

SECTION 2

TOPIC 9:

Partition of Bengal and Reversal 1905-11

The partition of Bengal was the most important event during the rule of Lord Curzon. It was carried out mainly for the convenience of administration. Bengal in those days was the biggest province of India extending over 1, 89, 000 square miles with a population of 80 million. It was comprising of Bengal, Behar and Orissa and was under the central of one lieutenant Governor. After Lord Curzon took charge as Governor General of India the discussion over the Partition began due to the following issues:

- 1. Vastness of Province:** The Province was spread over the area of 1, 89, 000 square miles with the population of 80 million, which was too vast to be managed by one lieutenant Governor. He could not make a tour for the whole province due to its vastness once in his tenure.
- 2. Limited Sources of Communication:** The sources of communication in the provinces were limited due to rivers and forests. The law and order condition of the provinces was also worst due to insufficient police and in-efficient management. Therefore the need of partition of province was felt severally.
- 3. Difference of Language:** There was also the difference of Languages and civilization of the natives of West Bengal and East Bengal. The natives of West Bengal considered themselves superior in civilization to the resident of East Bengal. The Condition demanded for the division of Provinces.
- 4. Promotion of Trade:** The division of Bengal was the need of the time to develop trade in East Bengal and to promote the Port of Chittagong, which could be done only by division of the Provinces.
- 5: Appeasement policy:** It is also believed that the British wanted to appease Muslims and certainly the partition went in favour of the Muslims. Before the partition only Western Bengal was developed and industrialized. It was a striking contrast to the eastern part where the Muslim peasantry was crushed under the Hindu landlords, the river system was infested with pirates, and very few funds were allocated for education. The partition helped boost Bengali literature and

language; efforts were also made towards the social, economic and educational uplift of the Muslims.

6: Divide and rule policy: Bengali Hindus also alleged that Lord Curzon had deliberately tried to **divide the Hindus** and the Muslims by drawing a line between the Hindu and the Muslim halves of Bengal. And by favouring the Muslims by giving them a new province in which they were in a clear majority, had struck a deadly blow to Bengali nationality. They branded him as the upholder of the devilish policy of 'divide and rule'.

7. Partition: The Partition of Bengal was thus calculated to restore efficiency in the Government and administration on one hand and encouraged local initiatives for progress and development on the other. Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal and formed two new provinces of manageable size – East and West Bengal. East Bengal consisted of Dacca, Mamansingh, Assam, Kaula, Rangpur, and Bogra district, the Dacca was capital of East Bengal constituted a majority Muslim Province, while the Bihar and Orissa constituted a separate province to be called as West Bengal with the capital of Calcutta and become the Hindu Majority provinces.

East Bengal contained a population of **eighteen million Muslims** and twelve million Hindus. Whereas West Bengal had a population fifty four million of which 42 million were Hindus and thus was the Hindu majority province.

Muslims' Response

It received a favourable response from the Muslims. It was thought that it would bring the emancipation of Muslims socially and economically. The Muslims welcomed the Partition of Bengal for the following reasons:

- 1.** In the majority province of East Bengal the Muslims would be free from Hindu dominance in economic field. They would get opportunities of services and advancement of agriculture.
- 2.** The city of Dacca, where the Muslims were in majority was the centre of Muslim culture. In Dacca Muslims had a great chance of success for social and cultural advancement than in Calcutta.
- 3.** The Partition could result in political uplift and securing represent action in the Government.
- 4.** The partition of Bengal relieved the Muslims from competing with Hindus, who were more advanced in every field of life.

Hindus Response

The Hindus did not accept it, as it dealt a telling blow to their monopolies and exclusive hold on economic, social, Political life of the whole of Bengal. They called it as a deliberate attempt by British Government

1. The Partition of Bengal had brightened the possibility of betterment of Muslims; while the Hindu landlords, capitalists and traders wanted status quo and to continue the exploitation of the Muslims.
2. Hindu lawyers also reacted to the partition of Bengal because they thought that the new province would have its separate courts and thus their practice would be affected.
3. Hindu press was not different from that of Hindu advocates. Hindus had their monopoly over almost whole of the province press. They were afraid that new newspapers would be established which would decrease their income naturally.
4. The Hindus launched **Swadeshi** Movement whose sole purpose was to boycott of British goods.
5. Murder attempts also began. Not only Lord Minto but many other British officials and Muslim leaders were attacked by Hindu extremist.

Annulment of the Partition

When Lord Harding assumed charge as Governor General of India Hindus again became active and sent a representation to him for the annulment of partition of Bengal. He recommended the same to the British Prime Minister for Indian Affairs. On the occasion of the visiting His Majesty George V to Indo-Pakistan and holding of Darbar at Delhi on 12th December 1911 the partition of Bengal was cancelled.

The united Bengal was placed under a Governor and Assam was placed under a Chief Commissioner. This decision was shattering blow to Muslims. It left them disillusioned. Their anger and indignation had widespread repercussions. The Muslims leaders and intelligentsia condemned the decision as betrayal of worst kind.

Expected Question & Answers:

Question No. 1: why was the partition of Bengal reversed in 1911? (7)
June 2001. Q. 3 b

Question No.2: how did the Hindus oppose the partition of Bengal between 1905 & 1911? (7)
November 2002 Q. 2 b

Question No. 3: why was the partition of Bengal reversed in 1911? (7)
November 2003 Q.2 b

Question no.4: why was Bengal partitioned in 1905? (7)

June 2004 Q.2 b

Question No. 5: why was the partition of Bengal reversed in 1911? (7)

November 2005 Q. 3 b

Question No. 6: Bengal was partitioned in 1905 because of geographical factors. Do you agree? Explain your answer. (14)

June 2006 Q. 2 c

Question No.7: why did the British decide to reverse the partition of Bengal in 1911? (7)

June 2007 Q. 2 b

Question No.8: the reasons for partitioning Bengal in 1905 were more important than those that caused its reversal in 1911, do you agree? Explain your answer.(14)

June 2009 Q.3 c

Question No.9: partition or reversal? Were the reasons why Bengal was partitioned in 1905 more important than those regarding its reversal in 1911? Explain your answer. (14)

June 2011 Q.3 c

Question no.10: why was Bengal partitioned in 1905? (7)

Oct/Nov 2012 Q.2 b

Question N.o.11: Bengal was the largest province of India with a population of 85 million people. Lord Curzon, the newly appointed Viceroy believed that Bengal was too large to be governed efficiently as a single province and in 1903 proposed that it should be split into two, West Bengal and East Bengal.

(a) Describe the Swadeshi Movement. [4]

Oct/Nov 2014 Q. 2a

Answer to Question No. 2:

The Hindu community from all over India strongly opposed it. They launched a mass movement, declaring October 16 as a **day of mourning** in Calcutta. Influenced by the Chinese boycott of American goods, the Hindus started the **Swadeshi Movement** against the British. In the meantime, the Hindus raised the Band-i-Mataram as the national cry protecting worship of Shivaji as a national hero. This organized anarchist movement took a terrorist turn resulting in political sabotage and communal riots.

The Partition movement was also strongly opposed from the beginning by the Bengali Hindu middle-class, who felt it was a deliberate blow by the British against the solidarity of the Bengali-speaking population. They believed the British government was fostering a strong Muslim nation in order to keep within check the rapidly growing Hindu power in the West.

This period saw the growth of the Indian National Congress, who condemned the Partition and considered it an attempt at British 'divide and rule'. The Congress grew from a middle-class pressure

group to become the main platform for a nation-wide nationalist movement centered on the goals of **Swaraj** (self-government) and **Swadeshi** (boycotting the import of British manufactured goods).

British reacted sharply. Restrictions were made on newspaper & public meetings. Between 1906 & 1908 the editors were prosecuted & imprisoned. In June 1908, Tilak was arrested & was put into prison for 6 years. Other leaders left India to avoid arrest. The British decided to win the support of the Hindus by making reforms, Known as Morley Minto reforms. But it was too late. British government decided to change of their strategy because of murder attempts and economic disaster. Partition of Bengal was reversed in 1911. Lord Harding, new Viceroy agreed to reverse partition. Announcement at Durbar in Delhi on 12 December by King George British decided to reverse the partition because they were forced to do so. British also moved the capital from Calcutta to Delhi.

Answer to Question No. 6:

Bengal had been one of the most important provinces of the sub-continent due to its best agriculture. British government spent a lot of power and money to administrate Bengal but ultimately they decided to divide it in 1903. Apparently it is believed that Bengal was divided due to its geographical factor and to some extent it is correct. Indeed Bengal was the biggest province and it was very hard to keep an eye on the dense jungles, deep marshy areas and extremely populated regions of Bengal. Its population expanded to 95 million which was ten times greater than the population of Britain at that time.

It was difficult to govern & effectively administer such a large province & the idea of partitioning it was brewing in the minds of the Britain rulers for quite some time. Lord Curzon gave a serious thought to it & got the approval of the British government. Bengal was partitioned into two provinces in October 1905 & provinces of West Bengal & East Bengal & Assam were created. The division of Dacca, Chittagong, MymenSingh were annexed to Assam. After the partition was enforced, it transpired that west Bengal had a Hindu majority population, while East Bengal & Assam had a Muslim majority population. The emergence of a Muslim majority province pleased the Muslim because it gave a chance for progress of the Muslim community in fields of education, jobs in government services & commerce. Under United Bengal, the province was dominated by Hindus who were better educated, economically better off & more well-organized, while Muslims lagged behind in every field.

The Hindus of Bengal bitterly opposed the partition & blamed the British that the partition had been enforced with sinister motives. In fact the Hindu businessmen of Calcutta feared a reduction in their income & profits. Therefore they started mass agitation against the partition of Bengal & their protest was supported by the congress. Muslims were disorganized & were unable to counter the congress & Hindu propaganda.

In fact, partition of Bengal was done not to favour or harm any community. The partition was done mainly because of geographical ground realities.