

Q: What were the conditions which necessitated the Partition of Bengal in 1905? What was the reaction of Hindus and Muslims towards the Partition? Discuss.

Answer

Introduction

Partition of Bengal (1905), which resulted in different responses from Hindus and Muslims was the outcome of various reasons.

The condition leading to the Partition of Bengal included administrative exigencies, backwardness of East Bengal relative to West-Bengal, increasing Hindu-Muslim consciousness in form of Bengali nationalism, and the tea export interests of the British Raj.

This partition received negative response from Hindus, especially lawyers, Hindu newspapers, and absentee Hindu landlords based in Calcutta. The Hindu response culminated in the Swadeshi movement. On the contrary, the response to partition from Muslims was positive and enthusiastic.

Conditions necessitating Partition of Bengal

- a. Administrative difficulties in governing the larger Bengal province

The province of Bengal before partition was too large to govern effectively and efficiently. These concerns were shown repeatedly by the British administrators and rulers in India.

As back as 1854, Dal haurie complained regarding the administrative ^{difficulties} that the Lt. Governor of Bengal had to bear. Similarly, Lord Curzon, the viceroy, expressed similar concerns regarding the administrative huddles in proper governance of Bengal. As a result, by 1902, it was decided to partition Bengal. On September 1st 1905, Partition of Bengal was announced and the idea was given practical shape on October 16, 1905. The outcome was a new province - East Bengal and Assam.

Administrative and demographic realities before and after partition

Bengal was huge province expanding on nearly 200,000 sq. miles having

population of nearly $78\frac{1}{2}$ million people. After partition, the new province - East Bengal and Assam - comprised an area of nearly 206,650 sq miles with almost 30m (thirty million) population of which 18 million (eighteen million) were Muslims, while 12 million (twelve million) were Hindus. This meant that significant portion of larger Bengal province was divided due to administrative exigencies.

b. Backwardness of East-Bengal

The deprivation of East-Bengal relative to West Bengal was another reason behind partition of Bengal. This pretext was explicitly told by Lord Curzon while on his visit to East-Bengal.

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in February 1904. In speech, he told the people that in carving out new province, the British Raj desires to alleviate the suffering and deprivation of East-Bengalis. In this same speech, he promised of establishing separate Board of revenue, legislative council, and Dhaka as new capital of the new province. Colonial assurances aside, the region of East-Bengal really lagged behind in nearly all areas, such as education, industry, communication, transport and law and order. Thus, the demand of removing socio-economic backwardness of East Bengal was genuine.

c. Increasing Hindu-Muslim consciousness in form of Bengali nationalism and British policy of divide and rule

One reason argued by various historians is the policy of divide and rule which encouraged British to partition Bengal. Shashi Tharoor in his book *Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, considers British policy of Divide and Rule as a driving force behind the partition.

On the contrary, Khaleed Bin Sayeed in *Pakistan the Formative Phase: 1957-1948*, denies the motivation of Divide and Rule behind partition of Bengal. He opines that the people of Eastern Bengal, especially Muslims, were too backward and resource-deficient to form any common front with Hindus.

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against the British. Therefore, the British did not have any imminent threat from any kind of rising Bengali nationalism.

d. British wanted developed communication to exploit E. Bengal's tea potential

East Bengal had high yield of tea, which the British wanted to exploit. The partition of Bengal would have ensured increased communication networks and utilisation of defunct Chittagong port for the former purpose. The export of tea, which increased after partition of Bengal, was staggering. From the period 1905-1911, there was astonishing increase of tea trade from few thousand pounds to 197,78,125 pounds. Thus, exploiting of the

tea trade potential of East-Bengal was prominent reason behind partition of Bengal.

Response of Hindus

- a. Negative response from Hindu lawyers, newspapers and absentee landlords.

The response from Hindus was primarily negative. At the front of criticism were the Hindu lawyers, based in Calcutta, who feared establishing of High Courts in Dhaka. In that case, they would lose their clientele. Accordingly, the Hindu newspapers, also based Calcutta, like The Bengalee and Amrita Bazar Patrika feared their circulation being impacted by partition. Similarly, Hindu absentee landlords expressed ~~concerns~~ ^{concerns} regarding concerns.

improvement in the socio-economic conditions of their subjects, mainly Muslims, in East Bengal. This would have political consequences in form of increased consciousness regarding the political and civil rights in the subjects. Thus, the censure of the partition of Bengal was mainly due to the impact it had on the socio-economic interests of Hindu elites and monopolies.

b. The Swadeshi movement as response to partition

The Swadeshi movement was initiated on August 5 1905 as response to the partition plan of Bengal. The basic message was boycott of foreign goods. The objective was to pressurise the British into rescinding

the partition, as well as the encouraging and patronising of local industry. It ^{was} a wholesome movement effecting cultural, political, social and religious domains. However, by 1908, this movement had degenerated and lost vigour and zeal.

c. Indian National Congress supported Swadeshi movement

The Indian National Congress (INC), which portrayed itself as a party representing all India irrespective of caste, colour, creed or religion, supported the Swadeshi movement.

In 1905, during the Benares convention of INC, chaired by Golchale, it put its support behind the boycott movement in Bengal.

Response of Muslims

Response of Muslim leaders and masses was positive.

The prominent Muslim personalities and masses exhibited positive response towards the partition of Bengal. The first Lt. Governor of East-Bengal, Bamfylde Fuller, recounts that Muslim masses responded to the partition with thanks giving prayers. Similarly, the Muslim leaders, such as Nawab Samiullah Khan and Nawab Ali Chaudhri also expressed motivated response. The former is quoted to have said that the partition of Bengal had aroused the Muslims' ^{from} inaction towards a community of vigour, zeal and struggle. Thus, the overall Muslims' response to partition was encouraging.

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Conclusion

Thus, the partition of Bengal was the outcome of various reasons, which varied from ensuring administrative effectiveness to exploitation of East Bengal's trade potential in tea. The response from Hindus was wholesome in form Swadeshi movement. ~~while~~ On more specific level, Hindus were motivated by their narrow socio-economic and political interests. Conversely, Muslims had a very affable response towards partition, which apparently was aimed at elevating socio-economic and political status of people, especially Muslim, in East-Bengal.

