| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The partition of Bengal in 1947 and The Role of the Hindu MahaSabha

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| **ABSTRACT**

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the English word "De-colonization" means liberation of colonies from their foreign overlords. After the 2nd world war, the De-colonization of the Asia African continent began due to different economic-political-strategic factors. However, in many instances, this process brings partition of an undivided country into 2\3 smaller successor States with forceful mass migration, refugee crisis, loss of monetary and human resources due to violent civil wars between different ethno-religious groups. After the battle of Plessey (1757) granting of Dewani to the English East India Company (1765), Bengal became the center of the British power in East India. The British city of Calcutta became the most prominent city in Asia as the capital of British India. Through the efforts of some European and native academicians, a mixture of Anglo-British culture happened. The Bengali thinkers taught the nation the first lessons of patriotism during the colonial period. At the beginning of the 20th century, the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, divided Bengal into two parts in 1905. The Bengali masses protested publicly against the partition. R.Tagore and other Bengali thinkers guided the agitation. This protest movement was known as the Swadeshi movement. In 1911, the division was cancelled, but the capital of British India had been shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. After the establishment of the Muslim League. (1906), The Hindu MohaSabha (1915) and enactment of the Morle-Minto (1909), Montegu-Chamesford (1919), the communal harmony between the Bengali Hindu and Muslim community decreased. After the 2nd world war, it became clear that the British Empire in the Indian sub-continent would collapse soon. During the power transfer process, the division of the sub-continent into two different countries became inventible. My aim in this study is to point out the role of the Hindu MahaSabha in the partition of Bengal in 1947. I will try to point out whether the division of Bengal was necessary or the rise of Bengali communalism forced it. I will try both analytical and descriptive research methods to answer my questions.

| **KEYWORDS**

"Dewani", "Rammohan Roy", "Swadeshi Movement", "Hindu Mohasabha", "Census"

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1. Introduction

The English word "communalism" has derived from the French word "commune" and the Greek word " ismos". According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, communalism means loyalty of some persons/ organizations to a socio-political grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation. Communalism and religious prosecutions are related to human history from time immemorial. Roman emperor Nero's reign was famous for the prosecution of Christians, a minor religious community in the 1st century A.D. In medieval Europe, King Ferdinand II of Aragon had forcefully converted Mohamedan residents of Spain. During the 2nd world war, Nazi Germany and her allies had systematically murdered around 6 million European Jews. It is known as "The Holocaust" or "The Shoah". Communalism and its consequent events are able to retain their existence in the 21st century. Rohingya genocide of 2016-2017, Gujarat riot of 2002 etc., is burning evidence of the fact. During Colonial rule, Communal riots broke out in different parts of the Indian Sub-continent. Important among them were the Moplah massacre of 1921, the Great Calcutta killing of 1946, the Noakhali riots, the Bihar riots etc. Bengal partition of both1905 and1947 is topics of continuous research, arguments, theories and counter theories and controversies from the second half of the twentieth Century in an academic circle both Indian and international levels. In her book "Bengal divided",, Joya Chatterjee interpreted the Bengal partition of 1947 as a result of increasing

Hindu communalism in the first half of the 20th century. In his book "carving Blocks", Pradip Kumar Dutta claimed that both Hindu and Muslim public figures spread communal thought among their followers. In her book "The Hindu Dissent", Chanda Chatterjee argued that due to the active role of Dr S.P. Mukherjee and Hindu Maha Sabah, Hindu majority districts of Bengal had been included in the Indian federation and thus able to maintain its religious and cultural hegemony. In this study, I will try to analyze the background and circumstance by which Bengal had been divided into Eastern and Western parts with bloodshed, unwilling migration of millions of common Bengali mass, the agony of leaving ancestral homeland etc. I will try to point out whether the division of Bengal was necessary or the rise of Bengali communalism forced it. I will use both descriptive and analytical research methods using both primary and secondary sources. Firstly, this study will follow historical narratives of the Bengal Partition of 1947 and then try to reach a conclusive outcome.

2. Literature Review

For writing this article, I have gone through Chanda Chatterjee and T. Roy's manuscript " Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the Hindu dissent and the partition of Bengal,1932-1947", besides Joya Chatterjee's " Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and partition,1932-1947", Darlympe's " The Last Mughal: the fall of a dynasty", and " The anarchy; the relentless rise of the East India Company", Pradip Kumar Dutta's " Carving blocks: communal ideology in early twentieth-century Bengal", Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar's " the history of Bengal/1 Hindu period". I have cultured different scholarly articles on this topic. Important among them are Bayly. C.A. (1985) the pre-history of 'communalism'? Religious conflict in India, 1700-1860.Modern Asian Studies, 19(2), 177-203, Heitzman.J, Kulke.H, & Rothermund.D. (1989). A. History of India. The American Historical Review, 94(1), 198, ROY.H. (2009). A Partition of Contingency? Public Discourse in Bengal, 1946-1947. Modern Asian Studies, 43(6)1355-1384 etc. I have collected different primary sources from state and central level archives & museums like Kolkata Police Museum, Nehru Memorial Museum, etc.

3. Methodology

The English word "History" was derived from the Greek word "Historia", which means enquiry, research, investigation of past events. Historical research is a systematic enquiry of past events/objects with the aim to reconstruct the past totally/partially as nearly as it was. It can be divided into mainly 3 activities. A] Exploration of new data, B] New interpretation of Known data, C] Subordination of data to unifying principles. Historical sources can be categorized into 3 sections as well- Primary, Secondary and Hybrid. in this study, I have tried to answer my research objectives using both primary and secondary sources following blended descriptive and analytical methodology.

4. Findings

In the history of the Bengal State, religious harmony was prevalent during all the periods. Though King Sasanka made some atecroties on the Buddhist sect during the war with Harshavardhan, it may be a biased claim of Hieu-En-Sung(Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, 2003). This harmony continued during the medieval period. Bengali Hindu and Muslim communities used to worship Satya-Pir(*Satya Pir*, 2021). During the Mughal period, Bengal was one of the most prosperous provinces till the first half of the 18th century. After the British victories of 1757, 1765, and granting of dewani, Bengal first faced the drain of wealth towards Britain (Dalrymple & Fraser, 2019). However, the drain was not one-sided. The British govt gave the Indians new technologies, laws, infrastructures, culture and civilization. It's a proven fact that the cultural awakening of Bengali middle-class people could not occur without English education. The religious harmony between the 2 communities continued after the beginning of the colonial rule. This is proved by the fact that during the uprising of 1857, both the Hindus and the Muslims fought against the British under the leadership of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Jafar. With his almost nil political power economic resources, Jafar tried his best to maintain harmony among all his subjects (Dalrymple, 2008).

After the failure of the revolt, the British began to suspect the Indian Muslims. The colonial administration favoured the Hindus for high posts. With this patronage, the Hindus, especially the western-educated Bengali middle class, made quick progress. However, some Bengali novelists pictured Muslim rulers as the oppressor of Hindus in their writing. In the late 19th century rise of Hindu revivalism could cause this (*Hindu Communalism*, n.d.). The Muslim community, under the guidance of Sir Said Ahmed Khan, also began to realize the importance and usefulness of western education. With the emergence of political enlightenment, the Bengali middle class took the leadership of the masses. The Indian Association, the National Congress etc., saw the rise of moderate national leaders. Through the British administration, at first, patronized the Indian political ambitions, they very quickly realized the threat. According to some historians, to crumble the Bengali intellectual leadership, the British authority planned Bengal province on the excuse of administrative benefits. It was the first partition of Bengal in 1905. The Bengali masses protested against the partition. It was known as the Swadeshi movement (Sarkar, 2010). It had 2 functions= Swadeshi [positive] and Boycott [negative]. In spite of the British oppression, the movement took speed, and in 1911 the partition was withdrawn. The capital of British India had been shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. During the swadeshi movement, Hindu-Muslim religious harmony began to decrease in Bengal. Some leaders of the movement used to propagate Hindu ideas. This sometimes offended Muslim mentality. The British also did their best to expand the gap. In Moymonsing, a communal riot took place during the Swadeshi movement (*Hindu Communalism*, n.d.).

Though Hindu-Muslim riots took place in India before the colonial era, the British rule began to show a permanent conflict between the 2 communities (Bayly, 1985).

The census system forced Indians to profess their religious identities publicly. After the Morle-Minto, Montegu-Chamesford reform took place, and elections of provincial Legislative assemblies began, there was a race for numerical superiority. Both the Hindu-Muslim community began to organize themselves. The Muslim League was set up in 1906 to take care of Muslim interests. Several Hindu organizations were set up in reaction and united under the banner of the Hindu MahaSabha in 1915. Its aim was to unite all Hindus and defend their interests.M.M.Malaviya became the main leader of it. In the 1920s, a Hindu ideology (Hindutwa) was developed by Savarkar. Its main point of view was India is the land of the Hindus. This theory was supported by Hedgewar, the leader of R.S.S(*Hindu Communalism*, n.d.). At first, the Congress and the Muslim League leaders were willing to co-operate to achieve mutual goals. The Locknow Pact (1916) was its example. But the Hindu MahaSabha became very powerful. It won more seats than the Swarajya party in the election; it began to oppose any kind of Hindu-Muslim joint political ventures. The Macdonald Award (1932) and the 1935 Act played their role to increase communalism. In the 1937 election, Congress won massively. The Muslim League began to oppose Congress lead provincial Govt. in different provinces.

In 1939 Hindu MahaSabha began to take a greater interest in Bengal province. After the exclusion of the Bose brothers from National Congress and the resignation of Congress lead provincial ministries in protest of the Viceroy's declaration of India as British allay in the 2nd world war, Savarkar thought it was the duty of the MahaSabha to unite Bengali Hindus irrespective of caste and to glorify Hindu rituals, traditions and ideology among the masses(Chhanda Chatterjee & Roy, 2021).

In 1939 the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabah and the All India Hindu Mahasabha had been merged by the initiatives of Dr ShyamaProsad Mukherjee. Very soon, its branches spread out all over Bengal. This organization aimed to train its volunteers in marital culture by providing training in fire arms and so on. From September 1939, Dr Mukherjee made a tour in Eastern Bengal to inspect the condition of the Hindu minority and to inspire them with the spirit of brotherhood. In almost all places, he was greeted warmly by common people. In some places, he faced some trouble. However, he found that in East Bengal, Hindus were living in an atmosphere of panic and terror. Dr Mukherjie and B.C. Chateerjee pointed out many discriminous steps taken by Fazlul Haque Govt. in the fields of economy, law, education and so on. There were comments from Muslim M.LA's to reduce the Hindus in the state of war prisoners. In Noakhali, Pabna, Malda backbone of the Hindu middle class was broken (Chatterjee & Mukherjee, 1939).

To uplift the Hindu spirit, "Hindu Nation Day" was celebrated in some districts on 16th October 1939. The Hindu MahaSabha session was organized in Calcutta at DeshapriyoPark from 15th December to 15th January 1940. Hindus from all backgrounds eagerly participated in the session. Many Marwari business houses also donated generously for the purpose. Delegates from Maymonsing, Barisal, Dacca, Bihar, Maharashtra, U.P. Assam, Punjab, and Gujarat participated in large numbers. In this session, resolutions were taken against the Communal Award, the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Bill, the Bengal Money Lenders Bill, Bengal provincial Govt. Interference in the Education sector, increasing the quota for Muslims in Govt. services etc. (Chhanda Chatterjee & Roy, 2021).

In 1940 Lahore session of the Muslim League propagated the "Pakistan Resolution". Dr ShyamaProsad Mukherjee at first tried to make a working plan for the Calcutta corporation election with an alliance with Subhas Bose. But the "Pakistan Resolution" could not make the plan successful. A branch of Ram Sena was set up to protect the Bengali Hindus from internal and external aggression (Deshpande, n.d.). On 17th August 1940, anti-communal award day was celebrated by the Hindu MahaSabha. In the Madura session, MahaSabah leaders propagated the policy of wartime co-operation with the British Govt. In return written guarantee from the Govt. was demanded that the Pakistan resolution of the League will not be granted.

In 1941 March communal riots broke in Dacca. Provincial Govt. did nothing to stop it. But the Hindu Moha Sabah not only protested but also raised funds for riot victims. This way, through all the 2nd world war, it did its best to organize the Hindus and create a fellowship among them. The Bengal Provincial Hindu Moha Sabah and its student association followed the footstep (Chhanda Chatterjee & Roy, 2021).

After the 2nd world war, it became clear that the British rule in India would not continue more. Economic crises, after the impact of the 2nd world war, Indian people's increasing desire for independence etc., forced the British Govt. to start the process of power transfer. The British Prime Minister Clement Attlee formed the Cabinet Mission with Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps, and A.V.Alexander. After reaching India and discussing with Indian leaders, the Cabinet Mission proposed the administrative system of 3 tiers- the provinces, provincial grouping and the center ("Hermann kulke and dietmar rothermund. A History of India. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble. 1986. Pp. 409. $35.00," 1989). Viceroy Lord Wavell called to form an interim govt in which Nehru will be the interim Prime Minister. Neither Cabinet mission nor Congress agreed with jinna's claim of partition. To achieve his long time goal, Jinnah called for "Direct Action Day" on 16th August 1946. On this day communal riot broke out in the city of Calcutta (Wikipedia Contributors, 2020).

The Bengal Provincial Govt. did nothing to protect the right and safety of its subjects. Instances of Communal violence continued to show up in different regions of Bengal throughout the year. Anti-social elements from both communities were eager to take advantage of the situation. Both the communities became aware of the situation and began to form volunteer crops respectively for security purposes. Dr ShyamaProsad Mukherjee set up Hindustan National Guard in 1946 (n.d.). He wished to spread its branches all over Bengal. On 29th January 1947, League's Karachi resolution refused the Cabinet Mission Plan.

The British Govt. replaced Lord Wavell with Lord Mountbatten as the viceroy of India with the aim to make the power transfer process quicker. Lord Mountbatten declared on 20th February 1947 that the British authority would quit India by June 1948. His policy of power transfer was to create many successor states (Ziegler, 2001). After that announcement, a section of Bengali middle-class people tried to create mass awareness about the political future of Bengal. They thought that they could determine their fate (ROY, 2009). Between February and June 1947, representation from political units, local bodies, and common people flooded the offices of the Hindu MahaSabha and the Bengal Provincial Congress. The demand was to divide Bengal and make its western part a separate state under the Indian Union. But the urge was not totally for creating a Hindu homeland. The nature of the appeal was not totally communal. Not only Hindu MohaSabha leaders but also Bengal Congress leaders like N.R.Sarkar and K.S.Roy publicly voiced for the Bengal partition blaming the communal policies of the Muslim League (Roy, 1947).

For some groups, partition was necessary to step for Indian freedom. There was an ongoing debate on what will be happening about the Hindus of Eastern Bengal. A demand arose that Hindus living in East Bengal should be given Indian citizenship as well (1947). The Hindu MohaSabha also began to organize Hindu public opinion in favour of partition. In February 1947, it set up a working committee to judge the possibilities of Bengali Hindu homeland *Hindu Outlook*(n.d.). The politics of Communal representation and the Muslim communities gain it made some sections of the Bengali Hindus fearful. In the contemporary pleas, Hindu culture in the danger of annihilation theme under the League rule was highlighted (1947).

Some Bengali Muslims questioned the right of the Muslim League authority to represent all Muslims. They feared that in Pakistan, Bengali Muslims would be dominated by non-Bengali Muslims. Bengali culture will be undermined(1947). The Depressed class leadership was also divided on the issue of the Bengal partition. There was doubt about the newly formed West Bengal State's ability to provide shelter for migrating depressed class people from East Bengal(ROY, 2009). Suhrawardy became alarmed by the theme of exclusion of Calcutta from Pakistan. He had his power base in that city. To avoid this, he propagated the idea that "Greater Bengal' consisted of not only undivided Bengal province but also Bengali dominated areas of Bihar and Assam (1947). In this issue, he received support from Sarat Bose, M.K.Gandhi and Jinnah. However, that plan could not live long due to communal tension.

The demand for partition of Bengal became very popular in almost all the districts of Bengal. On 23rd April 1947 strike was called in Calcutta in protest of the Muslim League's communal rule. It got spontaneous support from every social group. Dr Mukherjee wrote to the Viceroy on 2nd May 1947, urging him in favour of the partition (Mansergh et al., 1982). 10 thousand telegrams were also sent to the viceroy demanding partition by the initiatives of the Provincial Hindu mahaSabah. On 3rd June 1947, Viceroy declared that the British authority would very soon transfer power to 2 different successor states. There would be an election of Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly on 2 sections representing the Hindu and Muslim community regarding the political future of Bengal. On 20th June 1947 Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly met, and the division of Bengal was decided. A boundary commission was set up to decide the new boundary line. Another set of bargaining took place regarding the fate of Calcutta, whether it would go to East or West Bengal (S. M. Usam et al., personal communication, January 1947- January 1948).

5. Conclusion

There is a long debate on the factors of the Bengal Partition 1947. Joya Chatterjee pointed out that the main campaign demanding the partition of Bengal was organized by the Bengal Provincial Congress rather than the Muslim League or the Hindu MahaSabha. (Chatterji, 2002). Pradip Kumar Dutta pointed out that in the 1930s, both Hindus and Muslims began to spread among the Bengali people. The idea of a threat from other communities played a bigger role than the reality. The communal separate identities of the Bengalis had been hardened by the violence of 1946(Pradip Kumar Datta, 1999). Haimanti Roy pointed out that till the last moment of partition, there was multi-polar public opinion (ROY, 2009). It is my humble opinion that the partition of Bengal in 1947 was not done by any single political association. If communalism had its role in the partition, then there was fear of separation from the Indian Union, which was a sign of peace, security and stability at the moment of independence. Mobilization of mass people had been done by not only Hindu Maha Shabha but also by Muslim League, Congress and other political bodies.

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