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RESURRECTING DIVIDE AND RULE THROUGH THE PRISM OF HIJAB CONTROVERSY IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Power is the key to achieve anything; good or bad. It is the power which can change the world and which can terminate in devastating and innocuous outcomes. Power is therefore dear to almost all, be it a political, business or the common man's class. Various techniques are devised to acquire power. Though all approaches are diabolical but divide and rule is the most monstrous of all. It is argued that religion based division of Indian dominion into India and Pakistan was basically the creation and outcome of the Britisher's divide and rule policy. They used the strategy to destroy the harmony between various religions and used it for their benefits. Britishers ruled over us for a long period and our ancestors' woes are a living evidence of the pain, agony and trauma suffered by them during the partition. What is happening in Karnataka on hijab is nothing but an attempt by the anti-social groups to apply divide and rule policy to the best of their capabilities and proficiencies resulting in their grand success in the form of increasing fights, discord and unrest in the society. This paper is an attempt to comprehend the existing unrest in society on hijab issue in Karnataka through the lenses of divide and rule strategy of the anti-social elements prevalent even today.

Keywords: British, Divide, Hijab, Power, Rule

Introduction:

The adage, power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely, given by Lord Acton, a British historian, fits well in the present times too. Power was, is and will always remain as an obsession. It is the power that assists even in deep crises. In short, power is the key to achieve anything; good or bad. It is the power which can change the world; it is the power that can terminate in devastating and innocuous outcomes. Therefore, power is dear to almost all, be it a political, business or the common man's class. Various strategies are devised to acquire power through techniques like *saam* (accord) *daam* (incentive) *dand* (punishment) *bhed* (creating discord). Though all approaches are diabolical but divide and rule is the most monstrous of all. It is argued that

religion based division of Indian dominion into India and Pakistan was basically the creation and outcome of the Britisher's divide and rule policy. *Kissa kursi ka* can have far reaching, unimaginable, inconceivable and ineffable effects and repercussions. Collins online dictionary, explains divide and rule as 'a policy which is intended to keep someone in a position of power by causing between people who might otherwise unite against them. 'Britishers ruled over us for a long period and our ancestors' woes are a living evidence of the pain, agony and trauma suffered by them during the partition.

The Hijab Controversy:

What is happening in Karnataka on hijab is nothing but an attempt by the anti-social groups to apply divide and rule policy to the best of their capabilities and proficiencies resulting in their grand success in the form of increasing fights, discord and unrest in the society. Actually the fault is not theirs but ours! We experienced the trauma of partition in 1947, something which we had not experienced earlier but despite attaining a traumatic partition experience we have failed to comprehend its ill effects even after more than seventy years of India's sorrowful partition. We have failed to delve deeply on the aspect that the Hindu- Muslim divide is being misused by certain anti social elements of the society leading to a huge gap between them. The hijab has become the subject of a fierce debate in India.

It all began in January 2022 when six teenagers at a government-run college in Karnataka's Udupi district began protesting after they were barred from classes for wearing headscarves. The question of whether Muslim girls and women in Karnataka can wear the hijab in school and college will be decided by the state's High Court which is currently hearing the matter. The Supreme Court had refused to hear the petition on the ongoing hijab controversy, as the case is being heard in the High Court. Government-run colleges revise the rules every year. Decisions over uniforms rest with the Development Committee headed by a local legislator. The matter is sub judice and it is not appropriate to comment at this stage. Whatever be the outcome of the issue that whether wearing hijab is an essential Islamic practice or not, the focus of this paper is on the Hindu-Muslim gap which is increasing leading to polarisation of the classes. The objective is to comprehend the existing unrest in society on hijab issue in Karnataka through the lenses of divide and rule strategy of the anti-social elements prevalent even today.

The divide and rule resurrected:

Divide and rule is derived from Latin phrase *divide et impera*, i.e., divide and conquer. In politics and sociology it means gaining and maintaining power by breaking up larger concentrations of power into pieces that individually have less power than the one implementing the strategy. This policy is a mode to empower the ruler to retain its supremacy and control the subjects who might unite to repel the rule of the sovereign.

It is argued that the British used this strategy to destroy the harmony between various religions and used it for their benefits. Till 1857, there were no communal problems in India. In fact, the Hindus and Muslims used to help each other; Hindus used to participate in Eid celebrations, and Muslims in Holi and Diwali. The Muslim rulers like the Mughals, Nawab of Awadh and Murshidabad, Tipu Sultan, etc were totally secular; they organised Ramlilas, participated in Holi, Diwali, etc. Ghalib's affectionate letters to his Hindu friends like Munshi Shiv Narain Aram, Har Gopal Tofta, etc attest to the affection between Hindus and Muslims at that time. Although even before 1857, there might have been differences between Hindus and Muslims, but there was no aversion. The issues of communal riots and abhorrence began after 1857 when the mutiny broke out. In this battle the Hindus and Muslims jointly fought against the British which shook the British government to such an extent that after suppressing the Mutiny, they decided to start the policy of divide and rule. All communal riots began after 1857, artificially engineered by the British authorities. The British collector would secretly call the Hindu Pandit, pay him money, and tell him to speak against Muslims, and similarly he would secretly call the Maulvi, pay him money, and tell him to speak against Hindus. This communal poison was injected into our body politic year after year and decade after decade.

The strategy of divide and rule has been employed by most imperial powers in India for their own vested interests. The British Parliament enacted the Indian Councils Act 1909 with the objective of introducing certain reforms in the legislative councils and to augment the limited involvement of Indians in the governance of British India. It was more commonly called the Morley-Minto Reforms after the Secretary of State for India John Morley and the Viceroy of India, the 4th Earl of Minto. The number of elected members considerably increased in both the legislative council's i.e. imperial and provincial legislative councils. It enlarged the deliberative functions of the legislative councils at both the levels. Separate electorates were introduced for the Muslims. Provisions were made for separate voting and few separate constituencies were made for Muslims. This way the British started the divide and rule policy in India for their own benefit. The Act introduced communal representation in Indian politics. This was intended to weaken the growing tide of nationalism in the country by dividing the people on the communal basis. The impact of this Act was also seen in the partition of the country along religious lines. The effects of differential treatment of different religious groups can be seen to this day.

Analysis:

The creation of a state based on religion destroys the very basis of a nation, because it cuts off industries from markets and raw materials. British imperialism created India as a big administrative unit. The British policy was to prohibit the growth of heavy industry in India; otherwise, the Indian industry, with its cheap labour, would have become a powerful rival to British

industry. When the British left India, they divided us so that we may remain backward and weak, and not emerge as a modern powerful industrial state. Similarly what is happening in Karnataka on hijab is giving an opportunity to disruptive elements of society to escalate the polarisation of communal classes in India.

Wearing of hijab, burqa or even a turban is not something new in India. Why the conflict is occurring now? Is it because the assembly elections are being held in the country or does it show the weakness of the government that has failed to perform its primary constitutional obligation of maintaining peace and public order? Even the judiciary had to appeal to the masses to maintain peace and tranquillity! Why we cannot have a peaceful legal recourse to our issues over violent protests? What do we want to project to the world? Is religion above humanity? Though it is our fundamental right to choose what we want to eat, wear, travel etc, but we must not forget that our ends must be achieved through lawful means only, else we may have to pay a big price in the form of bloody violence.

Conclusion:

We as a multi cultural country have the pride of living together despite cultural differences. Irrespective of the judicial outcome in future, we need to remind ourselves that if we give primacy to our religions over humanity, time is not far when history may repeat itself and in cats' fight the monkey will surely have its cake. On one side we are showcasing statue of equality to the world and on the contrary we are projecting our religious hatred to the world. It is high time we must develop in ourselves the facets of patience and perseverance and try to unite with each other irrespective of our religious differences. Resurrection of the devil of divide and rule and its continuity will have serious ramification in elimination of humanity. Let us all unite and shed our religious hatred. Long live the humanity!

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