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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 06 - HISTORY OF THE PARTITION OF INDIA

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Riots in the Northern and Central Provinces

- Garhmukhteshwar, 6, 7 Nov. 1946 - by 1946-47, local riots were being tied with wider political movements and demands. According to official government reports, in the wake of the mass killings in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar, there was a repercussion as tension exploded in Garhmukhteshwar mela visited by people from Western UP and Eastern Punjab. An organized Hindu crowd attacked and killed the Muslims and looted and destroyed their shops and property in Garhmukhteshwar town. In spite of police firing, the Muslims also retaliated.
- In their summary assessment, the monthly security intelligence report of the army headquarters for the UP area – “Calcutta was revenged in Noakhali, Noakhali in Bihar, Bihar in Garmukteshwar, Garmukteshwar in ???” - Calcutta riots in 16 August 1946, touching Bombay from 1 September, spreading to Noakhali in East Bengal (10 October), Bihar (25 October), Garmukteshwar UP in November, engulfing Punjab from March 1947 onwards.

Riots in the Northern and Central Provinces

- Personal investigations and interviews reveal that these riots are all well organized, which were preceded by organized rallies and meetings to incite the common people; in many of such rallies, the police and the military are indifferent and negligent.
- N.B. Depending on the aggressor community in a particular case of riot, the newspapers, following their political and communal backing would play around with information in terms of numbers – either blowing up or diminishing the proportion of arsonage and massacre.

Riots in the Northern and Central Provinces

- How chaos is systematically generated- For instance, Congress backed newspaper The Hindustan Times talks about the attack of a pilgrim train near Meerut causing the death of and injury to a large number of pilgrims; according to UP Provincial Congress Committee Report, the Harpur riot on 9 November saw the Muslims of Shahjahanpur and Dasna avenging Garmukteshwar by attacking pilgrims. Hindus in turn killed Muslims in Harson and Indergarhi.
- However, a tour of the Meerut district by INC General Secretary Mridula Sarabhai and Nawaz Khan, member of INA, reveal the loss of lives and property caused by the pilgrims – mainly the Rohtak and Gurgaon Jats - to the villages. Surprisingly, a number of ex-servicemen of INA were joining extremist groups to carry out these arsonages with deft and precision. To further amplify the chaos, the extremists would often wear Congress Party's cap to defame it. Riots justified in the name of avenging a community and defended in the name of Gandhiji – political, communal, class-caste rivalry all motivated the riots, and personal interests caused individuals to shift their political positions.

Riots in the Northern and Central Provinces

- These riots remain empty signifiers – multiple versions battle over these incidental grounds to claim un/worthiness of certain ideologies. – ‘Garhmukteshwar’ is no different from Bihar and later East Punjab, as Noakhali is a repetition of Calcutta.
- According to League account as propagated by *Dawn* newspaper, the victims of Garhmukteshwar riots were Congressite nationalist Muslims who came to attend the fair despite knowing about the Bihar riots; the tragedy greatly declined Muslim support in UP for an undivided India.



Independence of India and Radcliff Line (1947)

- Even though both the Indian government and the Congress have been shaken by the events of Direct Action Day, a Congress-led **temporary administration** was created in September, with **Jawaharlal Nehru** as **Prime Minister of a unified India**.
- **Lord Louise Mountbatten** was nominated as **India's final Viceroy** by British Prime Minister Attlee, with the goal of overseeing British India's **independence by June 1948**.

Independence of India and Radcliff Line (1947)

- Vallabhai Patel was one of the earliest Congress leaders to embrace India's partition as a solution to Muhammad Ali Jinnah's developing **Muslim separatist movement**.
- Jinnah's Direct Action campaign had enraged him.
- He was also well aware that Jinnah had widespread Muslim backing, and an open battle between him and the nationalists may devolve into a Hindu-Muslim civil war with disastrous results.
- Britain indicated in early 1947 that they would hand up control no later than June 1948.



Independence of India and Radcliff Line (1947)

- The new Viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, moved forward the transfer of power date, providing fewer than six months for a mutually agreed-upon plan for independence.
- The main Hindu and Sikh lands were allotted to the new India, while the majority Muslim areas were assigned to Pakistan; the proposal envisaged partitioning the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal.
- The communal violence that precipitated the declaration of the **Radcliffe Line** or the Partition line, was far worse.



Independence of India and Radcliff Line (1947) - Mountbatten Plan

- The actual split of British India between the two new dominions was carried out according to the so-called "**June Plan**" or "**Mountbatten Plan**". The date of independence, 15 August 1947, was also proclaimed.
- The following were the primary points of the plan:
 - In the Punjab and Bengal legislative assemblies, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims would **convene** and **vote for division**. These provinces would be partitioned if a simple majority of either faction desired it.
 - Sindh and Baluchistan were given the **freedom to make their own choices**.

Independence of India and Radcliff Line (1947) - Mountbatten Plan

- A referendum was to decide the fate of the North West Frontier Province and the Assam district of Sylhet.
- By August 15, 1947, India would have gained independence.
- The possibility of Bengal gaining a separate **Bengal Union** was ruled out.
- In the event of a Partition, **a border commission would be established.**
- On June 2, India's political leaders agreed to the idea. It did not address the issue of the princely states, but on June 3rd, Mountbatten pushed them to join one of the two new dominions rather than remain independent.



Partition of Bengal

- In the pre-Partition phase, Bengal became the bone of contention. Besides religious factors, power struggle at play among different political groups to rule over the territory of Bengal invoked class-centric as well as caste-related concerns. Separate electorate for Hindus and Muslims after the foundation of the Muslim League had resulted in a communal rift without so much as paying attention to the different layers constituting each community.
- M.A. Jinnah claimed the whole of the Bengal province to Pakistan owing to its Muslim majority population. The Nazimuddin-Akram Khan school, backed by leading Islamic newspapers like *Azad*, *Morning News* and *Star of India*, was rooted to the Muslim League and its demand for a single state of Pakistan as the future home for all Indian Muslims.

Partition of Bengal

- On the other hand, as a counter-effect to the idea of the Muslim League's Two Nation Theory, the patrons of Bengal nationalist cause demanded a separate Bengal Union. Bengal Union fortified the idea of a collective Bengali *jati* (race), focussing on linguistic and cultural unity of Bengalis over and above their religion-based difference.
- The main proponents of an independent United Bengal were Sarat Bose and Kiron Shankar Ray among the Hindu organizers, and Abul Hashim, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, Fazlul Huq and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Premiers of Bengal, from among the Muslim leaders. They encouraged a departure from communalist politics and instead stressed on a unified Bengali identity. Their emphasis was the Bengali language as a shared identity than the Islamic community/religion. Supporters of Suhrawardy, such as Mohammad Ali Bogra and Tafazzal Ali wanted United Bengal and emphasized the language movement.
- Bengali Muslim leaders such as the Hashim-Suhrawardy group fought for an integrated Bengal in segregation from the Pakistan of the north-western frontier. This is because by including Bengal within its domination, the central Muslim League wanted to commercially exploit Bengal's topography as well as reinforce the Ashraf-Atraf hierarchy within the Muslim community. Formation of a unified "Pakistan" would set up political, cultural and economic supremacy of the Urdu-speaking and more affluent Muslims over the peasant and Dalit Bengali Muslim counterparts.

Partition of Bengal

- In this respect, the Hashim-Suhrawardy schools' proposal for the Union of Bengal aimed at a twofold advantage – rule by the quantitatively major Bengali Muslims over the entire province of Bengal, and not having to bow before the North Indian Muslim counterparts. On the other hand, while Hindu enthusiasts like Kiron Shankar Ray and Sarat Bose supported the idea of a United Bengal because of their true feelings for a language-based Bengali nationhood, they were possibly also apprehending the passing of the East Bengal's jute-based and other agricultural and industrial economy from the hands of the Bengali business community, most of whom were *bhadralok* Hindus, to the West Pakistani Muslim bourgeoisie.
- Afterwards, in 1971, the formation of Bangladesh was a prerogative for the Bengali Muslims, who were looked down upon by the North Indian aristocrat Muslims and exploited by the Hindu *bhadralok*. They were torn between their linguistic belonging as Bengalis and religious belonging as Muslims, as is understood in the hybrid nature of their language (called *dobhasa*), which combine Urdu or Persian with Bengali.

Partition of Bengal

- The Indian nationalist leaders welcomed Partition, coalescing with the Hindu Mahasabha's idea of total exchange of population. In opposition to the Idea of Bengal Union, Marwari businessmen such as Birlas sponsored the Mahasabha and looked forward to a Hindu-majority separate geographico-political space. Likewise, elite Bengali newspapers like *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, which was a staunch adherent of united India, voiced the nationalists' demand for West Bengal.
- For most Hindu Bengalis, mainly the *bhadralok*, staying in a United Bengal would mean political and social dominance by the Bengali Muslims, who were largely stereotyped as Dalit Hindu converts. So a separate West Bengal was essentially a *babu*-class vision to prevent capsizal of power and hegemony, in terms not only of religion and class but also, of caste.
- In W.H.J Christie's words (Note by Mr. Christie: Mountbatten Papers 483): "So long as the Bengal Hindus have Partition *and* Calcutta, they have all they want. Reunion with East Bengal would only put them again in a position of numerical inferiority to the Muslims".

Independence of India and Radcliff Line (1947) - Mountbatten Plan

- The Congress Working Committee approved the division proposal on the 3rd of June, 1947.
- The **Indian Independence Act** was enacted by the British Parliament on **July 18, 1947**, completing the partition arrangements.
- The Government of India Act of 1935 was altered to give the new dominions with a legislative foundation.
- **Pakistan petitioned for UN membership** after being established as a new nation in August 1947, and was recognised by the General Assembly on September 30, 1947.
- The current seat was retained by the Dominion of India, which had been a founding member of the United Nations since 1945.

Radcliffe Line (1947)

- The Radcliffe Line was the **demarcation line that separated the Indian and Pakistani** sections of British India's **Punjab and Bengal provinces**.
- It was named after its architect, **Sir Cyril Radcliffe**, who served as joint head of the two provinces' border committees.
- The demarcation line was published on **17th August 1947** upon the Partition of India.
- Its western side forms part of the present Indo-Pakistan border, while the eastern side forms part of the current India-Bangladesh boundary.

Radcliffe Line (1947)

- Prior to independence, it was determined to divide India into two halves, one for Hindus and the other for Muslims.
- **Pakistan was handed the provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan**, both of which have a large Muslim population (about 70% and 90%, respectively).
- The provinces of Punjab and Bengal, on the other hand, had just a little majority of Muslims.
- Muslims made up 55.7 percent of Punjab's population and 54.4 percent of Bengal's.
- Despite the fact that Muhammad Ali Jinnah intended these provinces to become part of Pakistan, and considering the emotions of Hindu and Sikh people, the Congress party did not approve.



Radcliffe Line (1947)

- As a result, it was determined to cut through these provinces and divide them between the two countries.
- **It was hard to draw a clear line dividing the people by faith.**
- In June 1947, two Border Commissions were established (one for Bengal and one for Punjab). Each Commission comprised five members: Sir Cyril, the Muslim League's two nominees, and the Congress Party's two nominees.
- Sir Cyril was given until the 15th of August to finish the delineation, but the final conclusion was not released until the 17th.

Radcliffe Line (1947)

- In the view of the British, **Sir Cyril was a neutral figure** who could not be biased toward either India or Pakistan because he had **no prior understanding** of the country or its problems. (One of the grounds for his appointment was because of this).
- Not only did the border commissioners have to deal with the people, but they also had to deal with **roads and railway lines, electricity networks, irrigation projects, and individual property holdings.**
- More than **a million people died** and **12 million more were displaced** as a result of the country's split.

Radcliffe Line (1947) - Violence After Partition

- In the months after the division, **massive population exchanges occurred** between the two newly constituted nations.
- After partition, India had 330 million people, West Pakistan had 30 million, and East Pakistan had 30 million (now Bangladesh).
- After the lines were drawn, **around 14.5 million individuals crossed the border**, hoping to find relative protection in a host land with a majority from similar community and faith.



Radcliffe Line (1947) - Violence After Partition

- The newly created administrations were totally unprepared to deal with such enormous migrations, and on both sides of the border, **immense bloodshed** and **killing ensued**.
- Estimates of the number of deaths vary, with low estimates at 2 lakhs and high estimates at 20 lakhs.
- In East Punjab, there were almost no Muslims, while in West Punjab, almost no Hindus or Sikhs survived.



Thank You

