Class 5

**British India: 1912-1947**

# Learning Objectives: At the end of the class students will be able to

* Recognize that the communalization of politics started with the partition which encouraged both Hindus and Muslims to form political parties along religious lines
* Understand the creation of a specific regional political framework in which religious identity began to overrule regional class identities
* Impact of Lahore Resolution, Cripps Mission and Quit India Movement, Bengal Famine of 1943, Wavell Plan and Simla Conference, General and Provincial Elections of 1945-46, Cabinet Mission Plan, Great Calcutta Killing, Partition Plan and Refugee Crisis

# Topics to be covered

1. Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement
2. Hindu-Muslim Unity: Lucknow Pact, 1916, C.R. Das and the Bengal Pact, 1924.
3. Simon Commission, Communal Award, Government of India Act 1935
   * participation of political parties in provincial elections
   * expansion of the electorate and the rise of the “moffusil” in Bengal politics
4. Krishak Proja Party: representing the peasantry of Bengal against the Zamindars, demanded absolute proprietorship of lands for peasants
5. Election of 1936-37 and the coalition government of Krishak Proja Party and Muslim League in Bengal, Bengal Tenancy Act, Debt Settlement Board, social reform initiatives
6. Cripps Mission and Quit India Movement
7. Bengal Famine of 1943
8. Wavell Plan and Simla Conference
9. General and Provincial Elections of 1945-46
10. Cabinet Mission Plan
11. Great Calcutta Killing
12. Partition Plan and Refugee Crisis

**Summary:**

Starting of the World War II changed the political scenario of British India when Viceroy Lord Linlithgow dragged India into the war without the consultation of Indian political leaders. This course of work provided bargaining chips to major political parties to ensure their particular demands regarding governing rights as well as independence of India. British also wanted to hold the power in their grip as India was providing not only a secured base but also it was supplying resources in terms of food, money, labor and men. In the end, incessant communal violence with political chaos added with British bankruptcy and economic pressure due to expensive Second World War, led to the partition of India.

In the stage of political chaos due to the war, All India Muslim League held a conference on 22-24 March, 1940 in Lahore to discuss the awaken situation and Mohammad Ali Jinnah also wanted to figure out the reasons behind the defeat of Muslim League in Muslim majority provinces in 1937 election.

Here, he explicated his Two-Nation Theory by addressing Muslims as a separate nation with distinct political, social, cultural, economic and spiritual perspectives that enunciated independent state for Muslims. On 23 March, 1940 Sikandar Hayat Khan’s drafted Lahore Resolution was moved by FazlulHuq demanding ‘Independent States’ for Muslims in the north-western and eastern zones of India.

On the other hand, Congress tried to draw an agreement with British government in exchange of their support in the war without any resistance. In April, 1942 Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to Delhi to seek the support. Cripps mission offered independence of India by creating a constituent assembly and proposed more seats for Indians on the Viceroy’s executive council. It also emphasized not to pressurize any part of the country to join the independent India. Powerless Cripps mission failed due to the opposition by

Congress leaders and new British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Such failed mission led to ‘Quit India’ movement in August, 1942 and these violent unorganized activities by all classes of people posed huge threats to British which resulted ruthless suppression of mainly Congress leaders and activists.

When British and major political parties were arguing about power, some 2 million rural people of Bengal died because of the Famine of 1943. Unlike 1770’s famine, this Bengal Famine is termed as man- made famine and it was a product of administrative failure where British stopped the rice imports from Japanese occupied Burma, moved food for their soldiers and big cities adding with black market prices, widespread corruption and shortages.

Finally at the end of the war, British again started their negotiations about India. Wavell Plan of June, 1945 proposed an all Indian executive council to form the interim government by restricting the viceroy and commander-in-chief positions from Indians. It also reserved seats for ‘Caste Hindus’ and Muslims. Nevertheless, this plan was also doomed due to Jinnah’s adamant position of not letting any other organization choose the Muslim candidates other than Muslim League although they did not perform well in 1937’s election in Muslim majority provinces. After this, British faced another round of revolts, movements and mutinies which killed and trialed many Indian activists.

On September, 1945 Lord Wavell announced the general and provincial elections where Congress won massively in Central Assembly as well as in provinces. But this time Muslim League gained the support of Muslim population by winning all the Muslim constituencies unlike 1937 and established their claim to be the sole representative of Indian Muslims.

The last negotiation to keep a United India was Cabinet Mission’s plan where it offered three tiered complex federation system by keeping the Centre weak and providing enough power to Muslim League, their wartime loyal ally to dominate North Eastern and North Western provinces. Eventually Jinnah and Congress both agreed on this plan but Congress added a condition to provide the provinces opportunities to step out from the groupings in future; however, this was not acceptable to Muslim League. Muslim League rejected the plan and called for ‘Direct Action’ programme from 16 August, 1947 to achieve their dream of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India.

The massive gathering in Maidan stepped into a communal conflict and turned into the ‘Great Calcutta Killings’ where at least 4000 people died by 19 August. The communal harmony and dream of United India were demolished from 16 August,1946. In the midst of outspread communal riots along with futile Congress-League coalition government in center British made the proposal to transfer the power by June, 1948.

British Prime Minister Clement Atlee appointed the last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten to execute the partition plan in February, 1947. Soon, British hastily decided to hand over the power in August, 1947, because of their postwar economic situation along with hostile Indian movements and communal riots. Mountbatten followed the path of creating two dominion states India and Pakistan and also decided to divide the two large significant provinces Bengal and Punjab. Sir Cyril Radcliffe was responsible to demarcate the line between these two countries within five weeks on the basis of religious demography. Although, this partition plan was decided by 12 August, 1947 but was not published till 17 August,1947. Thus, two countries Pakistan and India on the basis of religious demography were created on 14th and 15th August but the ill-managed and ill-equipped administration could not control the refugee crisis due to this partition which resulted in the death of around 2 million people.

**Trauma of Partition**

With the prospect of independence looming large, politicians of India were anxious about transfer of power. The idea of separate homeland quickly gained popularity among the Muslims. With the outbreak of riot in Kolkata and later in Punjab it became clear that India has to be divided. Families of different communities living side by side for generations turned against each other. Many friends turned into enemies overnight. Millions of people were murdered, particularly in Punjab where young men who returned home after the Second World War had the necessary training to carry out raids. In Bengal though the massacre was not of that scale it was vicious enough to spread terror. People no longer felt safe unless they live with their own community; they were suspicious and hostile to the other community. Meanwhile, as the prospect of partitioned India started to gain momentum a proposal came from Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy to transform the undivided Bengal into an independent sovereign state but was rejected by Congress who demanded Bengal to be divided along the communal line fearing domination of Muslim League in the united Bengal. Finally, when the declarations of the Partition came people rushed to be on the right side of the border. As the border of Pakistan was uncertain till the very end, the declaration prompted a mass migration hitherto unknown in the history of South Asia. Even that journey to the borders was difficult and dangerous. Those who ultimately crossed the border though found safety was scarred for life. The fear of a Hindu Raj became so permanent in the psyche of the Muslim population that it even governed the national policy of Pakistan since her independence in 1947.

***Required readings:***

* Bose, Sugata and Jalal, Ayesha, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 83-85; 109-119.
* Schendel, Willem Van, *A History of Bangladesh* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.79-87.
* Metcalf, B. & Metcalf, T. R., A Concise History of Modern India. Cambridge University Press,2006. (Chapter 07, pg. 203-223).

***Recommended readings:***

* Sarkar, Sumit, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2014), Chapters 4, 5 and 6.
* Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004).
* Hasan, Tariq, *Colonialism and the Call to Jihad in British India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2015).