

## UPSC Civil Services Examination

### UPSC Notes [GS-I]

#### Topic: The Partition of Bengal - 1905 [Modern Indian History Notes for UPSC]

Lord Curzon was the Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905. The partition of the Bengal province came into effect during his viceroyalty on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1905.

#### Background & the Partition

- Since 1765 (following the Battle of Buxar) the province of Bengal, which included present-day West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Bangladesh and Assam was under the British.
- It was a very large area and the population rose to almost 80 million by the first few years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Calcutta was the capital of the province and also of British India.
- There were difficulties in administering such a large area. The eastern part, especially in rural areas were neglected.
- That region was lacking in the fields of industry, education and employment. Much of the industry was centred on Calcutta.
- For administrative ease, the partition of the province had been proposed even before Curzon had arrived in India.
- In 1874, Assam was sliced away from Bengal and put under a Chief Commissioner.
- Initially, Lord Curzon proposed the partitioning of the province as an administrative measure solely. In 1904, he undertook a tour of eastern Bengal.
- The idea of using the Bengal partition as a political tool to undermine the growing nationalism in Bengal and other parts of India occurred later.
- As per Curzon, after the partition, the two provinces would be Bengal (including modern West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar) and Eastern Bengal and Assam.
- Bengal would also lose five Hindi-speaking states to the Central Provinces. It would gain Odia-speaking states from the Central Provinces.
- Eastern Bengal would consist of Hill Tripura, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Dhaka divisions. Its capital would be Dhaka.
- Bengal would have a Hindu majority and Eastern Bengal and Assam would have a Muslim majority population. Its capital would remain Calcutta.

#### Reaction to the partition of Bengal

- There was widespread political unrest in the province after Curzon announced the partition.
- Many people in Bengal regarded this partition as an insult to their motherland. There was a huge cry for the unity of Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore composed the famous song 'Amar Sonar Bangla' which later became the national anthem of Bangladesh.
- The Indian National Congress protested this move to separate the province on communal lines.

- Most of the Bengalis in the western part protested against this step which would also make them a linguistic minority in their own province. There would be more Odia and Hindi speaking people than Bengalis.
- Many Muslims welcomed this move since they thought that most Muslims, who were backwards in education and economic status in Bengal compared to Hindus, would benefit if they were in a majority.
- Lord Curzon also promised to start a university in Dhaka. This was also seen as an opportunity for Muslims to develop in education and improve their standard of living.
- The general protest in the rest of the country was against this partition. The people saw through the 'divide and rule' policy of the British authorities.
- The chief aim of such a partition was only to create a rift between the two communities and hampering the unity and nationalism in the country.
- The agitation had started much before the date of the partition itself. On the date of the partition, people observed a day of mourning. Tagore asked Hindus and Muslims to tie rakhis to each other as a mark of protest.
- A few Muslims also were against the partition.
- The Swadeshi and Boycott movements in the national struggle started as a result of this partition.
- People started boycotting British goods which had flooded the Indian market and had dealt a blow to the indigenous industry.
- The partition did succeed in creating a communal rift in the country and even contributed to the birth of the Muslim League in 1906.

### Partition annulled

- Owing to mass political protests, the partition was annulled in 1911.
- New provinces were created based on linguistic lines rather than religious lines. Bihar and Orissa Province was carved out of Bengal. (Bihar and Orissa became separate provinces in 1936).
- A separate Assam province was created.
- The capital of British India was moved to Delhi from Calcutta in 1911.
- Despite the annulment, the partition did create a communal divide among the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal.