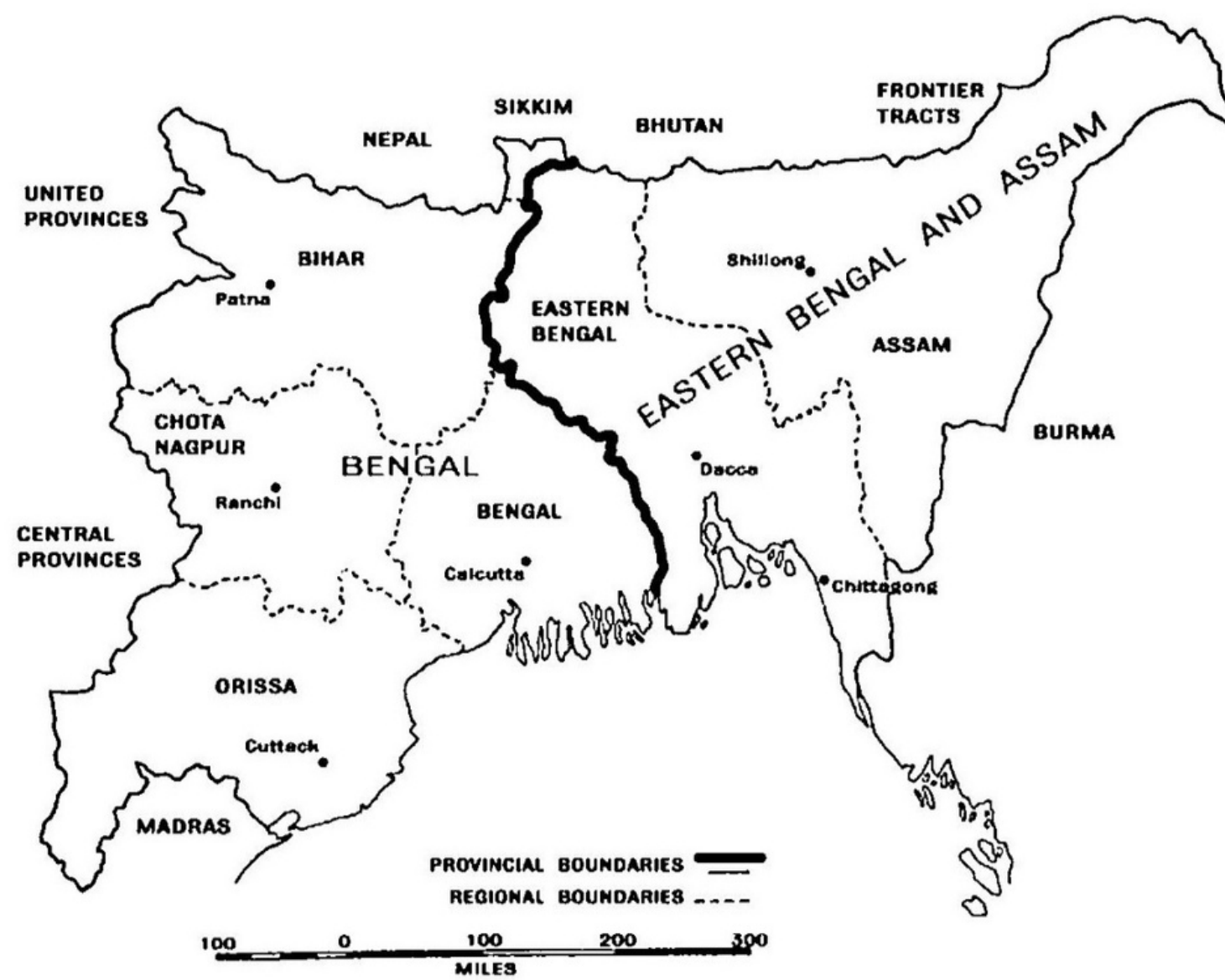


PARTITION OF BENGAL



Brief overview

Partition of Bengal is a very significant political event in the undivided Bengal and the entire Indian subcontinent. Before 1905 'Bengal Presidency' was the largest province in India. The Partition of Bengal was officially announced on 1 September 1905 and came into effect on 15 October. The 'Province of East Bengal and Assam' consisted of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong Divisions and Assam. The capital of this new province was established in Dhaka. West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa belonged to the province of 'West Bengal' and its capital was in Kolkata.

The nationalists saw the partition as a challenge to Indian nationalism and that it was a deliberate attempt to divide Bengal on religious grounds, with a Muslim majority in the east and a Hindu majority in the west. The Hindus of West Bengal complained that the division would make them a minority in a province that would incorporate the province of Bihar and Orissa. Hindus were outraged at what they saw as a "divide and rule" policy even though Curzon stressed it would produce administrative efficiency.

Causes and Place of Occurrence

The idea of dividing Bengal did not start from Curzon. Basically, the main reasons for the division of Bengal are three. 1) Administrative reasons. (2) Social and economic reasons. (3) Political reasons.

Since 1765 Bihar and Odisha were part of Bengal. In 1930, the original area of the Bengal Presidency was 189,000 square miles and the population was about 78 million. As a result, Bengal became too large as an official administrative area and for the British it's proper governance became difficult for the government. The beginning of the partition of Bengal was from here, the Muslims of East Bengal were in favor of that partition because the Muslims were far behind the Hindus. Therefore, Muslims supported the partition in the hope that East Bengal would get more opportunities if East Bengal was separated from West Bengal on the basis of religion, but most of the Hindus in West Bengal were against the partition of Bengal. East Bengal was an agricultural land. If this land is separated, it will have a big impact on the economy of West Bengal. Bengali Hindus were against the division of Bengal.

Annulment of the partition of Bengal

The authorities, not able to end the protest, assented to reversing the partition and did so in 1911. King George announced in 12th December 1911 that eastern Bengal would be assimilated into the Bengal Presidency and the partition of Bengal was cancelled. Districts where Bengali was spoken, were once again unified and Assam, Bihar and Orissa were separated. The Muslims leaders and intelligentsia condemned the decision as a betrayal of worst kind.

Causes of the Annulment

Protests and Violence:

The partition of Bengal created a Muslim-majority province, the East Bengal. The elite Hindus of West Bengal, who were collecting taxes from Muslim peasants in east Bengal, would now lose their influence in the new province. They, therefore, rejected the decision and launched a series of violent protests and demonstrations against the partition. The tide of anger rapidly spread to other parts of India.

Economic Reason:

The British reversed the partition of Bengal due to economic reasons too. The Hindus of West Bengal started Swadeshi Movement, which also spread to other parts of India. It was a massive campaign for boycotting the British goods and using home-made products. The Hindus responded to the movement enthusiastically. The use of local products became a matter of pride. Foreign clothes were thrown on bonfires.

British Measures Failed:

The British took several measures to bring the situation under control but political unrest kept on growing. Restrictions were imposed on newspapers and public gatherings. Editors were imprisoned. The situation was becoming difficult for peaceful administration and ultimately the British had to move toward the annulment of the partition.

Map

The British Government decided to redraw the boundaries and geographically split the areas into two parts. The overall district of Assam and Bengal was subjected to partition into two provinces of feasible size. The province of West Bengal consists of proper Bengal along with parts of Orissa and Bihar. It was basically Bengali speaking dominated area. The new province had almost 30 districts namely Dacca, Assam, Chittagong, Rangpur, Rajshahi area excluding Darjeeling, Malda, Hill Tripura, Jalpaiguri and Bogra, and many more. The eastern province had Dhaka (Dacca) as its capital and subsidiary headquarters at Chittagong. On the other hand West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa are formed by West Bengal province, whose capital was Calcutta.

Effects on people and subcontinent

1. Dissatisfaction among Bengali Hindus:

Led by Surendranath Banerjee, Jatindra Mohan Tagore, Narendranath Sen, and Motilal Ghose, the English-educated Bengali middle class held demonstrations in both town and countryside because the decision of partition conveyed a threat to the interest of the wealthy and influential Hindus as Bengali Hindus controlled most of Bengal's commerce and professional and rural life.

2. Effect on Indian National Congress:

The Indian National Congress was greatly embarrassed by the partition of Bengal. Lord Curzon had believed that Congress was no longer an effective force.

3. Emergence of Swadeshi and Boycott movement:

As an effective instrument against the partition, Congress launched the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement. The boycott of British goods became very much popular among the youths. English goods were seized and burned publicly.

4. Radical nationalism in Bengal:

The partition of Bengal in 1905 triggered radical nationalism. The moderates led the boycott, but small groups committed to terrorist activity began to mobilize under its banner.

5. Protest at National level:

Nationalists across the country supported the Bengal's cause. They were appalled at British arrogance and blatant tactics of divide and rule. The protests spread to Punjab, Bombay, and Poona.

6. The Disputed Divide and Rule policy:

Lord Curzon showed Muslim support in February 1904 with a visit to Dacca. He courted the Muslim landowners and spoke of partition as beneficial with an advantage of unity that they had not enjoyed since the days of the old Muslim Kings and Sultans.

7. The Split of Congress in 1907:

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a moderate, who had been elected Congress president in 1906, continued to press for Morley's promised constitutional reforms with the support of the Congress majority. But a strong voice within Congress, the extremists led by Tilak, now called for more radical action. This tension between Moderates and Extremists provoked a split in the Congress in 1907.

Impacts of Annulment

In 1911, Indian capital was shifted to Delhi from Calcutta and the same year East Bengal and West Bengal were reunited. The Bengali Muslims were angry and disappointed. The creation of United Bengal into a presidency with a Governor in Council appointed from England. The creation of Bihar and Orissa into a Lieutenant-Governorship with a Legislative Council and a Capital in Patna. Lord Hardinge promised a new University at Dacca in 1912. The resentment remained throughout the rest of the British period.