

## Partition of Bengal and Politics (1905-1911)

The Partition of Bengal had a profound impact on the politics of Bengal. It brought a division between the Hindus and the Muslims in the province which ultimately went to the advantage of the British administration. Political consciousness among the Muslims found its expression in the formation of the Muslim League. At the beginning, the **Swadeshi Movement** could extend its influence temporarily but it did not become effective in the long run. **The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909** accepted the Muslim demand for separate electorate and with that began a new trend in politics.

### Background of the Partition of Bengal:

The province of Bengal was constituted with Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. On the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1905, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India by a declaration divided the province of Bengal into two parts. This event is known as the Partition of Bengal. According to the Partition of Bengal, the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was formed, consisting of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi Divisions and Assam, Dhaka became the capital of the new province. On the other hand, the province of West Bengal was formed, consisting of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and Kolkata was made its capital. Although the proposal for the Partition of Bengal came into effect in 1905, it was officially made in the middle of the nineteenth century.

### Causes of the Partition of Bengal:

In 1853, Charles Grant recommended for reducing the area of the province of Bengal for the **betterment of administration**. In 1866, there was a famine in Orissa and the British Government failed to control the Devastation caused by it. A committee was formed to find out the causes of this failure and it recommended for **re-demarcation of the boundary** of the province of Bengal. As a matter of fact, it was very difficult on the part of one Lieutenant Governor to administer the vast Presidency of Bengal with a **huge number of populations**. The Government of India realized this problem long ago. Hence, to lighten the responsibility of the Lieutenant Governor it was decided to reduce the area of the Bengal Presidency. From 1826 to 1874 Assam was under the Bengal presidency. In 1874 it was separated from the Bengal presidency and its administration was left in charge of a Chief Commissioner. During this time the Sylhet district of Bangladesh was brought under Assam. **In 1901 Andrew Frazer**, the Lieutenant Governor of the

Central province made a proposal to separate Orissa from the Bengal presidency and attach it with the Central province. Within a few days, Andrew Frazer was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and he placed a plan regarding the Partition of Bengal before Lord Curzon. The plan for the Partition of Bengal was officially placed in 1903. Herbert Rizli, Secretary for Home of the Government of India recommended the plan for the annexation of Dhaka, Chittagong and Mymensingh Divisions with Assam. This plan is known as the '**Rizli Plan**'.

Although the Partition of Bengal was justified in view of administrative convenience, there were other causes behind it. Since the beginning of the British rule Eastern Bengal was **economically backward and neglected**. There was no **Development in the fields of education, trade, commerce and communication**. On the other hand, as Kolkata was the capital of the province, it became the centre of British administration, economic and cultural activities. Kolkata always used to get priority regarding establishment of schools, colleges and university etc. As a result, Eastern Bengal became educationally backward. Agriculture was the main base of the economy of Eastern Bengal but the Government did nothing for the Development and improvement of the condition of the cultivators. Most of the **Zamindars of Eastern Bengal were the permanent residents of Kolkata**. Their oppressive rent collectors, bill collectors and the footmen made the condition of the cultivators miserable. Besides, as the **communication system** was not developed, their economic miseries were becoming almost permanent. The British administrators were aware of all these and they expressed their opinion that Eastern Bengal should be developed through the Partition of Bengal. The British had **political motive** behind the Partition of Bengal besides administrative and economic reasons. Lord Curzon was especially concerned about the growth of political consciousness among the people of Bengal. He clearly felt that the Bengali middle class and the intellectuals were gradually becoming conscious about nationalism and politics.

The Congress conducted the Movements from Kolkata throughout India. In view of this Lord Curzon wanted to divide Bengal by implementing the policy of '**Divide and Rule**'. He thought that if Bengal was divided the Bengalees would become weak, and the centre of anti-British Movement would be shifted from Kolkata. On the contrary, the united Bengal was a great power, and the combined and united Movement of the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal was not at all safe for the

British Empire. Although there was some truth in Lord Curzon's statement regarding administrative convenience and economic development, he had also political motives behind the plan for the Partition of Bengal. He realized that the plan would make the Muslims happy and submissive to the British Government. Besides it would also establish Muslim solidarity and thereby weaken the Indian national unity.

### **Reactions of the Partition of Bengal:**

The Partition of Bengal had a mixed reaction among the people of Bengal. It appeared that the main motive behind the Partition of Bengal was to strengthen the British rule by dividing and weakening the people of Bengal. **The Congress** observed **the 'Day of Mourning'** through the country on the day the Partition of Bengal was officially declared. As a mark of protest, **'Hartal' was observed** on the 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1905 and on the advice of **Rabindranath Tagore a plan to observe 'Rakhee Bandhan'** was accepted. Making a call for accord and unity between the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal Rabindranath composed the song **'Banglar Mati, Banglar Gan'**. In the beginning, a section of the Bengali Muslim leaders opposed the Partition of Bengal. They opposed the Partition of Bengal in a public meeting held at **Rajabazar in Kolkata presided over by Moulavi Abdur Rasul**. But soon there came a change in the attitude of the Muslims and they accorded welcome to the Partition of Bengal.

**Nawab Salimullah** of Dhaka was the first to express his opinion that the Partition of Bengal was in favor of the interest of the Muslims. In Eastern Bengal, leaders like **A. K. Fazlul Huq and Nawab Ali Choudhury**, the Zarnmdar of Dhanbari welcomed the Partition of Bengal and accorded their fullest support to the statement of **Nawab Salimullah**. The Muslim leaders through their speeches delivered at different places of Eastern Bengal explained to the people the need for Eastern Bengal and Assam province.

**The Bengali intellectuals and politicians** who opposed the Partition of Bengal were mostly supporters of the Congress and they belonged to the **Caste Hindu community**. They regarded the Partition of Bengal as an **attack of the imperialist power on nationalism**. At this time, all the newspapers published from West Bengal were opposed to Bengal Partition. Among these, **The Englishman, The Statesman, The Pioneer published in English and The**

**Yugantar, The Sandhya, The Sanjibani, The Nabashakti, The Hitabadi etc.** published in Bengali were important. All these newspapers and journals played active role in the anti-Partition Movement of Bengal. But in course of time, these newspapers and journals became the victims of the government's suppressive policy. Within the years **1906-1908** the newspapers namely, **The Bande-Mataram, The Sandhya and The Yugantar were banned by the government.**

The conflicting reactions of the Hindus and the Muslims towards the Partition of Bengal were very significant. **Muslim participation** in the All-India nationalist role of the Congress was very limited. The educated Bengali intelligentsias of Kolkata were never sympathetic to the problem of Development of the backward and neglected Muslims of Eastern Bengal. Hence the Muslims thought that when .the Partition of Bengal would be implemented, Dhaka would be the capital of the newly formed province. Then a High Court would be established at Dhaka and newspapers and journals would be published from here. Besides, Dhaka would be developed as a centre of trade and commerce. Thus the position of Dhaka would be equal to that of Kolkata. This condition was regarded as being against the interest of the businesspeople, lawyer and educated section of the people of Kolkata. Similarly, creation of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was against the interest of the Kolkata based landlords and middle class people. So they opposed the Partition of Bengal plan. On the other hand, the Partition of Bengal generated a new hope for progress and prosperity among the neglected Muslims of Eastern Bengal. They thought that their interests would be preserved to a greater extent in the newly formed Eastern Bengal and Assam province. The prospects for educational and economic Developments in the new province created new hopes among the Muslims. As a result the newspapers and journals edited by the Muslims wholeheartedly supported the Partition of Bengal. **The Muslim Literary** Association of Kolkata regarded the Partition of Bengal as a blessing. The Scheduled Caste Hindus of Eastern Bengal also supported the Partition of Bengal.

### **Foundation of the Muslim League:**

The British Government held the Muslims alone responsible for the revolt of 1857. Consequently, they took a serious attitude towards the Muslims. The Muslims ignored the English language and as a result their political, social, cultural and economic conditions deteriorated greatly and they became backward. In these

circumstances, **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan of Aligarh** realized the necessity of English education for the backward Muslims. He undertook various attempts for the spread of English education among the Muslims. It was due to the initiatives taken by **Syed Ahmed, the MohamMadana Anglo-Oriental College**, the Translation Bureau and the Muslim Education Conference were established and organized. As a result, western education spread among the Muslims and they became conscious about their own position. The **All- India Congress was founded in 1885**, but most of the Muslim leaders did not join this organization. As a whole, the Muslims remained aloof from politics. The declaration of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 generated new hopes and aspirations among the neglected Muslim of Bengal. But the Congress Movement against the Partition of Bengal created an adverse reaction among the Muslims. They realized that the necessity for the formation of an independent and separate political organization to safeguard their own interests.

In 1906, the British Government decided to introduce administrative reforms afresh. In this situation, the Muslims desired to participate actively in politics. On 1 October, 1906 a Muslim delegation consisting of the thirty five members under the leadership of Aga Khan met the **Viceroy Lord Minto in Simla** and placed before him a memorandum. For safeguarding the interests of the Muslims the memorandum contained {he demands for separate electorate for the Muslims in the new reform laws and granting more seats to them in the Legislative Assembly. Beside these, the demands for making provisions of appointing more Muslims in the government civil and military services, Districts Councils, Municipal Corporations and the establishment of Muslim University were also included in the memorandum. The meeting of the Muslim representatives with the Viceroy Lord Minto held **at Simla is known as the Simla Deputation' or 'Simla Representative Conference'**. It is known from the autobiography of Aga Khan that at the time of submitting the memorandum at the Muslim Representative Conference at Simla, the Muslim leaders felt the necessity of forming a separate political organization in order to protect their interests and to compel the government to fulfill their demands. However, Lord Minto gave a patient hearing to the Muslim delegates and gave the assurance for consideration of their demands in the ensuing administrative reform.

After the meeting with the Viceroy at Simla under the leadership of Aga Khan, Muslim leaders discussed among themselves the possibility of forming a political

party. Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka proposed the formation of the All India Muslim Confederation. But no final decision was taken there in this respect. On December 30, 1906 'The All India Muslim Educational Conference' was held in Dhaka. During this Conference Nawab Salimullah proposed the formation of a political party named the '**All India Muslim League**'. The proposal was supported by the Muslim leaders like Hakim Azmal Khan, Zafar AH Khan and Muhammad Ali. Thus, **on 31 December, 1906 the 'Muslim League'** was formed in Dhaka as a political organization of the Muslims.

### **Objectives of the formation of the Muslim League:**

There were three objectives behind the formation of the Muslim League:

1. To promote among the Muslims of India the feeling of loyalty to the British Government and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intention of the Government with regard to any of its measures consisting of thirty five members
2. To protect and advance the political rights and Interests of "the Muslims of India and respectfully to represent their needs and aspirations to the Government.
3. To prevent the rise among the Muslims of India, of any feeling of hostility towards other communities without prejudice to the other aforementioned objects of the League.

**Aga Khan** became the first President of the All India Muslim League. **Nawab Muhsin-UI-Mulq and Nawab Vikhar-ul-Mulq were elected Joint Secretaries**, The leaders such as Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka, Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Zafar Ali Khan, Hakim Azmal Khan and Muhammad Ali played significant role in the formation of the Muslim League. The formation of the Muslim League brought significant changes in the subsequent political development of the sub-continent. In 1908, branches of the Muslim League were opened in different provinces of India; the principle of separate electorate was recognized in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. The Muslim League earned political success within a few years of its formation as an organization. The Muslim League expressed its profound

discontent when the Partition of Bengal was annulled in 1911. However, events like the Partition of Bengal, the foundation of the Muslim League and the annulment of the Partition of Bengal enhanced the political consciousness of the Muslims to a great extent.

### **The Movement against the Partition of Bengal:**

The Movement which was started to oppose the Partition of Bengal is generally known as the Swadeshi Movement. This Movement was divided into four phases, In the **first phase**, opposition against the Partition of Bengal was expressed through the speeches delivered and resolutions adopted in various meetings, **The second stage** emphasized on the attainment of self-strength and building national education Movement. Boycott or discarding the English goods and in its place production of local goods and commodities and using these constituted the **third phase** of the anti-partition of Bengal Movement. **Finally**, the Movement against the Partition of Bengal followed the path of revolution or terrorism in the fourth stage.

### **The Boycott Movement:**

At last the Movement against the Partition of Bengal was turned into a Swadeshi Movement. In the beginning, the main objective of the '**Boycott**' Movement was **to abandon the English goods**. With the spread of the Movement the meaning of 'Boycott' became gradually extensive. Side by side with the rejection of English goods and western education the idea of using locally made products, Development of indigenous industries and spread of national education gained importance. Since October, 1905 the Swadeshi Movement gradually spread over the different parts of Bengal. Through holding meetings at different places solemn oaths were taken to use the local products and to abandon the foreign goods,' This Movement conducted under the leadership of the Congress encouraged the burning of the English goods publicly in the urban and rural areas and inspired the people to use the local goods. As a result of the Swadeshi Movement, the demand for the foreign goods was reduced to a great extent. It can be known from the official report of 1906 that the imports of soaps, salt, cotton clothes and cigarettes from England were considerably reduced. During this, time factories grew up in different parts of Bengal for producing local hand-loom clothes, soaps, salt, sugar and leather goods. The Swadeshi Movement was not confined to Bengal only. This

Movement spread over the different regions in India and local factories and industries grew up in those places.

### **The Swadeshi Movement:**

The Swadeshi Movement took the form of national Movement in the field of education. A good number of students were expelled from the Government school\* and colleges for their participation in the anti-Partition of Bengal Hence it became necessary to establish national educational **There were four main characteristics of the national educational Movement.**

1. Under the national planning, arrangements are to be made for imparting, education in literature, science and technology for upholding the national interest.
2. To make the technical education compulsory for all.
3. To arrange the teaching of different languages in the colleges for higher research.
4. To make arrangements for the education of science and technology in the mother tongue.

As a result of the national educational Movement, a good number of national schools and some centers for technical education were established in different places of Bengal. The national schools were established at Rangpur, Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Barisal districts in Bengal. Ashwini Kumar Dutta established a national institution named **Braja Mohan College in Barisal**. But ultimately, the national education Movement did not become successful. As the **Swadeshi Movement took the shape of a political Movement**, eagerness for the spread of national education decreased. Besides, the students who passed out from the national schools did not get any Government job. Consequently, the popularity of the national education decreased. **Above all**, it became ultimately impossible to conduct the national educational Movement due to financial crisis and the strong opposition of the British Government. The people of different classes, of Bengal participated in the Swadeshi Movement. To mobilize the public opinion in favour of this Movement, associations were formed in different districts. **'Swadesh Bandhaba' of Barisal, 'Brati\* of Faridpur, 'Sadhana' of Mymensingh and 'Anushilan' of Dhaka** 'were the most prominent organizations. To create inspiration for the Swadeshi Movement the poets and writers published patriotic poems and essays in different, dailies and weeklies.



The most prominent among those poets and writers were **Rabindranath Tagore** , **Dijendralal Roy** and **Rajani Kanta Sena**. **Mukunja Das**, the distinguished son of Barisal and poet of Bengal moved around from village to village singing the song "**Do not put on 'Reshmi' bangle, O, the women of Bengal, never again wear it in your hands**" and thus created a strong feeling among the people in favour of the Swadeshi Movement. Through the participation in the Swadeshi Movement, the womenfolk of Bengal joined the politics of the subcontinent for the first time.

Although a few Muslim leaders supported the Movement against the Partition of Bengal at the beginning, ultimately the Muslim community of Bengal withdrew its support from the Boycott, the Swadeshi Movement and the anti-Partition of .Bengal Movement. Besides these, the ideology of **ultra Hinduism of the Swadeshi Movement** and the policy of conducting the Movement according to the ideology of Hinduism were strongly resented by the Muslims. Again, the ceremony of tying the '**Rakhee**' thread, offering worship at **Kalighat**, using the verses of Geeta, etc, in connection with the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement created adverse reactions among the pious Muslims. **The powerful supporters of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal were the Zamindars**. The **peasants** who constituted the majority of the population of Bengal were not happy with the existing land tenure system. As a mark of reaction against the administration of the Zamindars, the lower Caste Hindus along with the Muslims did not support the Swadeshi Movement in some cases. Consequently, there appeared a split in the Hindu-Muslim relations centreing round the question of the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement. It had far reaching effects.

The policy of the Swadeshi Movement of **abandoning foreign goods failed** for various reasons and finally the Swadeshi Movement lost support of the people. The Swadeshi Movement did not take the form of a national character because of the non-participation of the Muslims which was the main weakness of this Movement. The Government's repressive measures gradually broke down the morale of the supporters of the Swadeshi Movement. The **Marwari merchants of Kolkata** and the businessmen of the rural areas of Bengal showed interests in importing and selling of English goods instead of participating in the Boycott Movement. Finally, when the Swadeshi Movement followed the path of terrorism, it gradually lost the contact with the masses and failed.

The Swadeshi Movement marked the beginning of the anti-British Movement and the struggle for the Independence of India. Although the Swadeshi Movement was an **economic and cultural Movement** against the partition of Bengal, its political impacts were quite noticeable. The importance of the student community in politics was increased as a result of their participation in the Swadeshi Movement. Besides, as a result of the Boycott Movement, the import of foreign goods decreased and the importance of the establishment of the indigenous industries increased. Culturally this Movement infused the inspiration to cultivate the vernacular language, local education and literature. But the Swadeshi Movement created an acute bitterness in the Hindu-Muslim relations. The bitterness created in the Hindu-Muslim relations by the Movement against the Partition of Bengal was still more intensified by the Swadeshi Movement and it profoundly influenced the national politics and Movement.

### **Revolutionary Movement:**

**Swadeshi Movement** failed to change the attitude and decisions of the British Government towards the Partition of Bengal. So the extremist group in the Congress decided to start a revolutionary Movement with the objective of bringing about the fall of the British Government through terrorist activities, the British Government termed this revolutionary Movement conducted since 1906 the terrorist Movement. A number of secret societies grew at different places Bengal centring around Dhaka and Kolkata. The '**Anushilan Samiti of Dhaka**' and the '**Jugantar Party**' of Kolkata were the most powerful organizations the revolutionary Movement. During this time Pulin Bihari Das and Barinra imar Ghosh were the leaders of the '**Anushilan Samiti**' and the '**Jugantar Party**' respectively. The youths of Bengal who wanted to topple down the British Government by an armed revaluation were the members of these revolutionary organizations. In 1908, these revolutionaries failed in their attempts to kill the **Governor\* of Bengal Andrew Frazer** and the Lt. Governor of Eastern Bengal **and Assam Bamfield Fuller**, Their next main target was Kingsford, the Chief Presidency Magistrate. **Khudiram and Profulla Chaki** threw bombs at the motor of Kingsford at Muzaffarpur. But Kingsford was not in the car; rather the wife and the daughter of another English official were in the car. Both of them were killed in this bomb attack. **Khudiram** was arrested and he was hanged to death. **Prafulla Chaki** committed suicide. The sacrifice of the lives by these two revolutionaries created

unprecedented inspiration among the revolutionaries. During the years 1908 to 1911, many English police officers and their native associates were killed by the bullets of the revolutionaries. Although the swadeshi Movement and the revolutionary activities remained unimpeded, the British administrators did not change the decision of the Partition of Bengal. Towards the end of the year 1910 Lord Hardinge became the new Viceroy of India in place of Lord Minto. The severity of the Swadeshi and the revolutionary Movements finally compelled the British Government to annul the Partition of Bengal. Lord Hardinge followed a policy of appeasement and decided to annul the Partition of Bengal. He got full support of the Secretary of State for in this matter. At the same time, he also took the decision to transfer capital of India from Kolkata to Delhi. **At the Darbar of Delhi held on 12 December, 1911 on the occasion of the Coronation Ceremony of Emperor George v of England, the declaration of the annulment of the Partition of Bengal was proclaimed.** Even after this the revolutionaries continued their activities. The most important event of the armed revolution in Bengal was the looting of the Chittagong armoury in 1930. Towards the end of the decade of the thirties the government suppressed this Movement; a new province of Bengal was created by the amalgamation of East and West Bengal. Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal and made a new province, while Assam was placed under the Chief Commissioner as before. The annulment of the Partition of Bengal created a strong resentment among the Muslims.