

PAPER 1 DSE-A-1 SEM -5: HISTORY OF BENGAL (c.1757-1905)

VII. PARTITION OF BENGAL 1905: CURZON AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE BLUEPRINT

NOTE -3

ANTI-PARTITION MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

In December 1903, the Bengal Partition proposal became publicly known. The division of Bengal into two parts was issued by Lord Curzon in 1905. The Anti-Partition Movement was initiated on 7th August, 1905. An immediate and spontaneous protest followed. The strength of this protest can be gauged from the fact that in the first two months following the announcement, 500 protest meetings were held in East Bengal alone, especially in Dhaka, Mymensingh and Chittagong. Nearly fifty thousand copies of pamphlets giving a detailed critique of the participation proposals, were distributed all over Bengal.

Surendranath Banerjee, Krishna Kumar Mitra, Prithwishchandra Ray and other leaders launched a powerful press campaign against the partition proposals through journals and newspapers like the Bangalee, Hitabadi and Sanjibani. Vast protest meetings were held in town hall of Calcutta in March 1904 and January 1905, and numerous petitions (sixty-nine memoranda from the Dhaka division alone), some of them signed by as many as seventy thousand people were sent to the Government and the Secretary of State. Even the big zamindars who were hitherto loyal to the British Government in India, joined the forces with the Congress leaders who were mostly intellectuals and political workers drawn from journalism, law and other liberal professions.

The Government's decision to go ahead with the partition of Bengal, however, remained unmoved. Despite the widespread protest voiced against the partition

proposals, the decision to partition Bengal was announced on 19th July, 1905. It was obvious to the nationalist leaders that their moderate methods of protest were not working and that they needed to change their strategies. Within days of the Government's announcement, numerous spontaneous protest meetings were held in towns such as Dinajpur, Pabna, Faridpur, Tangail, Jessore, Dhaka, Birbhum and Barisal. It was in these meetings the pledge to boycott foreign goods were first taken. In Calcutta, students organised a number of meetings against the partition of Bengal and for swadeshi. Swadeshi implied that people should only use the products manufactured in India.

On 16th October 1905, Bengal was partitioned by Lord Curzon on the pretext of it being too big to administer. The Colonial Government thought that by partitioning Bengal, they would succeed in dividing the Hindu politicians of East and West Bengal and increase communal tensions. The tremor of partition was felt throughout India and was regarded as an insult and challenge to Indian nationalism. A movement was launched under the moderate leaders. Militant and revolutionary leadership took over in the later stage. Swadeshi and Swaraj became the slogan of the common man and the whole of India was drawn into the National movement.

The partition sparked off a protest movement, but it broadened the struggle for Swaraj attainment. Strong sense of unity among the people of Bengal fostered by their regional independence, cultural development of the 19th century, spread of western education and Hindu revivalist mood gave birth to a vehement resistance. The period emerged as the era of maximum political unrest in Bengal.

The Swadeshi Movement had its origin in the anti-partition movement. Bengal was the nerve centre of Indian Nationalism and the partition was intended to fracture that strength. The struggle for freedom received an impetus with the start of the Swadeshi Movement. People from all walks of life joined in and

became actively involved in politics. This movement also saw the emergence of all the major political trends of the national movement.

The formal proclamation of the Swadeshi Movement was made on 7th August 1905, in a meeting held at Calcutta Town Hall.

The day partition took effect-16th October 1905- was declared a day of mourning throughout Bengal. People fasted and no fire were lit in the cooking hearths. In Calcutta a strike was called. People took processions and walked barefoot, bathed in the Ganges in the morning, and then paraded the streets singing Vande Mataram. People tied rakhis at each other's hands as a symbol of the unity of the two halves of Bengal.
