

THE PARTITION OF BENGAL (1905)

Lord Curzon, the New Viceroy

On 30 December 1889, Lord Curzon took over as the new viceroy of India. Lord Curzon ordered the partition of Bengal in 1905. He wanted to improve the administrative efficiency in that huge and populous region, where the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia exerted considerable influence on local and national politics. The partition of Bengal came into effect on 16 October 1905, through a royal proclamation. The partition created a new province of East Bengal, which later became East Pakistan, the present day Bangladesh. The government explained that the partition was for stimulating the growth of the under developed eastern region of Bengal.

Partition of Bengal

Finding the Bengal presidency too large for one governor to administer, in 1905, the British decided to redraw its boundaries and divide it into two parts. The provinces of Bengal and Assam were reconstituted to form two provinces of manageable size-West Bengal, with a population of 54 million (42 million Hindus and 18 million Muslims). The territory to be transferred from Bengal to the new province consisted of the districts of Chittagong and Dhaka Divisions, Rajshahi Division excluding Darjeeling and the District of Malda. Lord Curzon sent the proposal to London in February, 1905. The secretary of state for India, Sir John Brodrick, sanctioned it in June, and the proclamation of the formation of the new province was issued in September. The province of Bengal and Assam came into being on 16 October 1905.

Reasons for the Partition of Bengal

The partition of Bengal sought to destroy the political influence of the educated middle class among whom the Bengali intelligentsia were the most prominent. It also set up a communal gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Indian National Congress Unanimously condemned the partition of Bengal. Actually, the main most advanced region of the country at that time.

Reaction of the People

An ill-conceived and hastily implemented action, the partition outraged the Bengalis. Not only had the government failed to consult the Indian public of their opinion, but the action appeared to reflect the British resolve to 'divide and rule'. Widespread agitation ensued on the streets and in the press, and the Congress advocated boycotting British products under the banner of *swadeshi*. The Congress-led boycott of the British goods was so successful that it unleashed anti-British forces to an extent unknown since the sepoy Rebellion. A cycle of the violence, terrorism and repression ensued in some parts of the country. Indians launched a mass movement, declaring 16 October as the day of mourning in Kolkata raising Vande-Mataram as the national cry protecting the Indian nationality. This organised anarchist movement took a terrorist turn, resulting in political sabotage and riots.

Reversal of the Partition

Keeping in view the fluid political situation in India, the British tried to mitigate the situation by announcing a series of constitutional reforms in 1909, and by appointing a few moderates to the imperial and provincial councils. In what the British saw as an additional goodwill gesture, in 1911, King Emperor George V (1910-1936) visited India for a durbar, during which he

announced the reversal of the partition of Bengal and the transfer of the capital from Kolkata to a newly planned city to be built immediately south of Delhi, which became New Delhi.

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