded friendly deliberations with the imperialists and many Sikhs and Hindus can be quoted who had been working for the British in collecting information pertaining to the political situation in different parts of India. They were involved in the activities of convincing the Indian leaders in favour of the British on different options.

The 'divide and rule' policy seems absurd when it is implemented in the pre and post British India or even back to it. India was a Hindu society but with the passage of time it was divided on the religious lines; first Islam and then Sikhism secured conversions. This division of the Indian society cannot be attributed to the 'divide and rule' policy of the British. Division on ethnic, religious, lingual and political basis was a natural phenomenon. None can believe that the Hindus who had changed their religion were bribed by any imperialist force. The Hindus had Hindi language but Guru Angad (2nd Sikh Guru) invented Gurmukhi script which provided his followers a separate identity;

-
- 5 Bhagat Singh, a Sandhu Jat from Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) who had been a member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, Kirti Kisan Party and Naujawan Bharat Sabha. In the Assembly Bomb case, he was sentenced to transportation for life. Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, vol. 1 (Patiala: Punjabi University Patiala, 2002), pp.316-18.
 - 6 The Babbar Akali movement during the 1920s was an anti-British drive under Kishan Singh Gargajj (1886-1926) who intended to take revenge for the Sikh killing during the Gurdwara movement. He was hanged on 27 February 1926. Kamlesh Mohan, "The Babbar Akalis: An Experiment in Terrorism," *Journal of Regional History* 1 (Amratsar 1980): pp.142-174.
 - 7 Ghadar movement was founded in USA in 1912 as an anti-British drive under Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna. It worked in India in 1914. It believed in violent strategy against the British. see detail, Sohan Singh Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party, A Short History* (New Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1977).
 - 8 Kuka movement was a puritan Sikh movement started by Balak Singh (1799-1861) from Rawalpindi nearly in 1855. Baba Ram Singh became successor who experienced non-cooperation, boycott and swadeshi methods of protests for the first time in India. The followers of the movement are also known as Namdhari Sikhs.

then Guru Arjun Dev (5th Guru) compiled *Granth Sahib* and lastly Guru Gobind Singh drew a clear line between Sikhs and others. There were no British who should be blamed for the divide of the Hindu society. The bloody wars took place on the Indian throne after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb; the imperial court in India remained always divided into groups which weakened the Indian empire. It was not provoked by the 'British' under the 'divide and rule' policy. Disunity among the Indian communities helped the British to establish their rule in the Subcontinent, which does not mean that the Indians were divided by the British. The Hindu Mahasabha was not founded with the British will to upset the Hindu unity and to prolong their rule. Surely, the British had not been behind all these developments rather it was all a natural phenomenon. Indian nationalist writers however stubbornly denied its naturalness and claimed it was willed by the British.

In 1909, the Muslims were given the right of separate electorates which the Congress or the Indian scholars have attributed to the 'divide and rule' policy of the British but their pens seem paralysed to shed light on the same right given to the Sikhs in 1919. Was it not a 'divide and rule' policy? In 1916, the Congress conceded the separate electorates for the Muslims, which does not mean that the Congress leadership had joined the British conspiracy under the 'divide and rule' policy.

To Tuteja, when Gandhi in the early 1930s pointed out that the Sikh demands were communal, Master Tara Singh responded that communal politics could be dealt with the communalist politics.⁹ The Hindu leader should have stood for his idealism but he did not object. But in September 1940, he wrote to Master Tara Singh that the Akalis and Congressmen should part company as the Sikhs believed in violence while the Congress in non-violence.¹⁰ Which attitude of Gandhi should be attributed to the British policy and which to the anti-British?

According to Jaswant Singh Marwah, Lala Lajpat Rai was extremely aware of "the British game" that they were ruling over

9 KL Tuteja, "Sikhs and the Congress: 1930-40," in Verinder Grover, ed., *The Story of Punjab, Yesterday and Today* (Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1995), p.453.

10 The Punjab Governor's Report to Viceroy, L/PJ/5/243.

the country through 'divide and rule' which "aimed at creating discord amongst the various communities and religious sects to gain maximum advantage."¹¹ Surprisingly Jaswant Singh skipped Lala Lajpat Rai's opinion that the solution to the communal problem in the Punjab was the partition on the religious basis.¹² Jaswant Singh accepted the existence of religious identity of different communities although he opines that the British adopted the 'divide and rule' policy. In the Round Table Conference, Gandhi accepted the partition of the Punjab as a Sikh representative with 17 points given by the Akali leadership in which the partition of the Punjab on the religious basis had been demanded. It is yet to be cleared whether Lala Lajpat Rai and Gandhi were the pioneers of the partitioning movements and responsible for this communal rift under the British dictation and the vivisection of India. During the Round Table Conference, the Indian leaders including MK Gandhi showed their inability to reconcile different community demands. The Hindu and Sikh leaders consented the British to solve the communal issue on their own. They virtually admitted their failure and rendered a blind trust to the enemies (British), although they were well aware of the 'divide and rule' strategy. It makes the point, whether they had become a part of the British policy by handing over all powers to the British on the very sensitive issue or some other facts moved them to this decision. Gandhi observed fast until death when the Communal Award conferred separate electorates upon the *Achoots* which forced them to surrender the right but he never showed the same resentment in case of the Muslims and Sikhs. He should have protested with the same fervour when the separate electorate was given to the Muslims and Sikhs but he never did. It creates doubt whether he was following the British agenda or he thought the Muslims and Sikhs as nations. He had no clear-cut standpoint about it because he seemed ready to concede the right of self-determination. Sometimes, he stood for territorial nationalism but

11 Jaswant Singh Marwah, "Lala Lajpat Rai and Freedom Struggle in the Punjab," *Punjab History Conference*, 20th Session (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1987) pp.318 (316-320).

12 Kirpal Singh, *The Partition of the Punjab*, 2nd ed. (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1989), p.10.

at others he led the religious movement like Tehrik-i-Khilafat. He also favoured the right of self-determination if some community demanded. It means he was going to accept the Muslims a nation on the religious basis. The Congress' anti-war character is much projected as revolutionary which was a constitutional rather than a defiant nature because a big majority of the Hindus had been fighting for the British already and even the Congress leadership gave positive gesture to co-operate practically in the war efforts if certain of their demands would be accepted by the government. It is entirely against the philosophy of non-violence which demands 'no physical reaction in any favourable situation or inducement.' In 1940, Gandhi "reiterates that he would do nothing to embarrass the British."¹³ Why did Gandhi not want to embarrass the British? Had he been purchased by the masters? It seems true as he became a sign of this Hindu-British friendship. This amity can be witnessed through the display of Gandhi's statue in the parks of London. On the other hand, the statues of Bhagat Singh Shahid and Udham Singh have not exhibited in UK.¹⁴

Many historians write that the Congress committed a blunder in 1916 and had to pay a big price of accommodating the Muslims as a nation. But they are silent on the the Congress leaders who seemed ready to accept the Pakistan demand.¹⁵ More than one time, the Congress leaders like Gandhi and Rajagopalacharia accepted the claim of the Muslim League for the separate homeland with some reservations. No writer has blamed that these leaders were motivated or induced by the British. According to the Governor's Report in September 1944 about the Jinnah-Gandhi dialogues and the public reaction, the Hindus condemned Gandhi that he through negotiations had revived the image of the Muslim

13 Letter from Governor-General to the Secretary of State for India, 20 May 1940, L/PJ/8/692.

14 Udham Singh confessing the murder of M. O' Dwyer said that he was sacrificing the life for his country. JS Grewal and HK Puri, *Letters of Udham Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1974), p.41.

15 Rajagopalacharia Formula according to which Rajagopalachari wrote to Quaid-i-Azam in July 1944 that Gandhi and the other Congress leaders were ready to accept the Pakistan demand. Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000), 108; see also HN Mitra ed., *The Indian Annual Register: An Annual Digest of Public Affairs, 1919-1947*, vol. 1, 1943 (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990), p.301.

League when it was dying. It was the same allegation which was attributed to Sir Sikandar Hayat, the Punjab Premier, in 1937 that he had concluded the Jinnah-Sikandar Pact just to revive the Muslim League status. The scholars strive the best to prove that Sir Sikandar was dictated by the British to enliven Jinnah's image among the Muslims. Gandhi's position became vulnerable when he was alleged by his own community after Gandhi-Jinnah talks. The very point needs clarification on the part of the nationalist writers.

The Congress constantly rebuffed the Muslim League's offers of cooperation. The League too was a claimant to struggle for the Indian independence from the imperialist British and this similarity could be used as a bridging element between the two main parties but the Hindu leadership from top to the grass root level adopted undemocratic and immoral attitude which could never result in any harmony. Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan said in November 1939:

The Congress Ministries, instead of settling communal differences, had intensified them greatly. Hindus were let to believe through local Congress committees that Hindu Raj was established in India and they really began to behave themselves as the real rulers. Muslims were variously insulted.¹⁶

All political developments on the part of the Muslim League were considered as dictated by the British but the major demand, the Pakistan scheme, was not declared as the British move. In the opinion of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad "the Pakistan scheme accepted by the Muslim League at Lahore in March does not represent the decision of Indian Muslims, and he has refused to admit the possibility of Muslims elected to a constituent assembly demanding the vivisection of India."¹⁷ This assertion of Abul Kalam Azad was a clear deviation from the Congress taunt to the Muslim League. He should not have attributed the destiny of Pakistan to the 'Indian Muslims' rather he should have been sure that Pakistan move was initiated by the British under the 'divide and rule' theory. He should have been sure that the Muslim League under the British patronage would definitely succeed in achieving Pakistan whether it owed the massive support or not. But Abul Kalam was under the democratic principle seems to accept that

16 *Times of India*, 28 November, 1939.

17 Report on the situation in the Punjab for the first-half of June, 1940, L/PJ/5/243.

Pakistan demand would be possible if it would be backed by the Indian Muslims.

Sir Sikander Hayat Khan joined the National Defence Council in 1941 and then resigned from it under the League leadership pressure. Was any or both the approaches dictated by the British? Some authors who adhere to a 'divide and rule' approach have referred to the Jinnah-Sikander Pact as evidence of its existence. They maintain that that Sikander Hayat went to Lucknow under the British dictation to enliven the Muslim League which had already been hit severely by the defeat in the elections of 1937. Yet, Sikander's withdrawal from the National Defence Council cannot be proved to be due to the 'divide and rule' policy.

The British policy of barring the Muslim League in the case of Punjab is an empirical evidence that from a government officer to the Governor and then to the federal government opposed the League on the issue of Pakistan and favoured united India. Even the British high officials used no proper language for the Muslim Leaguers in July 1943 just to save the Punjab Unionist government from the Muslim League. The Muslim League had a democratic right to launch political activities or manoeuvrings but it had to face a severe fury of the central and provincial governments and the civil administration.¹⁸ If the Muslim League's activities were commanded and supported by the British, it should have been accommodated in the Punjab. The writers raise question on the British soft corner for the League. It was a political coercion under the numerical strength and their importance in British India. The British had also policy to protect minorities from majoritarianism. The US government tried in 1942 to force the British to come to terms with the Congress but the British simply replied that the minorities had supported them in the war, therefore, they could never ignore them all including the Muslim League, the most popular Muslim party in India:

We must not on any account break with the Moslems who represent a hundred million people and the main army elements on which we must rely for the immediate fighting. We have also to consider our duty towards thirty or forty million untouchables and our treaties with the Princely states

18 External Affairs Department, Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 29 July 1943, IOR: L/PJ/8/662.

of India, perhaps eighty millions. Naturally we do not want to throw India into chaos on the eve of invasion.¹⁹

The first recognition of the Pakistan demand by the Cripps Mission also hinted towards the separation. But it was not a 'divide and rule' policy rather the British adjusted the demands of an important minority who had been ruling nation at the time of their advent and who were now fighting for them. At the same time, the British wanted to avoid the Balkanisation of India. The strategic necessity for this policy was to increase with the later onset of the Cold War. As early as August 1942, Mr. Amery wrote to the Viceroy that the British must not only "avoid raising false expectations among the Sikhs themselves but also to prevent encouragement to separatist tendencies in other Provinces like Madras and Bombay."²⁰ The evidence from the final years of British rule is clear. United India, not Balkanisation of this region was the creed and policy of the British. Pakistan was eventually to be conceded, but with great reluctance. This does not accord with the view that the British had consistently adopted a 'divide and rule' policy.

Another area of clarity may be 'honesty' of the British regarding the election process from the start to the results. The scholars hardly have shown their reservations towards the fair and honest attitude of the British regarding the 1946 elections.²¹ All agree that the elections were conducted fairly then they ought to follow the line given by many writers that the two nation theory is a truth and Pakistan is an outcome of the popular movement by the Indian Muslims and the constitutional struggle of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The Akalis demanded Azad Punjab or Khalistan but these moves never criticised by the top Congress leadership considering them as British dictation. But the Central Akali Dal under Baba Kharak Singh in an Akhand Hindustan conference at Rawalpindi on 4 and 5 December 1943 opposed Azad Punjab scheme and said

19 Letter from British Foreign Office to Washington on 5 April 1942, FO/954/12A.

20 Letter from Amery to Lord Linlithgow on 20 August 1942, MSS.EUR.F. 125/11.

21 In Punjab, the League had reservations that the Governor was using his influence through his machinery in favour of the Unionist and Akali candidates but no complaint of rigging was reported.

that it was a British intrigue to divide India.²² Baba Kharak Singh, an anti-Akali leader, therefore condemned their scheme but the Congress high command remained silent.

To peep into the issue, a mention about the individual character or the role of leadership is also relevant to the study. Charles E. Trevelyan, a British civil servant in India, had already suffocated all such discussions which are being attributed to the imperialism and anti-imperialist Indian political parties when in 1838 he presented two models which could result in a political change in India. The first was the Native Model which was an anti-imperialist struggle through plots and conspiracies to throw the British back into the sea while according to the second model, the new generation through English education did not see the British as enemy and aggressors rather they “hoped to regenerate India with the help of the English through constitutional means, and ultimately to attain self-government.”²³ Leadership can be categorised into two:

- a. Violent or defiant leadership
- b. Constitutionalist Leadership

Defiant Leadership:

In such a leadership, freedom fighters tried to force the imperialists to leave their motherland with a violent strategy. They used weapons and even attacked the pro-government elements either they were locals or foreigners. Such attacks were justified as a national duty. To them, the unity among the locals could push out the imperialists therefore the co-operation of the locals with the British meant the stability of the imperial rule. Their ultimate goal was to wage a unified struggle against the foreign and pro-foreign rule elements. Chandra Bose, Babbar Akali leaders, and Bhagat Singh Shahid, can be quoted in this regard. Though many provoked the War of 1857 under the personal benefits but even then many freedom fighters fought under the true nature of the

22 Report on the situation in the Punjab for the first half of December 1943. L/PJ/5/246.

23 S. R. Mehrotra, “The Early Indian National Congress, 1885-1918: Ideals, Objectives and Organization,” in B. R. Nanda, ed., *Essays in Modern Indian History*, p.43.

nationalist passions. These violent elements were gunned down, hanged, punished, jailed, and banished to the Andaman Islands. In the British Punjab, Jabru, Malangi (Dakoo), Nizam Lohar and many others are said to have adopted violent strategy to resist the foreign rule.²⁴ They gladly defied the British laws and looted the pro-government rich people. They by this strategy could not receive respect in the society because government institutions always play decisive role in projecting personality under the state policy. Therefore, the state declared them *dakoo* (dacoits) but after winning freedom, these people were perceived as freedom fighters in the specific circles of the nationalists and the regionists. The government had powers, institutions, press, laws and the implementing agencies, local supporters to launch campaign and financial resources which projected the people according to the government policy. Under the nationalist spirit, these defiant people struggling for freedom with violent strategy have been considered freedom fighters though today every violent strategy is tantamount to terrorism.

This type of leadership considers the rulers as enemies and uses violent strategy to push them out of the land. These defiant individuals sacrifice their lives, continue freedom struggle and ultimately achieve the goal. In the Punjab, Babbar Akali movement and struggle of Baba Ram Singh, Ghadar Movement, can be quoted which had never been acceptable by the ruling British. According to Gurcharan Singh, Congress, Akali Dal, Sikh League and Babbar Akali were no different as far their aims were concerned but the main difference was the means to achieve the objectives. The “Babbar Akalis were determined to expel the foreigners, kill the traitors, the *toadies* and the friends of the enemy.”²⁵

24 For detail see Punjabi books, Iftekhhar Waraich Kalrvi, *Dais Mera Je Daran Da* (Gujrat: Rozan Publishers, 2007); also see Iqbal Asad, *Punjab de Lajpal Puttar* (Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Board, n.d.) and Mehr Kachelvi, *Punjab de Soormein* (Faizpur: Asar Ansari, n.d.).

25 Gurcharan Singh, “Babbar Akali Movement-A Study of Aims and Objects,” *Punjab History Conference*, 20th Session (Patiala: Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, 1987), p.348.

Constitutional leadership

In this category, the leadership accepted the rulers' victory under expediency and decided to fight for the freedom through the parameters given by the rulers. It was a matter of deal or bargaining. The local leaders conceded the rulers' hold and in return the rulers accept the local leadership. Therefore, the rulers allowed them to protest and demand their rights acceptable on moral or other specific ground. The rulers accepted the role of the local leadership to placate the emotions of the people because foreign rule is never welcome by the locals. Therefore, the role of the local leadership through the constitutional means was the only way which could certainly satisfy the individuals. The Indian National Congress, All-India Muslim League, Khalsa National Party, Punjab Unionist Party and Shiromani Akali Dal can be quoted as examples of such a political tendency.

Max Weber talks of charismatic leadership while Stephen John Covey has a strong pen on principled leadership. Gurmit Singh writes about three types of great leadership:

- i. The born leaders
- ii. Leaders by qualities, and
- iii. Leaders, product of specific circumstances.²⁶

Leadership emerges as a result of some setback, deprivation or violation of the rights. Human beings have been struggling to go for better pursuits of life. Struggle needs leadership; some individuals are endowed with the quality of eloquence, response ability, sustainable temperament, endurance, convincing power in discussion, impressive knowledge and character that help a person to be outstanding and accepted as leader of the people concerned. The leader adopts common interests as his agenda, collects the people and converts them as the followers. Sometimes, an incident produces leadership but such leadership may follow different attitudes:

1. after solution, the particular incident or problem, leadership disappears;

26 Gurmit Singh Advocate, *Gandhi and the Sikhs* (Sirsa: Usha Institute of Religious Studies, 1969), p.5.

2. the incident proves a base of popularity for the leadership which convinces him to maintain its status by taking up another issue;
3. after the incident, leadership seems neither dead nor challenging to the existing top leadership rather it continues in normal way and then assert influence on the local issues. On the other, it may go up to the top with more powerful struggle.

In all the forms of leadership, a leader works as a middle man or a bridging element between ruled and the rulers. He accepts authority of the rulers though he does not consider them the real and lawful ruling people.

The British to their understanding and political needs may be said to have used a balanced approach towards all the nations living in the Subcontinent. They tried to accommodate all the majority and minority communities because all of them had played friendly role in the difficult times like wars and administrative affairs. They had accepted the British political authority in India and adopted a constitutional role for complaints and demands. The locals gradually gave tough time to the ruling people as they had got much political and working confidence on the lines given by the British education and western political philosophies. The British always tried to honour the importance, sacrifices and services of the local communities. In 1942, when they desperately needed the army recruitment from the Subcontinent and the Indians were making the fullest use to benefit from the situation, the British adopted such a policy which could neither resent nor provoke the peoples against the positioning at the crucial juncture of the Indian freedom struggle. They had to keep the minorities' demands and the Hindu importance in their mind while framing any policy. The Viceroy writes to the Secretary of State for India in 1942:

I may be right in thinking that your present formula is an attempt to meet my requirement of not upsetting the Punjab or the Army. From my point of view this formula would be fatal to declaration in Hindu eyes. They would interpret it as a virtual promise not merely of Pakistan but of Sikhistan also, and as containing greater possibilities of disintegrating India than even Jinnah claims. They would observe that not even a majority in a provincial assembly would be needed to detach some particular region from the Union. They would regard it as still further empowering minorities to force separation on exorbitant terms by the mere refusal to agree. I do not object to giving the minorities a strong position in the future

deliberations, but if we promise too much strength now the declaration will be reviled by Hindus.²⁷

Every nation believes itself the bravest and civilised people. They also negate other nations particularly the rival one. The strange attitude is that they feel gratification in vilifying the rival people otherwise in the modern age all can go ahead to find peace and progress in perspective of the historical realities. Antagonism should have no place in their policies. The facts which caused rift and irritation for others should not be pushed forward. The antagonistic past should not be forgotten but ought to be overlooked for the sake of humanity and peace of the region. Under this, the Indian writers ought to accept what forced the Muslims to part with the Hindus including the follies on the Congress' part. Definitely all was not committed deliberately to push away the Muslims from them but even then it happened which displeased the Muslims. The Muslims ought to accept that they did the same with the Sikhs and Hindus in the political domains of the Punjab. The Sikhs ought to be capacious in accepting the weak part played by their leadership. With the open mindedness and truth, the South Asian nations can go ahead as good neighbours. The responsible scholars should not take shelter of the slogans like 'divide and rule' policy. The 'divide and rule' is merely a slogan to boost the national leadership to the idealised status. The 'divide and rule' was neither true nor present in the British India. Even it is not practicable in society rather it is a phenomenon pertaining to a battlefield. The British educational and democratic reforms influenced the Indian society and resulted in numerous gaps. The lack of creative political traditions, the Indian leadership could not fill these gaps. By adopting the theories and practices of the British masters, they achieved independence but could not secure integrity of the region despite their desire. The depressed saw their posterity in the chains therefore they preferred separation to the eternal slavery. On the eve of the partition, Quaid-i-Azam warned the Sikhs not to commit suicide by joining the rude Hindu majority²⁸ but they did. They are

27 Letter from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India on March 9, 1942, 589-S, L/PO/610b (i) ff 1-121.

28 Kapur Singh, *Sachi Sakhi* (Gurmukhi) (Amritsar: Dharam Parchar Committee, SGPC, 1993), pp.144-45.

repenting now and will be doing the same forever for joining united India.

Conclusion

The main aim to propagate the 'divide and rule policy' by the Hindus was just to pressurize the British to abandon their pro-minority policies. The Congress claimed to be a representative of all the peoples living in the Subcontinent and wanted the support of all minorities to establish its writ in the Indian affairs but the British too needed the support of all the minorities therefore they could never overlook the interests of the minorities. Status of the ruling class and moral pressure of the Muslim world also played a favourable role to be receptive to the Muslim demands.²⁹

It is a stark reality that minority politics is a politics of complaints and demands but the majority community ought to be capacious to infuse confidence among minorities which can cope with any odd situation. Story of Muslim and non-Muslim communities revolves around the fact that the majority community made utmost endeavour to suppress and humiliate the minority instead of respecting their identity and due share in the polity. Under the stress of Indian nationalism, to placate the people and to get rid of the massive criticism, the Indian leadership gave two points namely, Muslim League's villainous role and 'divide and rule' principle of the British nation in India. The non-Muslim leadership declared themselves innocent and 'ignorant' as well because they could not get the on-going wrongs and the repercussions of the 'divide and rule' policy (if it existed) which was pulling their sister community towards separation. Despite, they continued the policy to segregate the Muslims and Muslim League leadership. They should have embraced the Muslim leadership by conceding their demands and did not give them opportunity to go to the British 'enemies.' But they did not come up with the required love and fraternity towards the Muslims. Unfortunately, they went beyond when the Muslim League was expecting very kind response from the Congress in the making of the UP government in 1937. No civilised political leadership of the

29 Letter from Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India on 3 March 1946, IOR: L/PO/6/114.

modern world can present example of this kind for making a coalition ministry what conditions the Congress had presented to the Muslim League as response to the co-operation. Even from the very outset of the political awakening among the Hindus, the Congress leadership adopted the Hinduised policy. Apparently the Hindu leaders maintained the secular spirit given by the Englishmen but in fact the objectives or political creed was planned and pursued on the religious lines. Gandhi is said to have been claimant of the territorial nationalism according to which all sections living in the Subcontinent were a single nation. But his words and actions proved he was undoubtedly a religious man. To Gurmit Singh:

The Muslim masses became apprehensive by the strong Hindu religious flavour of Congress propaganda. They felt that Gandhi ji was trying to identify the national awakening with revival of Hinduism. Their apprehensions were strengthened by Gandhi ji's conduct. Even when appealing for Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhi ji made the appeal not as a national leader appealing to both sections, but as a Hindu leader. The Hindus were "we"; the Muslims were "they".³⁰

Master Sundar Singh Lyallpuri, an anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan and anti-Jinnah man, believed that the Muslims were forcibly converted from Hinduism to Islam therefore they ought to rejoin Hinduism and leave M.A. Jinnah alone in the political arena because he would drown the Muslims in the Indian ocean. One can see the analysis of such a staunch anti-Muslim leader who writes that "Hindus have given no equal social status to Muslims, the result thereof is Jinnah and other separatists."³¹

The cry of 'divide and rule' policy seems a move by the writers rather than the Hindu politicians who rarely had projected this phenomenon during the negotiations with the British authorities. Rather the Indian scholars, after 1947, focused on it and undertook to prove that the Muslim politics was commanded under the British policy of 'divide and rule.' Ostensibly, the newly emerged India required intellectual movement to promote the nationalist passions among the Indians otherwise the Indian

30 Gurmit Singh, *Gandhi and the Sikhs*, pp.35-36.

31 Master Sundar Singh Lyallpuri "Challenge to Jinnah," on 9 July 1945, File-930, Quaid-i-Azam Papers, National Archives of Pakistan, Islamabad.

Muslims and Sikhs could repeat the history of the Muslim League in future. The Indian leadership also wanted to project themselves as freedom fighters against the British imperialism. Jawaharlal Nehru took a very prudent decision when he rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan because by accepting this plan, India could be divided into many independent states. Definitely the weak federal system and prevalent powers to the units might induce them to split which convinced him to save the rest of India by conceding Pakistan. But to sustain this integrity, India desperately needed to portray the Muslim League as a stooge of the British. But one should be clear that historical realities cannot be wiped out by such propaganda.

After the departure of the British, the fashion to portray themselves as enemies to the imperialists was projected with more zeal. It may be important but the newly independent nations may project themselves as constitutionalist freedom fighters. Under this they should have the courage to accept their submission to the ruling authorities through the constitution given by the imperialist nation. In the current century, such an understanding can help to develop a friendly relationship between the nations of South Asia because violence is taking root day by day that would be pernicious to their future and the international peace ultimately. If the nations accept that the imperialism was bad but they had accepted it for the time being, avoided violence and struggled through the constitutional means to achieve the freedom, to create a positive link their past with the present and future without fear and this status would be fruitful for the respective nations and the rest of the world.