

Theme 13. Understanding Partition **Politics, Memories, Experiences**

Partition-A significant marker in the history of India and Pakistan

- Partition was characterized by violence
- Thousands of people were killed
- Innumerable women raped and abducted,
- Millions were uprooted,
- Numerous people become refugees etc.
- Migration of people across borders
- People became homeless, lost all their property
- They Lost their childhood memories
- They were separated from their relatives and friends.
- People were stripped of their local and regional cultures

Partition or holocaust?

- The word holocaust was used by historians for the massive massacre incident in Germany by Hitler.
- Scholars used the word holocaust for incidents happened during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, where millions of the people were killed, raped with women, plundered during the partition by the both side of the people.
- The word primarily means destruction or slaughter on a mass scale.
- Survivors of Partition described the incidents as
- Maashal-la(martial law)
- Mara-mari(killings)
- Raula or hullar(disturbance,tumult,uproar)

Types of stereotypes existed among people during the partition

- The partition produced haters of Pakistan in India and haters of India in Pakistan.
- Some people believed that Indian Muslims are loyal to Pakistan and not to India.
- The Hindus had some of stereotypes about the Muslims such as Muslims are cruel, bigoted, and unclean and invaders on India.
- Hindus considered themselves as kind, liberal, pure and children of the invaded.
- R.M.Murphy, a journalist has shown that similar stereotypes exist in Pakistan.
- According to him, some Pakistanis feel that Muslims are fair, brave, monotheists and meat-eaters, while Hindus are dark, cowardly, polytheists and vegetarian.
- Some of these stereotypes pre-date partition. But they played a crucial and strong force during the partition.

Partition as a culmination of communal politics

- Some of Indian and Pakistan historians believe that Mohammed Ali Jinnah's theory that the Hindus and Muslims in colonial India constituted two separate nations could be traced back to the medieval history.
- Events of partition also connected to the long history of conflict between two groups from the medieval and modern times.
- But this view refuses the mutual cultural exchange and history of sharing.
- It also negates the fact that people's thinking is changed by circumstances.
- Some scholars viewed that Partition was a culmination of a communal politics.
- It started developing in the opening decades of the 20th century.
- The separate electorates for Muslims, created by the colonial govt.in 1909 and expanded in 1919, crucially shaped the nature of communal politics.

- The separate electorates meant that Muslims could now elect their own representatives in constituencies allotted only for Muslims.
- This gave inspiration for the politicians who had worked within the parties to give more sectarian slogans and increase number of benefits that came out of it.
- Religious identities thus acquired a functional use within a modern political system.

Issues during the 1920 to 1930 decade which grew the tension between Hindu and Muslims

- During the 1920s and early 1930s, tension grew around a number of issues.
- Muslims were angered by music before- mosque
- The cow protection movement by Hindu
- The Suddhi movement (bring back to Hindu) by Hindu
- Hindus were angered by the rapid spread of tabligh (propaganda) and tanzim (organization) by Muslim.
- Middle class publicists and communal activists tried to build solidarity with their communities.
- They mobilized people against other community.

Communalism

- Communalism refers to a politics that seeks to unify one community around a religious identity in hostile opposition to another community. It seeks to define this community identity as fundamental and fixed.

The provincial elections of 1937 and the congress ministries.

- In 1937, elections to provincial legislatures were held for the first time.
- Only 10 to 12% of the population had the right to vote.
- The congress performed well in the elections and won with absolute majority in the 5 provinces out of 11 and formed the govt. in 7 of them.
- It performs poorly in the constituencies reserved for the Muslims.
- The Muslim League also performed very poorly and got 4.4% of the total Muslim vote.
- The Muslim League could not win even a single seat in the NWFP.
- It got only 2 out of 84 reserved constituencies for Muslims in the Punjab province and 3 out of 33 in Sind.
- In United provinces, Bombay and Madras, Muslim League wanted to form a joint govt. with the congress but congress rejected the offer.
- This rejection convinced the League that the Muslims could be represented by the League only and the congress was considered as a Hindu party.
- Few were convinced by the projection of the League by Jinnah as a “sole spokesman” of Muslims.
- Support for the League from the United provinces, Bombay and Madras was popular, but it had little support from the provinces Bengal the NWFP and the Punjab out of which the future Pakistan was to be carved out.

Attitude of the Congress party towards the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha

- The congress ministries widened the rift.
- The congress had rejected the League’s demand for a formation of joint govt. in the United provinces.
- The League and the congress differed in the question of abolishing landlordism.
- The congress did not gain anything from the “Muslim mass contact” programme.
- The radical and secular approach of the congress party alarmed conservative Muslims and feudal Muslims who had not won over the Muslim support.
- In 1937, the congress leaders such as Maulana Azad asked its members not to join in the Muslim League. In 1938; the congress declared that its members should not be part of the Hindu Mahasabha.

Hindu Mahasabha

The Hindu Mahasabha was founded in 1915. One of its founders was V.D Savarkar. It was a Hindu party confined to North India. It tried to unite Hindu by giving up caste and sect. It was started to give counter actions to the Muslim organization of that time.

Muslim League

The Muslim League was founded in Dhaka in 1906. It was dominated by the UP based Muslim elite.

Aga Khan was one of the founders of the League as well as its first president. The Muslim League demanded for the separate nation for the Muslims during 1940s.

Rashtriva Swayamsevak Sangh

The RSS spread from Nagpur to the United Provinces, the Punjab and other parts of the country in 1930s.

By 1940s the RSS had more than 100,000 trained cadres with strong ideology of Hindu nationalism.

They were convinced that India was the land of the Hindus.

Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj was a north Indian reform movement founded by Dayanand Saraswathi in 1875. One popular slogan of the Arya Samaj was "Go back to Vedas" and its main functions were to sustain the Vedic practices. This trend is known as revivalism.

Lucknow Pact (1916)

The Lucknow Pact signed between the Congress and the Muslim League was an important one in understanding the partition. It shows the origin of the Muslim League which was controlled by the UP based "young party". One of the major features of the Lucknow pact was the acceptance of separate electorates. However, the pact paved the way for a joint political platform for the moderates and extremists and the Muslim League.

The "Pakistan" resolution

- The Muslim League moved a resolution demanding Muslim autonomy in British India.
- It was passed at the largest gathering of the League delegates on 23 March 1940. It never mentioned partition or Pakistan.
- Sikandar Hayat Khan, leader of the Unionist party had drafted the original resolution.
- He declared in a Punjab assembly speech on 1 March 1941 that he was opposed to a Pakistan that would mean "Muslim Raj here and Hindu Raj elsewhere..."
- He supported considerable autonomy for the units of the confederation.

The origin of Pakistan demand

- Urdu poet Mohammad Iqbal, the writer of "Sare Jahan Se Achha Hindustan Hamara" demanded for a separate "North West Muslim state" in his presidential address to the Muslim League in 1930. The poet put forward his intention.
- He did not predict the emergence of a separate state with an aim to reorganize the Muslim majority to form an autonomous unit within a single Indian federation.

- The name Pakistan was coined by a Punjabi Muslim student at Cambridge, Chaudhary Rehmat Ali in his pamphlet.
- Initially, leaders did not take it seriously and rejected as a dream of a student.
- The name Pakistan stands as follows:
- P-Punjab, A-Afghan-Kashmir, S-Sind and Tan-Baluchistan.

The suddenness of Partition

Post-war developments

- In 1945, the British agreed to create an Indian central Executive council. Except the viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, all members would be Indians.
- Jinnah demanded that the League had an absolute right to choose all the Muslim members of the Executive council.
- Also the League wanted the communal veto power in the council with decisions opposed by Muslims needing a two third majority.

Provincial elections in 1946

- The Congress got majority in the general constituencies by capturing 91.3% of the non-Muslim vote.
- The Muslim League got success in the seats reserved for Muslims.
- It won all 30 reserved constituencies in the centre with 86.6 % of the Muslim vote and 442 out of 509 seats in the provinces.
- Only after 1946, the Muslim League was able to become as a political party for Muslims and justified its claim as the “sole spokesman” of India’s Muslims.
- About 10 to 12% of the population enjoyed the voting rights in the provincial elections and 1% in the elections for the Central Assembly.

Cabinet Mission

- In March 1946, the British cabinet sent a three-member mission to Delhi to examine the League’s demand and to suggest a suitable political frame work for a free India.
- The Cabinet Mission recommended a loose three-tier confederation.
- India was to remain united.
- It was to have a weak central govt. controlling only foreign affairs, defence and communication with the existing provincial assemblies being grouped in to three sections while electing the constituent assembly: section A for the Hindu majority provinces and sections B and C for the Muslim majority provinces of the north-west and the north-east (including Assam) respectively.
- The sections or groups of provinces would comprise various regional units.
- They would have the power to set up intermediate –level executives and legislatures of their own.
- Initially all the major parties accepted this plan.
- However, the agreement was short-lived because it was based on mutually opposed interpretations of the plan.
- The League wanted the grouping to be compulsory, with sections B and C developing into strong entities with the right to secede from the Union in the future.
- The Congress wanted that provinces be given the right to join a group.
- It was not satisfied with the mission’s clarification that grouping would be compulsory at first, but provinces would have the right to opt out after the constitution had been finalized and new elections held in accordance with it.
- Ultimately, therefore, neither the League nor the Congress agreed to the Cabinet Mission’s proposal. The two major leaders who were opposed to the partition on the communal line were Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (**Frontier Gandhi**) of the NWFP.

Direct Action Day

- After rejecting the mission’s proposal, the League moved for “Direct Action Day” to achieve its separate nation for the Muslims. 16 August 1946 was declared as “**Direct Action Day**” by the Muslim League.
- On the day Calcutta witnessed communal violence which lasted for many days. By March 1947, the violence spread the rest of regions in the country.

Activities related to partition in Bengal

- In March 1947, to leaders of the congress party voted for dividing the Punjab into two.
- One part was with Muslim majority and other part with Hindu and Sikh majority.
- The method was demanded for Bengal also.
- Leaders of Hindus and Sikhs believed that partition was a necessary evil; otherwise they would be dictated by the Muslim League and its majority.
- Bhadrak Hindu in Bengal demanded that power should remain with them due to fear of the Muslim majority in Bengal.
- They felt that the partition was the only solution for political dominance

Breakdown of law and order

- Amritsar district witnessed communal killing and other atrocities between the Hindus and the Muslims due to the complete breakdown of law and order in the city.
- People appealed to the British for help and the later was not willing to take decisions and intervene and advised the people to contact Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel or M.A.Jinnah.
- Leaders except Gandhi were busy with the negotiations regarding independence.
- While people were in fear of losing their lives and property; the British officials were busy in quitting India.
- Even Indian soldiers and policemen came to act as Hindus and Muslims or Sikhs. People could not seek any help from the uniformed policemen while killings were reaching its zenith.

Gandhi's efforts to avoid the Killings of the people during partition (THE ONE MAN ARMY)

- Gandhi took efforts to restore communal harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims.
- He was 77 years old.
- He tried to prove his ahimsa and also believed that hearts of people could be changed.
- He went to Naokhali from there to Bihar villages and then to the slums of Calcutta to stop killings by appealing to the people.
- In October 1946, Muslims in East Bengal targeted Hindus.
- He visited the area and appealed to the concerned religious community not to attack and assured the safety of the Hindus.
- He visited Delhi also and tried to build a spirit of mutual trust and confidence between the two communities.
- Gandhi knew that this was "a voice in the wilderness" but opposed the idea of partition.

The condition of women at the time of partition**"Recovering" women**

- Women were raped, abducted, sold, forced to settle down to a new life with strangers in unknown circumstances.
- They had undergone to develop new family bonds in their changed circumstances.
- However, the Indian and Pakistani govts were insensitive to human relationships, and they now tore them away from their new relatives, and sent them back to their earlier families or locations.
- They did not consult the concerned women, undermining their right to take decisions regarding their own lives.

Preserving "honour"

- For preserving community honour, men killed "their" women -wives, sisters, daughters-in this period of extreme physical and psychological danger. They also forced "their" women to commit suicide to save them from falling into the hands of enemies.

Regional Variations

- The impact of partition was more in the north-western part of the subcontinent.
- Communal carnage occurred in Calcutta and Noakhali in 1946, the partition was most bloody and destructive in the Punjab.
- From Punjab Hindus and Sikhs migrated into India and the Punjabi- speaking Muslims moved towards Pakistan during the period from 1946 to 1948.
- Many Muslim families of UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh migrated to Pakistan during 1950s and early 1960s.
- Some of the families chose to remain in India. Most these Urdu-speaking people, known as muhajirs (migrants) in Pakistan moved to the Karachi-Hyderabad region in Sind.
- In Bengal, Hindus remained in East Pakistan while many Muslims continued to live in West Bengal.
- Finally; Bengali Muslims (East Pakistanis) rejected Jinnah's two-nation theory through political action

Help, Humanity, Harmony

- Historians have discovered numerous stories of how people helped each other during the partition period, Stories of caring and sharing, of the opening of new opportunities, and of triumph over trauma.
- For example, Khushdeva Singh, a Sikh doctor specializing in the treatment of tuberculosis, posted at Dharampur in present day Himachal Pradesh.
- He worked day and night and provided "rare healing touch, food, shelter, love and security to numerous migrants-Muslim, Sikh and Hindu.
- The residents of Dharampur had developed the kind of faith and confidence in his service for humanity and generosity that Muslims in Delhi and others had in Gandhi.

Oral history

Historians used official documents and oral histories for the reconstruction of the history of partition. Oral history helps us in understanding the trials and tribulations of common masses

Strengths of oral history**Oral histories help to capture memories in detail**

- It helps us grasp experiences and memories in detail.
- It helps to write richly textured vivid accounts.
- It is impossible to extract this kind of information from government documents
- For example, the accounts of the women in Thoa Khalsa

Oral histories describe the day - to - day experiences of the people

- Government documents would only tell us the negotiations between the British and the political parties.
- Oral histories would, on the other hand, tell us about the experiences of the people.
- For example, the experience of a trader from Peshawar who managed to secure a job Cuttack, but upon reaching India, enquired whether it was in the north or south part of Hindustan as they hadn't quite heard of Cuttack in Peshawar before.

Oral histories help historians to broaden the horizons of their discipline.

- They allow historians to do this by rescuing from oblivion the lived experiences of the poor and the powerless.
- For example, the story of a refugee who retailed wheat at wholesale prices and made a living by selling the gunny bags in which the wheat came.

Limitations of oral history

- Oral history may lack concreteness and the chronology may be imprecise.
- As each experience is unique, it becomes difficult to generalize. A large picture cannot be built from micro-evidence.
- Historians believe that oral accounts are only concerned with tangential issues. Individual experiences in oral histories are irrelevant to the unfolding of larger processes of history.
- At times it becomes difficult to locate the people and thus it is hard to reconstruct the past on the basis of few testimonies.
- Difficult to retrieve complete information

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