CHAPTER III

THE SHAPING OF THE MINORITY DURING THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT
The presence of the 'minority' or 'minorities' in India is often, though sometimes quite mischievously distorted as the creation of the British rule. Dr. P.S. Deshmukh while welcoming the report on minority rights which was prepared by the Advisory Committee, declared in the Constituent Assembly "In my opinion there is no monstrous word in the history of Indian politics than the word minority........ the demon of the interest of the minorities and their protection stood before us and appeared to bar the progress of the country, it is a matter of history that this was a creation of the British Policy". Dr. Deshmukh might have been merely reflecting the sentiments of many a member of the Constituent Assembly. But in this matter at least this impression was superficial. To consider the minorities as a bar to the progress of the country and to treat them as a byproduct of British colonialism was nothing but oversimplification. It may be quite justifiable to remark that the Britishers gave their own orientation to the communal question and used it and the concerns it evoked to their advantage. But the division itself cannot be attributed to the British nor could it be oversimplified as their creation.

On the other hand the existence of syncratic practices across the majority and minority did not mean unity of

1. Dr. P.S. Deshmuka C.A.D. 27 - Aug - 1947
beliefs and practices. What were a set of differences structured in a specific way, found a different expression under colonial impact and were actively reconstructed by the British to suit their policy.

In a way the internal composition of the minority and the articulation of its relation with the rest acquired a specific attenuation, due to the historical context of their rise, the type of tradition they were called upon to interact with the prevalent social relations and the nature of state power in India. It would be a truism, therefore, to say that the notion of minority and its significance was formulated very differently in India from, say, the West.

Here we need to distinguish between minorities and religious groups and certain specific ideological orientation they acquire which could be termed as minoritism and communalism. While communal approach and communalism are condemned and rightly so, the minorities be it religious or linguistic are to be treated as a part of the existential reality. Hence it is incongruous to think of the minority as a 'burden' or as something to be assimilated to the larger whole.

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1. For Communalism see Aseeg Ali Engineer communalism in India. Romilla Thaper — Communalism and writings of Indian History Biplan Chandra — Communalism in modern India.
The concept of the minority as came to be constructed in the liberal thought, was politically distinguishing it from the governing majority. The stark reality of ethnic and religious minorities jostling around representative institutions carrying overboard their world views is something that Western Europe is called upon to confront very recently. In the central liberal formulation minority is conceived as a group which is denied the exercise of political power vis-a-vis another group which exercises political power in the society. The essential aspect of a political minority is that the minority is not and need not be basically unhappy of its predicament. In a very subtle sense the minority is the majority "in making", because the political opinion of the people may change and by means of a popular expression, such as election, the minority will be catapulted to the status of majority. The same phenomenon will convert the majority into a minority. Thus a political minority in a democratic set up is in a situation of 'becoming' and it must be ever ready to transform itself into the majority. The majority too is aware of its predicament that it must be prepared to take the role of the minority one day or the other. The majority will as a matter of practical necessity, respect and appreciate the

1. Bhikhu Parekh : "The Rusdie Affair, Research Agenda for Political Philosophy" - Political Studies, Vol 38, No 4, Dec 1990, 695-709
views of the minority because the majority knows that it may one day become a minority. Thus the minority in a political context, that too in a democratic set up enjoys some sort of equality with the majority.

A minority which will continue permanently as a minority and which has no chance of transforming itself into a majority, will not be able to claim and enjoy the same amount of respect of the majority since the latter knows that it will continue to enjoy the privileged status permanently and it will not be replaced. This is the difference between a political minority and a religious or linguistic minority catapulted into politics as such. For example the Congress demand for representative democracy and parliamentary institutions was fully justifiable if the minority issue was perceived in the political context, whereas, in the given Indian situation, the minority issue could not be reduced merely to a political level. It appears that the Congress underplayed atleast in the first half of this century, the religious and linguistic cleavages in terms of its public stand although in practice it attempted to coopt them or assumed a level of commonality of interests.

This is not to deny the existence of either a majority

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1. Dr. Ambedkar develops this argument forcefully in the context of his demand for autonomous representation for the untouchables. see, What Congress and Gandhi Have done to Untouchables.
or a minority in India before the colonial configuration. Most of the people in an area might have belonged to a particular caste or most of them might have been speaking a particular language thereby the others forming a minority. Similar relation might have been at work creating a variagated complex of minorities and majorities depending upon the context. Sometimes people may have been aware of it and at other times not. But it did not form the basis of constituting political power.

The concept of minority gradually got evolved on account of the impact of the intervention of the state and its changing dynamics in the affairs and day to day life of the individuals. Once the state started intervening more and more and was seen as the platform of power and patronage questions were raised, why a specific few are given preference and why others are denied of the opportunities. The criteria of evaluation of relations across the different social groups on one hand and between them and the state went through a change. There was an awakening mass consciousness that power belonged to people and all have a right for a share in it. It was argued that opportunities be it in the form of employment or representation must be


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equitably available. Inevitably it created different groups placed at differential positions from such opportunities constructing their identities among others in terms of majority and minority. The introduction of representative institutions not merely reinforced this identity, but structured their relations in a delimited way.

The fact of existence of a minority, the differences of group identities and the fact of the existence of such differentiations and differentiated groups need not necessarily lead to a feeling of minoritism. The existence side by side of two or more religious or linguistic groups, one majority and minority need not result in the generation of minoritism. A multi caste society need not for that matter create casteism. Actually we can say that reflective consciousness of a social group that it has some interests to protect distinguishing it from that of the majority and other minorities could be seen as minoritism.

Analytically we can explore certain dimensions of this minoritism. It is a conscious feeling that one belongs to a group that has a specific identity other than that of other larger groups. Further it is a positive assertion of ones identity with an exclusive group. It is not merely an awareness but a positive commitment. The mere fact of one's belonging to a particular group need not necessarily result in minoritism because this belongingness need not bring
about a value commitment. The group identity might positively or even negatively influence the chances and opportunities available to him once such an influence is generated.

Minoritism can also be a genuine attachment to the community which happens to be a minority. The realisation that the community is neglected or denied or suppressed or exploited may constrain one to identify with his group and to struggle unitedly. One might have been indifferent to one's group identity in terms of language or religion. But suddenly he is forced to turn aside and look at the predicament wherein he and a few others are discriminated. The basis of the discrimination may be the language or religion which distinguishes his group from others.

Minoritism can be for personal aggrandisement. It may effectively restrict the number of possible contenders by getting the avenue reserved for his group. Here the advancement of the group is the apparent argument. However the genuine reason is the eagerness to keep away the possible contenders so that one can have a better chance by limiting the competition.

The anticipated personal gain can be merely an economic benefit, or an additional facility or an opportunity which may have more possibilities. It can be in
the form of a privilege which one claims because of the fact that he belongs to a minority. For example, political offices are often divided and a portion is distributed to some members from among the minorities. These beneficiaries will naturally struggle to keep the minority identity alive in the absence of which they may not be eligible for such preferential treatment.

The majority may also give cause for the creation and retention of minoritism. The majority may genuinely be worried about the undergrowth of a small section in the society. The reasons for the slow rate of growth may easily be identified to a factor that distinguishes the minority from the majority. In such a situation the majority itself may encourage those people belonging to the minority to organise themselves as a group and to come up to the expected level of development. Sometimes the elements of the majority to promote their ends may encourage minoritism. In a stiff competition for supremacy, the majority itself may be divided within and such divided sections may make use of the minorities for the advancement of their selfish interests. Thus in such situations minorities easily become the tools in the interdivisional rivalries that arise in the majority. Here the creation and retention of an ideology of minoritism becomes a political necessity for one or other division in the majority. Thus the weakness and the division of the majority may result in the generation of
minoritism and minority groups become pliable instruments in the game of manipulative politics. Here minoritism is not in itself an objective but only a means either for a few individuals or for a group for securing and retaining privileges.

Minoritism in India has constantly reflected a tendency for a continuous search for a protector or defender. It is needless to state that minoritism originates out of a sense of helplessness, inability to stand by one's own, and a basic sense of fear and anxiety. Minoritism encourages to look to the protector and through the protector the minority regains self confidence. The paramount issue is about the identity of the defender. Or who can be a real defender? During the days of imperialism the organised muslim minority tended to look on the British Government and there was a confidence that the Government would protect them against the alleged machinations of the majority to grab power and to dominate over the minority. It is another thing that the British Government cleverly manipulated this predicament for the furtherance of their interests. They purposely aggravated the situation and tried to tighten the grip over the Muslims by exaggerating the possible dangers of a Hindu domination. However the fact is that the Muslim by and large were looking to the British as a third party and as a
strong defender of their life and liberty.

Even today the trend among religious minorities is to search for a defender. An analysis of the voting pattern of the minorities and the weaker sections during the past general elections indicate an overall acceptance of the Congress party as the defender. The Muslims, Christians and other minorities by and large solidly stood behind the Congress presuming that the Congress Government at the Centre is a guarantee for the life and liberty of those sections. The policies of the post independent Congress show that it has almost assumed the role of the defender or the protector of the minorities and weaker sections.

An inexplicable riddle that confuses the issue of minoritism is the problem of representation. Had there been a universally agreeable form of representation of minorities, the issue of minorities or minoritism would not have been of such uncontrollable proportions. One of the routes of such

1. This could be seen in the series of memoranda and petitions submitted by the different Muslim groups to the British Government in India.

2. Only negative evidence can be supplied for the above proposition. Inspite of the existence of communal parties, the religious minorities stood behind the Congress as is shown in the 1957, 1962, or 1987 election results.

3. The recent changes in the voting pattern and the shift in the attitude may indicate that minorities are getting estranged from the Congress. However the tendency of the minorities is to look to the Central Government for protection.
representation generally adopted by political parties in India is to nominate a member of minority community to a political office or choose him as their candidate for an electoral contest. However there is no guarantee that such a candidate would fulfil this demand as his base rests with the party rather than with the minority.

It is all the more incongruous to give the right of representing the minority to the religious leaders. Whenever a crisis arises in this domain it is the practice to consult the religious leaders for ascertaining the reaction of the community. The wisdom of such measures to questionable as the religious leaders cannot effectively represent other interests such as economic political or social. In so far as the religious dimension is concerned a religious leader may be representative. But it is extremely dangerous to stretch out this representative nature to other fields. It is again a pity that the religious leaders proclaim themselves as self appointed leaders of the community and try to rule over that domain that rightly belongs to Caesar. These religious leaders most often make the community more exclusive and even close, thus doing a great disservice in a broader perspective. The problem still remains unanswered. The true representative of the community is yet to emerge. One may be easily drawn to the conclusion that separate electorate is the answer for this
malady. The provision for separate electorate i.e. a community itself selects its leader, its representative to the political, to the religious and to other fields may appear as a reasonable alternative. This again is in vogue in certain areas. For example, the religious pontiff is elected or selected by the followers of that faith. But in the political field this is not viable nor feasible mainly because the political interest of the minority is often overlapping with that of the majority. Whereas the religious interests are exclusive to the group and need not be taken vis-a-vis that of the majority community.

A negative factor that contributed to the growth of minority feeling and minoritism is the mode of representation of minorities practised by political parties especially Indian National Congress. The political parties nominated members from minority communities for various political offices by selecting people from those communities. But the identity may be the only in a name or in a surname and that may be only aspect that binds him to his community. To such people it becomes profitable to keep minority feeling alive whereas the community as a whole may

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1. The problem of true representatives was often raised by Muslim League. For example in 1929 they demanded that the Muslims should be represented in the Round Table Conference only by men "who truly represents the community and give true expression to their views and sentiments." See R.C. Majumdar - Struggle for Freedom p. 531.
not have any advantage by his becoming the holder of an office. This is more so in the case of those political leaders from the minority communities who have no faith neither in the religion nor in the practices of that group.

MINORITISM VERSUS COMMUNALISM

These are two terms which call for a clear distinction. Communalism is often an attempt to promote the interests of a particular community disdainful of its consequences on other such communities. It can be defined as 'a philosophy which stood for the promotion of the interests of a particular religious — community or the members of a particular caste. So it indicates a peculiar attachment to a particular community. The realisation that one can achieve more benefits — through his communal identity, makes him more committed to his community. This commitment may be because of his feeling of neglect or discrimination by the other communities. It may be because of his desire to gain additional benefits, either in the economic or political field. It also may be due to the fear consciousness of the domination of another powerful community. Sometimes it is

1. A V.K. Krishnamenon without even the rudimentary knowledge of Malayalam representing Kerala, a linguistic state and A.K. Antony a non believer representing Christian community are such practical contradictions.

an expression of an intense desire to exclude another group from the field and thus to reduce the number of competitors. It results in making another community, conceived on the same principle as one's own community as the enemy. In extreme cases, solution to one's own problems could be envisaged as eliminating the hostile community or isolating from it.

While communalism which sets barricades between one community and the others is reprehensible, minoritism need not be that much apprehensible. It need not represent reactionary forces in every day life as communalism. Minoritism often may display a healty approach to radical reforms - economic changes, and to socio economic issues. Communalism on the other hand opposes radical changes, and socio economic reforms because such changes may adversely affect the vested interest in the community by closing ranks across different people hitherto fragmented in terms of parochial and sectarian identities. Thus communalism is more oriented to conservativism and vested interests. Minoritism can be a healthy approach to the progress and development of a community and it has an orientation to the growth and welfare of the group. This is why minoritism is happy with democratic approaches political equality and an

1. See Bipan Chandra Communalism is modern India.
openness to all issues. Communalism as we see today is conservative and has a closed approach to the prevalent social relations. Recent Indian history shows that the communal organisations were not exactly against imperialism or colonialism but they were against other communities. Minoritism on the other hand can well go with the overalling of social relations. It does not treat the other community as an enemy, nor it necessarily develops any distrust in other communities. Finally communalism cannot be eradicated by appeasing the communal leaders. This approach will in fact multiply the evil designs of communalists. Minoritism, if at all it has a leniency in the communal line, it ceases to exist when the problems and issues of the minorities are satisfactorily approached. While communalism reflects a perverted form of nationalism, minoritism may develop simultaneously with the true spirit of nationalism.

MINORITIES AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The issues of minorities and minoritism in the Indian context emerge largely during the period of national

1. see, Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern Indian, Delhi, Vikas, 1989.
movement. The groups and communities became conscious of their minority status only during the British rule. Earlier the identity of the social groups and the relationship across such groups was based upon different foundations and covered a different spectrum. Hence such issues as colonialism, struggle for freedom, communalism and the demand of minorities were so closely interlinked that any of these could not be understood without a clear perception of the other issues. For instance, the role of the minorities in the national movement was very much related and determined by the attitude and response of the Indian National Congress to various issues and problems pertaining to the minorities. The Indian National Congress, at least till the attainment of independence had not taken pains to develop a positive policy regarding the minorities, or for solving the specific problems of the minorities. Instead the predominant approach of the Congress was to assume that

1. See Anil Seal - *Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, New Delhi - S. Chand - 1971
   David Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics, The Madras Presidency 1870 - 1920*
   Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976
   Mushir-ul-Hassan, *Nationalism and Communal politics in India*, Delhi, Manohar, 1979

2. See Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Colonial Discourse',
   Mimeographed copy (unpublished)

3. Bipan Chandra-Communalism in Modern India.
the different communities and groups are united to consider themselves as one nation. On this assumption it went on concentrating on political issues and strategies for attaining independence. In other words the Congress's policy with respect to minorities was merely to 'react' to specific situations. As and when a problem arose the congress used to respond to the particular situation without much worrying to develop a well-conceived perspective regarding the minority issue as a whole. As a result we could see some sort of a vacillation bordering between 1 idealism and communalism. Sometimes the Congress adopted a policy from a very idealistic point of view and at other times either yielded to the communal pressure or agreed to 2 at least a few communal demands. From the beginning the Indian National Congress gave priority to political issues. Initially there was a strong emphasis on social issues shared by a large number of nationalists. However with the rise of 'extremism' this issue was to recede to the back 3 ground. Sometimes, the minority issue figured prominently in the Congress Agenda. Gandhi was extremely sensitive to the growing gulf between the Indian National Congress and

1. See Moin Shakir — *Political Thought in Modern India* ed. Thomas Pantham — sage New Delhi 1986
2. Bipan Chandra — *Communalism in Modern India*.
the Muslims. Among the three conditions he saw indispensable for Swaraj one was Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi’s efforts led the Indian National Congress to align itself directly with the Khilafat movement. But in the twenties, Gandhi was increasingly distanced from organised Muslim opinion and instead certain select individuals mediated his relation with that community. Of course it may be too uncharitable to remark that the very founding of the Muslim League, its growth in Indian politics and finally the partition of the country only reflect the inability of the Congress to come to terms with the concerns of minorities. This is also not to exonerate the Muslim League from the responsibility for igniting the communal flare up in India. The bracketing of minorities and their fluid configuration can already be seen in the nineteenth century, especially its later half, as a result of complex sociopolitical forces at work in India. The best known and politically the most explosive case of minorities in India has been that of the Muslims. Even before Sir Syed Ahmed

1. The other two being Khadi and abolition of untouchability. For Gandhi’s approach to Muslims, see Judith Brown, Gandhi’s Rise to Power, also, B.R. Nanda, Mahatma Gandhi

Khan, the Farazi and other purificatory movements among muslims were trying to reinforce an identity which sometimes may not have been directed against the Hindus but its consequences lead unto it. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's attempts to distance the Muslims from the Indian National Congress are well documented. Similarly the attempt of Muslim clergymen especially in such centres as in Aligharh and Bareily to retain control over their religions audience through subtle theological, legal and sociological interpretations is well known. Besides the sulking of large sections of muslim aristocracy deprived of their power and patronage in the 19th century and the headway that large sections of Hindus, albeit the upper castes, made especially in education and employment in public offices reinforced the distance between these sections. The net result of such developments was the emergence of an autonomous muslim platform in India. The British increasingly forced to confront the rising crescendo of the nationalist opinion naturally welcomed such a development. Then the introduction of representative institutions with popular participation, to some extent, from the 19th century provided avenues for such platforms to claim leadership.


2. See, Moin Shakir, Khilafat to Partition, New Delhi, Ajanta, 1981.
The formation of Muslim League in 1906, the representation of certain Muslims under the leadership of Agha Khan to the Viceroy and the Minto Morley reforms of 1909 leading to the famous 'communal award' definitely led up to the consolidation of Muslim political identity.

Similar developments were taking place among other sections in India as well leading to the construction of certain identities and excluding the possibility of others. The rise of the 'Singh Sabha' in the later half of the 19th century and subsequent changes up to the formation of the Akali Dal definitely drew some boundaries between the Sikhs on the one hand and the rest. The development of the Aryan Theory and the demarcation between the Dravidians and Aryans, influenced the reconstruction of 'Shiva Sidhantha' in South India - in the later part of the 19th century and in a cleavage ridden political context, led to the rise of the non-Brahmin movement and its political expressions in the second decade of this century in Madras. Again how sections of British officials being in antipathy with the congress supported this movement is well known.

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1. See Kushuvant Sing - The History of Sikhs - Genda Singh, Religion State and Society.

2. Hardgrove : The Dravidian Movement - Bombay - Popular - 1965

In Bombay Province social reformers like Mahatma Phule saw in the rise of nationalism a further consolidation of the power and privilege of the upper echelons of Hindu society. Through the Sathya Sodak Sangha, Phule attempted to constitute an autonomous identity of the entire non-brahmin masses and let devolve political initiative to it. However soon this political platform was to be faction ridden and the untouchables or the then so called depressed classes increasingly felt the need to express themselves separately. Such separation came to a breaking point in the 1920s when the backward castes and the depressed classes movement was organisationally and politically separated.

In the 19th century in the context of colonial interface a large number of reformist and revivalist sects had come up in India with the objective of reforming the Hindu society. The most prominent among them were Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. However a large number of subaltern sects were also reformulated during this period especially among those castes and communities low down in the Hindu hierarchy. The Kabir Panthi and Raidasi

1. see, Rosalind O'Hanlon, Caste Conflict and ideology, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985,
   L.Natarajan, A Century of Social Reform in India

2. J.N. Farquhar, Religious Movements in Modern India.
sects saw an upswing all over north India. In southern India efforts of Narayana Guru Swamy led to the founding of Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and directed the identity of Izhavas then considered untouchable caste. In the 1920s, we find the rise of Adi Hindu and Adi Dharam movements among the untouchable castes in Northern India. The Scheduled tribes in different parts of India reacted in their own fashion, but in this reaction we find a distinctive orientation manifest that of armed confrontation with the perceived enemy. The Kol rebellion, the Santhal rebellion of 1835, the Birsa movement of 1895-1900 in Chotanagpur and Santhal Panganas can be stated as example in proof. By the mid of 1920’s however we find the various tribal movements expressing a complex relationship with the national movement wherein although certain anti colonial objectives are shared by the former, their own autonomy is highly appreciated. This is very much seen in the Jharkand movement under the leadership of Jaipal Singh and in the tribal stirrings elsewhere.

1. See Nandini Gooptu - Untouchables in U.P. in the early 20th century, In Peter Robe (ed) Dalith and Labour movements in India (forth coming)

Kunwar Suresh Singh - Tribal Movements in India, New Delhi, Manchar, 1982

The Anglo Indians were already given special place in terms of preferences in employment under colonial rule. Although it is difficult to say whether there was a representative Indian Christian platform, elements of the same placed at various levels of prominence in different walks of socio-political life could always be propped up for that purpose and actually it was done, when for instance, the selection of the representative of Indian Christians to the Round Tabale Conference was concerned.

The above discussion on the constitution of the above identities vis-à-vis or against a supposed majority is only representative and not exhaustive. These identities were constituting themselves vis-à-vis a larger movement of which often they themselves were a part. There was also emerging a Hindu platform in parallel mainly in such areas where they saw themselves as a minority and susceptible for domination especially in the context of growing popular representation. This was very much the case in Punjab where the Hindus were a minority and took the initiative for forming the Hindu Mahasabha in 1906. Similar situations obtaining in Bengal converted itself into nationalism and the reasons for the same are extremely well argued by several scholars. The

1. See Gupta A(Ed) Studies in Bengal Renaissance, Jadavapur 1958
Heimsath C.H. Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform, Princeton – New Jersey 1964
national movement did not attempt to be a bare minimum of a large number of such identities that emerged over a period. Of course there were differences in the vision of national movement. Some conceived it as transplanting such identities and founding a new identity; while others saw it as articulating these identities in a new way. Any way ideology and the pace of the national movement was not dictated by the above identities, atleast in the majority of the instances. However even whensd the national movement acquired a mass character some of these identities survived and some of them even consolidated themselves. Jinnah argued for a muslim nationalism in India and attempted to rival it with that evoked by the Indian National Congress. Dr. Ambedkar strove hard to carve out an autonomous political constituency of the untouchables when he found that the emancipation of the untouchables is stuck against the relentless resistance of caste Hindus. The British naturally used these identities to play them against the Indian National Congress or sometimes to play them against one another. We can see it in the Round Table Conference where the delegates were selected by the colonial Government on the basis of these supposed identities representing


interests against the claim of the Indian National Congress to represent the nation as a whole. Their strength is manifest in the communal award as embodied in the 1935 Act wherein not merely the Muslims but the Sikhs, the Anglo-Indians, the Indian Christians and the scheduled castes were to find separate representation in the legislatures. By the time of independence these interests were very safely ensconced at various levels of the British political system in India.

The development of the linguistic identity traces its own trajectory. At the level of the province its high point can be seen in the opposition to Curzon’s division of Bengal in 1905 into East Bengal and West Bengal. Subsequently we find linguistic identity increasingly manifest in the demand for reorganising provinces on a linguistic basis. The British sometimes conceded this demand as in the case of Orissa, Bihar and Sind. Sometimes it was not, as in the case of the demand for a separate state for Karnataka. The Congress itself accepted it as the principle to reorganise lower political and administrative units in India as far back as 1921. Once the principle of linguistic states was accepted, naturally the principle of linguistic minorities has to be accepted and the right of such minorities to preserve their language culture and traditions expressed therein.
With respect to the tribals in India the British policy can be broadly termed as paternalism. They tried to see that the areas inhabited by them are not inundated by outside non-tribals. After the introduction of dyarchy, till independance such areas were maintained as excluded areas and were directly under the control of the British administration. Although the nomenclature for them could be ‘racial minorities’, nationalist opinion saw them increasingly as cultural minorities. This is very much seen in the influence of, say, Elwin or the subsequent policy formulation of Nehru with respect to them. However the tribal question did not figure in anyway prominently in the nationalist debate, not as much as the religious minorities. It was something for recent India to tackle with its demands of secession and autonomy. Racism was of course not in vogue at the time of making the constitution, both nationally and internationally. Its divisive implications as manifest in the Aryan Dravidian politics were obvious for placing obstacles in the building of a nation. Internationally the policy of Hitler in upholding racism and its consequences in the just concluded world war II were by now crystal clear. The constituent assembly therefore gave

1. See Kunwar Suresh Singh - Tribal movements in India.
2. See for instance - B.P. Singh - Politics of North East India, Dehli, O.U.P., 1982
its muted reconstruction of racial minorities as a cultural minorities.

Apart from such identities which came to be shaped and reshaped over a period, there were the political agendas associated with them and they in turn came to shape the responses of the different platforms created on the basis of these identities. This was particularly true with respect to the politics pursued by the Muslim League and its response to the Congress especially from the mid thirties.

There are various instances which show the Congress genuinely attempting to accommodate minority demands. The Congress response to the Khilafat issue the political reforms proposed in 1916, the minority clause in the

1. Muslim League was a marginal force till 1937. It is doubtful whether even Jinnah took it seriously as his exile in Britain shows. Only in the context of 1937 election and the fears and the prejudices generated in the process can be seen the possibility of resurgence of Muslim League. See Ayesha Jalal. Jinnah, the Sole Spokesman.

2. see, Moin Shakir, Khilafat Movement

3. The first major outcome of the significant cooperation (between Congress and League) was a scheme of political reforms jointly drawn up by the committees of the two political organisations and finally adopted by them at their respective annual sessions held at Lucknow in December 1916. One of the major features of the scheme was the provision for separate electorate. According to the proposed scheme, four fifth's of the members of the Imperial Legislative Council were to be elected and one third of them were to be muslims elected by separate electorate.

See R.C. Majumdar - Struggle for Freedom Page 247.
Congress rules etc. are sufficient to show how far the Congress went for accommodating the communal views. The Nehru Constitution in 1928 is another remarkable illustration of accommodating the demands of minorities. It was in fact the first attempt to make a constitution by Indians for themselves. It was a joint effort by different groups and a compromise between opposite perceptions. This constitution provided for reservation of seats for Muslims in those states where they were a minority on a population basis, and also for Hindus in those states where they were a minority.

Often the Congress acted in full conformity with its national outlook and above all sectarian communal influences. It is sufficient to quote a 'certificate' given to the Congress by Sir Harry Haig, the Governor of United Provinces in 1939. "In dealing with the communal issues, the Congress ministers, in my judgement, normally acted with

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1. In 1889 Congress made a rule that no resolution is to be passed to which an overwhelming majority of Hindu or Muslim delegates objected. See Bipan Chandra, Amalesh Tripathi and Barun De, Freedom Struggle New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1972.
Maulana Azad, a staunch supporter of the Congress and an ardent devotee of the nationalist spirit brings out specific examples, where the Congress acted fully in tune with its avowed secular principles. He clearly disproves the Muslim League's allegation against the Congress of communalism and Hindu bias and he charges that on most of the occasions the Muslim League acted only to ferment communal sensitivities and only establishing its claim of representing the Muslim community. The Congress' generosity was very conspicuous especially when it came to the formation of the cabinet either in the first provincial Governments, in the interim government or in the government of free India.

1. R.C. Majumdar. Struggle for Freedom, page 609. Majumdar continues" Maulana Abul Kalam Azad appointed by the Congress to supervise the work of the ministers who had to deal with every incident involving communal issues, characterised as "absolutely false" the charges levelled by Jinnah and the Muslim League against the Congress with regard to the injustice to Muslims and other minorities" page 609.

The Congress never made a government without giving more than due representation to the minorities. In spite of all these, the Congress, in simple words, failed to satisfy the minorities. The fact remained that in spite of its strenuous efforts often very sincere, unfortunately the Congress could not secure the confidence of the minorities as a whole or always. It may be absolutely irrelevant to pin point the reasons or to identify the culprits, nevertheless the fact is overwhelmingly clear that neither the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs nor the backward castes had reposed their full confidence in the Congress as the Hindu majority came to do on the one side the Congress used to claim that it is a national secular organisation and therefore it represented all communities and on the other side several of those communities asserted their autonomous political existence. Often the Congress was accused of

1. Azad Cites the Simla Conference as an example and convincingly establishes how the Muslim League had not acted in the larger interests of the Muslim Community instead stood for the personal prestige and egoism of Jinnah. The Simla Conference after II World War was one of the rare occasions where the Congress, the Muslim League and the British Government could agree on the Political problems - but could not come to a settlement on the composition of the Executive Council. The Muslim League insisted that it should nominate all Muslim members i.e. the Congress should nominate only Hindus. But the Congress quite justifiably insisted that it should be free to nominate anyone. The Congress working Committee had decided to nominate two Hindus, one Muslim, one Parsee and one Christian. Azad says that the Simla Conference is a beautiful example that Congress could act as a national party and not as a Hindu organisation.

For more details - see Maulana Azad ibid p.17.
harbouring pro-Hindu orientation. The relationship between the Congress and the minorities was marred on certain occasions when the communalist in the Congress got an edge over the nationalist although communal composition of section of the Congress has to be distinguished from its ideological orientations and moorings, the communal elements in the absence of rebuttal exerted their inevitable pressure. It goes to the credit of the Muslim League that it could create a sense of genuine fear of Hindu domination over the minorities. The Muslim League's reaction to all constitutional reforms was essentially based on this apprehension of Hindu domination. The Congress on the other hand, in spite of its earnest efforts to bring in all sections had to be dominated by Hindus. Thus the Muslim League's argument that any representative institution necessarily invites Hindu domination, succeeded in keeping the minorities especially the Muslim masses afraid of closing ranks behind the Congress that too after 1937.

Again it goes to the credit of Muslim League for transforming the minorities as 'communal groups'. The

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1. Maulana Azad gives a number of instances. Sardar Patel's role in making B.G. Kher the Chief Minister of Bombay ignoring the claims of Nariman and Rajendra Prasad's role in getting Krishna Sinha elected in Bihar are such examples explained.

See for more details, Maulana Azad, India wins Freedom
Also ref. Sumit Sarkar - Modern India 1885-1947.
absence of security feeling among the Muslim masses was converted very succinctly to the advantage of Muslim League's sectarian interests. Gradually the Muslim League went on increasing its demands finally making an effective claim for the partition of the country. The approach of the Muslim League is the major reason that encouraged some members of the majority community for branding the minorities as 'antinationals', 'foreigners', 'supporters of the British rule'. This again was counter productive and some among the minority communities started suspecting the motives of the Congress and the nationalist movement. For the Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians the sense of minority feeling was not on the same wavelength and accordingly the 'Muslim response' differs from the Sikh response and the Christian response. The Muslim response to the nationalist movement culminated in separation. The Sikh response led to some sort of isolationism with a strong tendency for separation, whereas the christian minority developed some sort of indifferntism.

The Muslim masses after 1937 were more receptive to religious arguments and a very limited number of Muslims only joined hands with the Congress. The majority of them,
by and large stood behind the Muslim League and supported its candidates. The Muslim League cleverly advocated sepa­ration and finally India was divided. Whereas the Sikhs as a community was divided in its approach to the Nationalist movement. The Akali Dal all along claimed that it is the sole representative of all Sikhs just as Muslim League claimed of the Muslims. This was not liked by the Congress. There was a considerable level of support for the Congress too in the Sikh community. This was largely because of the nature of the Akali movement which was not essentially a political, but a quasi-religious movement for freeing the gurudwaras (Sikh Temples) from the control of Mahants (priests), most of whom were corrupt and ignorant. The Akali movement could set a nationalist outlook on account of the support given to the Mahants by the British Government. Otherwise it was merely a popular agitation for the reform of Gurudwaras. But if we understand nationalism as directed against the social basis of support of colonialism as well, it was authentically nationalist.

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1. Commenting about the 1945 election, R.C. Majumdar write "The Muslim League won every Muslim Seat the Nationalists muslins forfeiting their deposits in many instances. The Congress secured 91.3 percent of the votes cast in non­muhammedan constituencies and the Muslim League 86.6 percent of the total votes cast in Muhammedan constituencies..... In the provincial elections too the Muslim League won almost all Muslim seats."

See R.C. Majumdar - Struggle for Freedom page 724.

2. Mohinder Singh - The Akali Movement
Delhi, Macmillan, 1978.
organisation of S.G.P.C. in 1920 too has to be seen in this reformist context.

However the minority feeling get entrenched and a sense of alienation and isolation gripped the community by the time of partition. But unlike the Muslims, the Sikhs were divided in its demand for a separate state. A strong demand made before the cabinet mission by certain Sikh leaders for a separate state merely reflected the growth of minority feeling and the fear that the Sikhs might not get justice from a Hindu dominated socio-political set up. Among the Sikhs, there was always a trend of non-confidence in the Congress whereas the Congress claimed that it represented all sections. The emergence of minoritism among


2."The other powerful minority, the Sikhs, were represented by four leaders whose views did not agree.....the extreme view was presented by Giani Kartar Singh who demanded a separate sovereign State, Khalistan. Baldev Singh was opposed to the idea of a separate Sikh State and favoured a united India. In order to safeguard the interests of the Sikhs, he asked for weightage in representation....... The two other Sikh representatives, Master Tara Singh and Harnam Singh preferred a united India. But if India were divided, they demanded a seperate state for the Sikhs........"

3.On August 20, 1944 The All India Sikh convention at Teja Singh Samundri Hall, considered a resolution for declaring Sikhs as a separate nation. On Oct. 14, 1944 at the Akali Conference at Lahore, Master Tara Singh named four enemies of Sikhs. They were the communists, the Britishers, Mahatma Gandhi and Mohammad Ali Jinnnah. Such developments show the growth of minoritism in the direction of separatism.
the Indian Christian minority and their response to freedom struggle was different from that in the case of Muslims and Sikhs.

At the early phase of the Congress, when its leaders could separate religion from politics the missionaries, the bishops and church elders encouraged the participation of the Christians in political activities. In the early sessions of the Congress, leaders such as Kalicharan Ranerjee of Bengal, Madhusudan Das of Orissa, C.G. Nath of Lahore and Peter Paul of Madras actively participated in the proceedings. But that was in the early years of the Congress. By the beginning of this century things changed. Almost all communities developed their own organisations. As a result nationalism was finding expression in sectarian and partisan movements. As a result both the majority and minority communities showed a communal tendency, and the

1. According to George Thomas there was a greater level of involvement from the side of Christians in those days. He establishes his argument by considering the number of Indian Christian delegates who took part in the early sessions of the Congress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress Session</th>
<th>Total No. of delegates</th>
<th>Christian delegates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) 1888 - Allahabad</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) 1889 - Bombay</td>
<td>1705</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) 1890 - Calcutta</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) 1891 - Nagpur</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

George Thomas - Christian Indians and Indian Nationalism
An interpretation in historical and theological perspective
Hamburg University page 86.
British quite expectedly made tactical use of the apprehensions of the minorities and they assumed the role of some kind of a protector for the minorities. Gradually the Christians also along with other minority communities developed a fear complex concerning the all-embracing claims of Hindu fundamentalists and communalists.

One could see a number of reasons for the apparent indifference from the Christian community especially in the first half of this century. During this period we find the ecclesiastical leaders laying a lot of stress on loyalty to authority as a Christian duty. As in its past, the hierarchy rarely encouraged the faithful to openly challenge the authority of Government and instead advised to treat any attempt for subversion of law and order as immoral. The indifference must partly be on account of the assistance they got from European missionaries in their educational and health services. This resulted in some sort of a feeling that a British Government may be better than a Hindu or Muslim Government. This was also a reflection of the fear of the domination by majority. It has a counter reflection too. That was a suspicion from the side of the majority that the Christians may not be sincere in their opposition against the British. Another reason for the indifference

1. George Thomas p.89
was that the Christians were concentrated mainly in South India and Goa which was then a Portuguese colony. According to C.T. Philip, some of the missionaries gave even a theological justification for the colonial rule and they believed that the end of British rule would result in the curtailment of freedom for western Christian missions to continue their work. It is also argued by C.T. Philip that the missionaries were partly instrumental in changing the 'cultural liberalism' of the British to "cultural Imperialism".

The Syrian Christians in the Travancore-Cochin-Malabar area who constituted a large chunk of the Christian community in India provides a typical example of a small minority community which did not develop a deep sense of minority feeling and also it was almost indifferent to the nationalist movement. This community was not economically or educationally backward nor it had experienced any major form of discrimination. It was free to go on with its business and agriculture (in which its members were engaged). Under the Travancore Maharajas there was relatively a harmonious relation across different religions. The then Travancore presented a picture of communal harmony and coexistence. Hence there was no much need for the

I.C.T. Philip, Protestant Christianity in India
people to organise themselves as a minority and to fight for their rights. Those who came forward from these communities to politics, invariably got involved in state politics rather than in national affairs. They had more or less kept aloof from the Hindu politics of the north. But though the involvement was insignificant, they had very high regard for the nationalist leaders especially Mahatma Gandhi. At the same time they did not develop any serious allergy to the British rule in India. The Deepika and Malayala Manoram very seldom criticised the British rule. Their interest was mainly in the local politics of Travancore State. Both these papers were very loyal and submissive to the Travancore Maharaja. In brief, the Syrian Christians represented a small minority group, which had not thought about themselves as a minority and not cultivated a sense of minoritism and on the other hand had not developed any attachment to the nationalist movement too.

1. As far back in 1909 Malayala Manorama brought out a news item praising Gandhi and his attempt to help Indians in South Africa. This may be the first time Gandhi appears in Malayalam Publication.

2. The Deepika a leading Malayalam daily is the mouthpiece of the Kerala Catholic Church and it is owned by the Bishops. Malayala Manorama, the wellknown and widely circulated daily is owned by a Syrian Jacobite Family and it usually upholds the interests of the Jacobite Church - Both have their head offices in Kottayam - Kerala.