

### **INDIA AFTER WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND VERNACULAR ACT**

After the WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, the British government came into action and restricted the authority of the EAST INDIA COMPANY by a large extent and the British government itself took the responsibility to control the SUBCONTINENT. In 1877, QUEEN VICTORIA was proclaimed Empress of India in a magnificent ceremony in Delhi.

However, British rule proved unpopular among Indians because they were treated as slaves in their own country without any right to have any say in the running of their country. The ruling elite and government servants were all British. The recruitment of Indians into the army was also reduced by a large ratio and conditions were created for the British goods to be available at cheaper rates and therefore local manufacturers found it very hard to sell their own goods.

The lack of opportunities for Indians led to widespread criticism of the British in regional newspapers. The British response was to pass the Vernacular Act of 1878, which placed strict controls on these newspapers. In the same year, the British passed an Arms Act which made it impossible for most Indians to own weapons, to ensure that future revolts were not that effective. In this environment, it is not surprising that nationalist ideas started to grow in India.

### **FORMATION OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS**

Events like the passage of the Vernacular Press Act in 1878 and the Ilbert Bill of 1882, as well as the reduction of the age limit for the Civil Services Exams in 1876 resulted in a wave of opposition from the middle class Indians. Consequently some of them came together and formed a number of small political parties that came out in the streets for protests and rallies. The British foresaw the situation resulting in another rebellion on the pattern of the War of Independence of 1857. To avoid such a situation, the British decided to provide an outlet to the local people where they could discuss their political problems. In order to achieve this goal, Allan Octavian Hume, a retired British civil servant, had a series of meetings with Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy. He also visited England and met people like John Bright, Sir James Caird, Lord Ripon and some members of the British Parliament. Hume also had the support of a large number of Englishmen in India, including Sir William Wedderburn, George Yule and Charles Bradlaugh.

On his return from Britain, Hume consulted the local Indian leaders and started working towards the establishment of an Indian political organization. He invited the convention of the Indian National Union, an organization he had already formed in 1884, to Bombay in December 1885. Seventy delegates, most of whom were lawyers, educationalists and journalists, attended the convention in which the Indian National Congress was established. This first session of Congress was presided over by Womesh Chandra Banerjee and he was also elected as the first president of the organization.

To begin with, Congress acted as a 'Kings Party'. Its early aims and objectives were:

1. To seek the cooperation of all the Indians in its efforts.
2. Eradicate the concepts of race, creed and provincial prejudices and try to form national unity.
3. Discuss and solve the social problems of the country.
4. To request the government, give more share to the locals in administrative affairs.

As time went by, the Congress changed its stance and apparently became the biggest opposition to the British government.

Muslims primarily opposed the creation of Congress and refused to participate in its activities. Out of the 70 delegates who attended the opening session of the Congress, only two were Muslims. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who was invited to attend the Bombay session, refused the offer. He also urged the Muslims to abstain from the Congress activities and predicted that the party would eventually become a Hindu party and would only look after the interests of the Hindus. Syed Ameer Ali, another important Muslim figure of the era, also refused to join Indian National Congress.

### **THE PARTITION OF BENGAL**

Finding the Bengal Presidency too large for one governor to administer, in 1905 the English decided to redraw its boundaries and divided it into two parts.

The provinces of Bengal and Assam were reconstituted so as to form the two provinces of manageable size. Western Bengal, with a population of 54 million (42 million Hindus and 9 million Muslims); and Eastern Bengal and Assam with a population of 31 million (12 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.

Curzon, the Viceroy of India, sent the proposal to London in February 1905. The Secretary of State for India St. John Brodrich 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 October 16 1905.

Incidentally, the partition went in favor of the Muslims. Before the partition, Western Bengal, being the first area to come under western influence, was developed and industrialized. It was a striking contrast to the eastern part where the Muslim peasantry was crushed under the Hindu landlords, the river system was infested with pirates, and very few funds were allocated for education. It was dreaded as a place of banishment. The partition helped boost Bengali literature and language; efforts were also made towards the social, economic and educational uplift of the Muslims.



- **MUSLIM REACTION:**

The new province of Eastern Bengal brought happier prospects of political and economic life for the Muslims. The Muslims turned into majority by the creation of a new province. The partition of Bengal provided chances of great progress to the Muslims who formed the majority group in the new setup. In the combined province of Bengal, the Muslims were a suppressed class of society. The Hindus had monopolized trade and government services which aggravated the economic condition of the Muslims. The partition of Bengal provided them with a chance to rehabilitate their social position. They hoped that their social status would get a tremendous boost in the new province. The Muslims expressed their utmost happiness over the partition of Bengal. They offered their gratification in the loyal way to the government for taking a step for their social, economic and political uplift.

- **HINDU REACTION:**

The Hindus reacted toward the partition of Bengal in a hostile and violent manner. The Hindus could never support a move which was to bring prosperity and happiness to the Muslims. The reasons for Hindu opposition to the partition were as follows:

1. The Hindus believed that they would come under the domination of the Muslim majority in the new province and their superior position would be downgraded to the inferior status.
2. As the provincial High Court and other judicial bodies were to be shifted to Dhaka, the Hindu lawyers feared that their legal practice would be affected.
3. Since Dhaka was to become the center of journalistic and other academic activities, the Hindu press and media believed that from now onward the Muslim point of view would be projected in the newspapers and magazines. They also feared that their income would seriously be lessened.
4. The Hindu landlords, capitalists and traders did not like the partition as it was to put an end to their exploitation of the poor Muslims.
5. Before the partition of Bengal the Hindus enjoyed dominant position in the political sphere of the province over the Muslims. The new setup was to put an end to their superior political position and their political dominance over the Muslims would finish.

The Hindus, therefore, launched an intensive movement against the partition of Bengal, They termed the partition as degrading and an insult to the national character of the Hindu population. Religions color was given to the agitation and the partition was termed as the dissection of the 'Scared Cow Mother' in order to arouse intense opposition by the Hindu masses. They considered the partition as an attempt to sow the seeds of hatred and discontentment among the Indian people to weaken the national movements for independence.

The day of 16 October, 1905, when the partition was enforced, was declared as a national tragedy. Strikes were held throughout the country. The Indian National Congress also jumped in to support the agitation against partition. The Hindu students put up violent demonstrations against the partition. The Congress severely criticized the partition in the annual session of 1906.

The Hindu agitation soon turned into a violent reaction. The people disobeyed government orders by refusing to pay taxes and rentals. Communal clashes erupted at a number of places which upset the law and order situation in the country. The political disorder and unrest largely largely prevailed in the country. Bombs were thrown and attacks were made on the lives of the British people. Swadeshi movement was organized by the Hindu majority to boycott the British manufacturers. The train carrying the Governor of the Eastern Bengal was derailed and an attempt was made on the Viceroy's life which failed.

The Muslims kept away from the Hindu agitation and adopted a humble and loyal posture. They welcomed the partition and passed resolutions supporting the partition of Bengal. They impressed upon the government to maintain its decision of the partition of Bengal.

The most serious result of the Hindu agitation was a steep rise in Hindu - Muslim riots. The net result of this was that the Hindu agitation definitely disunited the Muslims from the Congress.

- **BRITISH REACTION TO HINDU PROTEST:**

1. Restrictions were placed on newspapers and public meetings. Editors were prosecuted and imprisoned.
2. In 1908, a press act gave even more control to government over newspapers.
3. Many influential Hindu leaders were either imprisoned or sent into exile.



## **THE SIMLA DEPUTATION**

In 1906 a group of Muslim landed magnates and chieftains organized a deputation of Lord Minto, the Viceroy, at Simla and pleaded for a few concession to the Muslim community of India.

The Simla Deputation, the meeting came to be called, was a pre-arranged affair. And it is said that the Deputation that waited upon Lord Minto was actually a British move.

However, within a few months following the Simla Deputation a political forum of the communalist Muslims emerged. Nawab Salimullah of Dacca took initiative in organizing a conference of the communalist Muslims in which a resolution was adopted in favour of the foundation of the All India Muslim League.

Accordingly the All India Muslim League was founded in 1906.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE**

The All India Muslim League was formed under the initiative of Nawab Salimulla of Dacca in 1906 with the following objectives .

- (1) To promote among the MUSLIMS of India a feeling of loyalty to the British government.
  - (2) To protect and advance the political rights and interests of the MUSLIMS of India, and to represent their needs and aspirations to the British government.
  - (3) To prevent the rise among MUSLIMS of India of any feeling of hostility towards other ; communities.
- Above were the objectives with which the All India Muslim League was founded.

## **THE MORLEY-MINTO REFORMS**

In 1906, Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for Indian Affairs, announced in the British parliament that his government wanted to introduce new reforms for India, in which the locals were to be given more powers in legislative affairs. With this, a series of correspondences started between him and Lord Minto, the then Governor General of India. A committee was appointed by the Government of India to propose a scheme of reforms. The committee submitted its report, and after the approval of Lord Minto and Lord Morley, the Act of 1909 was passed by the British parliament. The Act of 1909 is commonly known as the Minto-Morley Reforms.



The following were the main features of the Act of 1909:

1. The number of the members of the Legislative Council at the Center was increased from 16 to 60.
2. The number of the members of the Provincial Legislatures was also increased. It was fixed as 50 in the provinces of Bengal, Madras and Bombay, and for the rest of the provinces it was 30.
3. The members of the Legislative Councils, both at the Center and in the provinces, were to be of four categories i.e. ex-officio members (Governor General and the members of their Executive Councils), nominated official members (those nominated by the Governor General and were government officials), nominated non-official members (nominated by the Governor General but were not government officials) and elected members (elected by different categories of Indian people).
4. Right of separate electorate was given to the Muslims.
5. At the Center, official members were to form the majority but in provinces non-official members would be in majority.
6. The members of the Legislative Councils were permitted to discuss the budgets, suggest the amendments and even to vote on them; excluding those items that were included as non-vote items. They were also entitled to ask supplementary questions during the legislative proceedings.
7. The Secretary of State for India was empowered to increase the number of the Executive Councils of Madras and Bombay from two to four.
8. Two Indians were nominated to the Council of the Secretary of State for Indian Affairs.
9. The Governor General was empowered to nominate one Indian member to his Executive Council.

### **THE BENGAL PARTITION REVERSED**

Just how vital it was for Muslims to form their own political party was emphasized in 1911 when the British showed that they could not be trusted to protect Muslim interests. Lord Harding, the new Viceroy, agreed to reverse the partition of Bengal. The decision was announced at a Durbar in Delhi on 12 December by King George V, who was visiting India at that time. The British tried to suggest that they had reversed the partition as a part of their governing policy of India. In reality, they had been forced into the move by the fierce opposition of the Bengali Hindus. However, the British also moved the capital from Calcutta to Delhi to show that Hindu opposition had not been completely successful. The reversal of the partition of the partition of Bengal was bitterly opposed by the Muslims, but the British were not to be moved. The Muslims now realized that how important it was for the Muslim League to prosper if they were in hope of receiving fair treatment in India.

