

Partition of Bengal (1905-1911)

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. Need of the time:

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. 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 favorable 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 representation 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.

Annulment of the Partition

When Lord Hardinge 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 sullen and disillusioned. Their anger and indignation had widespread repercussions. The Muslims leaders and intelligentsia condemned the decision as betrayal of worst kind.

Conclusion

The Muslims of India had appreciated the step and started turning in the favour of the British but the British soon gave in against the mounting pressure of Hindus which helped the Muslims to realize the importance of standing on their feet and to organize themselves politically. It also affirmed the apprehension of Sir Syed that

the Muslims might submerge in the majority of Hindus and lose their separate identity.