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Policy Of Divide And Rule In British India: A Case Dstudy Of Partition Of Bengal (1905) And After

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ABSTRACT

The beginning of 20th century new policy of divide and rule was implemented by the British by dividing Bengal. In this paper i have tried to look over the changing scenario of later politics of India. As a result of partition emergence the of feeling of nationalism by starting the Swadeshi movement, the first tine started mass movement, passive resistance which became the main instrument of later movement under Gandhi. Emergence of the extremist, , one the other hand formation of Muslim league, it became more strong by introduced separate electorate for Muslims in the act of 1909, and finally partition was annulled in 1911 and same year the capital was transfer to Delhi.

KEYWORDS: SWADESHI, BOYCOTT, PASSIVE RERISTANC NATIANALISM

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BACKGROUND

After the second half of the 19th century there was a change in Indian politics and it had become more visible with the beginning of the 20th century. The year 1905 had a profound impact on the political history of India. The first egregious “communal” violence in Bengal began by an act of boundary drawing, when the British colonial administration, for reasons both political and administrative, partitioned the province of Bengal into two smaller Hindu and Muslim majority provinces.”¹ In spite of the separation of Assam, Bengal remained the most populous province of British India having an area of approximately 1, 89,900 sq. miles and a population of approximately 78 and a half million. The feeling in the Government was that it was administratively difficult to be administered by a single person and that was why perhaps the plan was 'officially' to reduce the size of the province and its population.

PARTITION

In reality, the proposals to redraw the map of Bengal started as early as the Orissa famine of 1866 when Sir Stafford Northcote suggested to reduce the area of Bengal presidency which included Bengal, Bihar Orissa and Assam on grounds of administrative convenience and efficiency. In 1874 Assam was carved out from Bengal province which led to the demand of other areas like south lushai hills to be separated from Bengal in 1892. In 1901, a fresh look at the issue of the Bengal province was revived with the administration engaging in territorial adjustment of the provinces of Bengal and the Central province.”² Fraser in his note on 28th of March 1903 advocated the transfer of the Chittagong division along with Dacca and Mymensingh and possibly for the 1st time highlighted the political advantages of the blueprint and it found favour with Curzon who accepted his ideas and were contained in the note that Curzon gave entitled 'Viceroys' Minute on Territorial Redistribution in India (19 May/1 June 1903). It was this Minute which formed the basis for Risley's letter of 3rd December 1903 proposing the transfer of the Chittagong division along with Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam.

On the 12th of December 1903, when the proposal was published in the Government of India Gazette, there was an agitation and Public criticisms against the proposal. Public meetings were held in towns and cities and sending memorials and telegrams to the Government. Professionals and the landlords also joined the agitation. Protest meetings were held in Chittagong under the presidency of Jatra Mohan Sen. An official Report on the Agitations noted, the Superintendent of Police Chittagong reported in that year the rumour of the impending transfer was causing discontent among the people, as they objected to being called Assamese”³ .

Four leading newspapers of Calcutta, the Bengalee, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, the Indian Mirror and the Hindu Patriot, protested against the division of the Bengali race and the vernacular

papers such as the Sanjibani and the Bangabasi expressed unwavering hostility to scheme. Sanjibani in its issue of 7th January 1904, “strove to engage the sympathies of the Zamindars by warning them that mere a gazetteer notification is required to abolish the permanent settlement in the non-regulation province.

As early as January 1904 The Indian Association of Calcutta, led by Surendra Nath Banerjee issued Circulars to the association branches in the mofussil instructing the local leaders to hold meetings and adopt resolution and send telegrams to the Calcutta newspapers. Many landlords were also opposed to the division like Maharaja of Mymensingh, Cassimbazar, Nattore, Susann, even the Bengal Chamber of Commerce members came out to give assurances of support to the Partition agitations.”⁴ Generally, however, the protests were initially the handiwork of the "local bar association and school masters", i.e. basically the English educated middle class.

Despite mass protests the Secretary of State gave his consent to this proposal on 9th June and on the 19th July 1905, the Government of India announced its decision to set up the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the formal proclamation coming in on the 1st of September and on the 16th of October 1905 Bengal was partitioned.

Partition of Bengal has generated a great deal of debate on the question of motive, the principal rival views varying between administrative and economic & political conveniences. But whatever they could be Curzon and Risley were very clear in their mind. Ostensibly the decision was purely administrative and economic, to safeguard the interests of tea, oil, and coal industries. Assam planters would be having a cheaper maritime outlet through the the port of chittagang, bring Assam-Bengal railways under one administration but Sumit Sarkar points out these arguments seem to have been fallacious.”⁵ But the proposal of political convenience with the division of Hindus and Muslims and the creation of a province to unite the people of Muhammadan faith. Risley in his notes, 7th Feb. 1904 & 6 Dec. 1904 declared that...

“Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is perfectly true and is one of the merits of the scheme. The only rejoinder that I can think of it that Bengal is very densely populated; that Eastern Bengal is the most densely population portion, that it needs room for expansion and that it can only expand towards the East. So far from hindering national development we are really giving it greater scope, and enabling Bengal to absorb Assam.”⁶ And again,

The partition of Bengal was unpalatable to all sections of the Bengalis. At the beginning Surendra Nath Banerjee said, “We felt that we have been insulted, humiliated and tricked. We felt that the whole of our future was at stake, and that it was a deliberate blow aimed at the growing solidarity and self-consciousness of the Bengali-speaking population.”⁷ In the *Bengalee*, edited by

Surendra Nath Banerjee, a leading article was published on July 7, 1905 under the caption: "A Grave National Disaster" which warned the Government of an unending national struggle of the greatest magnitude in case the Government did not reverse their decision."⁸ The *Muslim Chronicle* & Anglo-Indian press, such as the *Statesman*, *The Englishman*, and *The Times of India*, along with some of the papers of England like, *The Times*, *The Daily*, *Manchester Guardian*, also condemned the proposal."⁹

By the time Curzon came to visit East Bengal in Feb.1904 there was already some differences of opinion among the agitationists. Almost coinciding with the visit of the Viceroy to Dacca, Chittagong and Mymensingh, the Nawab of Dacca led some of the residents of the Eastern districts of Bengal to declare their support in favour of alternative scheme for partition. Curzon tried to win the support of the Muslim population by pointing out that the Decca would be become the capital and centre of newly created province of whole Muslims and the scheme "would invest the Mohammedans in East Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman Viceroys and Kings".¹⁰

And again, by offering "the Bengali people instead of being the pre-dominant element in one local administration would in future become the predominant element in two" and indicated his resolve to ignore the popular sentiments regarding the scheme. If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying on the eastern flank of India, a force' already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future."¹¹

The Amrita Bazar wrote that the viceroy's utterances had "chilled the people and dashed their hopes to the ground."¹² A month after the Viceroy's visit therefore, the first of the great protest meetings was held at the Calcutta Town Hall on the 18th of March 1904. The visit of the Viceroy therefore, instead of allaying the fears of the Bengali agitators, increased their anxiety. Another meeting was held at Calcutta on the 10th of January 1905 to coincide with the visit of Sir Henry Cotton at the Town Hall on the question of partition in an article published on the 12th of August, the Bengalee declared, that there was no longer any hope of the Bengali race to develop by sympathy and it must be a case of development by "antagonism or political nirvana"¹³

July 17th at a meeting 1905 in Calcutta gave a call for the boycott of foreign goods and institutions. And another on 7th August at Calcutta Town Hall by time a formal boycott resolution was passed which marked as the beginning of Swadeshi movement. It was initiated as early as February 1905 by a 'Punjabi agitator' Tahil Ram Ganga Ram. Though not considered then, in the August in 1 meeting, one of the resolutions adopted was to institute a boycott of English goods."¹⁴ The agitations reached its climax on the day of the partition, i.e., 16th of October.

AFTER PARTITION

Partition of Bengal started the new epoch-making politics of partitioning in later political history of India, which led to the 2nd partition of India. The partition instead of dividing and weakening the Bengalis further united them through an anti-partition agitation. The partition of Bengal was widely welcomed by Muslim because the Muslims in the newly created regions of East Bengal and Assam felt that a separate region would give them more opportunities for education, employment, and other advancements. Indeed what the Curzonian administration had ignored was the growing Bengali identity which cut across narrow interest groups, class and regional barriers.¹⁵ At this juncture the partition instead of dividing the Bengalee society, brought into existence a "Swadeshi Coalition" by further consolidating the political alliance between the Calcutta leaders and their counterparts in East Bengal, which according to Rajat Ray, was "nothing less than a revolution in the political structure of Bengal society."¹⁶ Sir Bam Fylde Fuller's Government made no secret of its intention and proclaimed from the house its partiality for the Muhammadans. The policy of patting the latter on the backhand 'hammering' the former was pursued in a reckless manner.

16th Oct. observed as a day of mourning in all over Bengal. People took out processions and band after band walked barefoot, bathed in the Ganges in the morning and then paraded the streets singing Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 'Bande Mataram' which became the theme song of the movement. The day was also observed in the old province of Bengal as "a day of Arandhan" in almost all houses. Rabindranath Tagore called for Rakhi Bandhan as a day of unity.¹⁷ The Government tried to suppress the anti-partition agitation by introducing repressive measures.¹⁸ As a reaction swadeshi and boycott movements were started which resulted in the growth of nationalistic feeling among the people, for the first time started mass agitation which shaped at the of Gandhi. In 1905 Gokhale identified Swadeshi with the highest type of patriotism, Dadabhai Naoraji referred to Swadeshism as the "cradle of New India." In 1908 Gandhi wrote that the real awakening of India took place after the Partition of Bengal which might lead to the partition of the British Empire. In 1905 Lala Lajpat Rai observed: if the people of India will just learn that lesson from the people of Bengal, then the struggle is not hopeless. The agitation gave rise to the Extremist or Nationalist Party under Tilak, Aurobindo, Lajpat Rai, and other leaders, and radically changed the conception of political goal and the method to achieve it, upheld by the INC since 1885. This newly born nationalism was first expressed in the Home Rule Movement of Tilak and Besant, and then in the Non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Will Durant observes: It was in 1905, then, that the Indian Revolution began. Almost all the characteristic features that marked India's struggle for freedom up to 1947 can be traced to the Swadeshi agitation. Even Gandhi's Non Co-operation and passive Resistance had their origin in the Swadeshi movement. Non Co-operation and Passive

Resistance were preached by Aurobindo during the Swadeshi movement. Aurobindo anticipated Gandhi's enunciation of the high moral and spiritual values of a non-violent struggle. Aurobindo said: "On their fidelity to Swadeshi, to boycott, to passive resistance, rested the hope of a peaceful and spiritual revolution. Also, the differences between the political Ideologies of the Moderates & the Extremists, the Hindus & Muslims, were developed during the Swadeshi agitation and this persisted till the very end. It is the Swadeshi movement that gave rise to militant nationalism, generally referred to as terrorism and more properly called revolutionaries. The revolutionaries galvanized the political consciousness of the country which really commenced the national struggle for freedom as we conceive it today.

Besides trying to suppress the anti-partition agitation, the British Government also tried to win over the Muslims to their side. In eastern Bengal, Bam Fylde Fuller known for his pro-partition and pro-Muslims sympathies and partition itself being leadership panicky. And then the secretary of states Morley's budget speech of 1906 indicates that representative government was going to be introduced in India. This alarmed the Muslims and provided the context for Simla deputation of Oct 1 1906. The idea came from Mohsin-ul-Mulk who met the Viceroy at Shimla with 35 Muslims deputationists led by Aga Khan and presented an Address to the Viceroy for separate electorates for the Muslims and an excess Muslim representation on the Viceroy's Executive Council and Provincial Legislatures as compared to their numerical strength in the country. Minto received the deputation gracefully, and recognizing the representative character of the deputationists and they quickly enlisted the support of Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, who was regarded by the British as a "natural" leader of the Bengali Muslims. They even demanded a separate entity of the Muslims. Partition of Bengal strengthened this separatist trend resulting in the formation of the All-India Muslim League under Nawab Salimullah. Lord Morley, the secretary of states for India, welcomed the foundation of the All-India Muslim League as he had thought that it would act as 'a native opposition to the Congress'. In its next session in Karachi in December, 1907 the Constitution of the League was framed, objectives were (1) to promote loyalty towards the British Govt. (ii) to protect political and other rights of the Indian Muslims; and (iii) to promote friendly relations between the other communities. At the annual session of the League held at Amritsar, in December 1908, resolutions were adopted in respect of extension of the principle of communal representation to the self-governing institutions, at that time Mohammad Ali Jinnah, criticized the principle of communal representation as pursued by the League. Lord Minto had already intended to grant a favourable concession and finally passed Morley-Minto Reforms, known as the Indian Councils Act, 1909 which is called command performance that provided separate electorate or communal representation for creating a discrimination between the Muslim and Hindu voters, thus, undermining the feeling of a

growing nationality.”¹⁹ The headquarter was shifted to Lucknow in 1910. The seeds of separation in politics had been sown obstructing the growth of inter-communal nationalism. Now he declared the Muslim League not only promoted Muslim interests but could also curtail the growing influence of the so-called INC in favour of British. Not all Muslims supported the government on the issue of Bengal partition. The nationalist newspaper *Mussulman*, opposed the Nawab’s stand against Congress and argued that the work of the Congress was “beneficial to both communities. The partition definitely engendered new thinking about the Bengali Muslim “leadership.”²⁰ The British, seeking allies, identified Ashraf Muslims, particularly those associated with the Nawab of Dacca as “natural leaders.

CONCLUSION

In 1910, Morley & Minto were replaced by Crewe & Hardinge respectively. The decision to reverse the partition, and reconstitute the province to join Eastern and Western Bengal was announced on December 12, 1911. The British Government and the conservative section of the Muslims, belonging to the class, had believed that the principle of communal electorate based on a very narrow property franchise would attract the young Muslim element of the Congress to join the League. In 1911 the Partition of Bengal was annulled and the capital of India was transferred from Calcutta to Delhi. Following the re-union of the two Bengals in 1911, there was a new phase of Hindu & Muslim rapprochement and a new attitude of acceptance of each other, in spite of their difference. For several reasons during the First World War (1914-1918) and afterwards, the Congress and the League used to hold their sessions one after another in the same town, enabling common delegates to attend both. The Congress-League scheme forged at the 1916 Lucknow session of the Congress headed by Motilal Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah was the hope for a bright future. From the widely accepted scheme of 1916 through the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) there followed an unprecedented Hindu & Muslim togetherness in Bengal.”²¹

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