

TWO BENGAL PARTITION AND AFTERMATH

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Abstract

There were two Bengal partitions; one occurred in 1905 and another in 1947. In 1905, Bengal was divided into three provinces, and the official reason provided by the British Raj was that the Bengal Presidency was too big to rule properly. In 1911, fortunately for the Bengalis, the British Raj was forced to withdraw the first Bengal partition, whereas in 1947, India was divided into two countries, India and Pakistan, and Bengal was divided into western and eastern regions. The western part of the Bengal province became the state of West Bengal and remained with India, whereas the eastern part of Bengal became East Pakistan. The main reason for the partition of India in 1947 was to put a stop to the constant struggles and violent outbursts between Hindus and Muslims. It was assumed by the British Raj, the Indian Congress leaders and the Muslim League leaders that by dividing India into two separate nations and giving each dominant religious sect control over its respective country, the Hindus could live peacefully in India and the Muslims could live peacefully in Pakistan. Unfortunately because of the partition, hundreds of thousands of deaths occurred and the millions of people became refugees. Partition failed to solve the religious problems and left a grave impact on the Indians and Pakistanis. From this suffering arose a mutual hatred, as each religious group blamed the other for its losses. From that hatred emerged a relentless rivalry and a mutual urge to avenge past sufferings. The tension created in 1947 seemed to have a long-lasting impact on the Bengalis, and stories about the suffering of ancestors who relocated from East Pakistan or West Pakistan are still told among families. Shortly after Pakistan was created, west and east parts of Pakistan started to grow apart based on their cultural and language differences. In 1971, with the help of Indian military, East Pakistan finally declared its independence from Pakistan and became a separate nation-state called Bangladesh. This paper will trace the two Bengal partitions (1905 and 1947) to show why the British Raj was forced to withdraw the first partition, whereas the second one stood firm. Furthermore, it will analyze whether the partition of 1947 was a result of the British imperial revenge for their ego being crushed in 1911 when they were forced to end the first Bengal partition or there was actual need for the separation of the two quarrelsome religious sects. Finally, the paper will emphasize the impact of the 1947 partition by discussing the current social, political, and economic conditions in West Bengal and Bangladesh, and how the long shadow of the partition is still alive in both regions today.

Keywords: Partition, violence, sufferings

1. INTRODUCTION

Only from the marriage of two forces does music arise in the world

Where there is no love, where listeners are dumb, there can be song.

—Rabindranath Tagore (Tagore, "Broken Song," 1985, p. 55).

It was November 9, 1989. The Berlin Wall had finally fallen, and thousands of people were crossing over the wall. East and West Germans hugged each other with tears in their eyes, and some actually danced on the wall and waved. The joy of those thousands of faces was broadcast all over the world. In a small part of West Bengal, India, an old gentleman was watching those happy faces on the national channel of Indian Television (DD1) with a sad smile. Suddenly, he burst out in despair: "They are Germans, not Bengalis!" The gloominess spread from the old man's voice and engulfed everyone in that room, even his small granddaughter. It was not hard to decipher, even for that small girl, why suddenly her grandfather, who were first-hand victim of the partition of India, looked so distant. I was that small girl, and I did not fathom at that time how irrevocably the impact of the Partition of 1947 lingered on the hearts of those, like my maternal

grandfather, who suffered and lost so much in the process of the division of one nation into two; Pakistan and India. My maternal grandfather's family was Hindu *Zamindars* in Jhenaidah in Khulna district, and soon after the partition they became refugees as Khulna became part of East Pakistan. The family had to run at night towards Howrah, West Bengal, India. On their way, they heard the screams from the distant burning villages, and finally, they reached Howrah exhausted. There they found a Muslim family who were moving to East Pakistan. Both parties exchanged real estate, and for a *Zamindari* they received two small houses, and a few years later, one of which was taken from them by force by the tenement. To comprehend the impact of the first Bengal Partition on the second Partition of India, it is necessary for us to understand what caused the Partitions and the roles of the people who, knowingly and unknowingly, selfishly and altruistically, engineered the partition.

1.1. The Reason for the Partition

The main idea behind Britain's withdrawal from India was to divide India's political power and create sovereign states that to accommodate the various ethnic-religious groups. For instance, Hindus would stay in India, and Muslims would go to Pakistan, to resolve the conflict between these religious sects (Schaeffer, 2005, p. 223). That is why on February 20, 1947, British Prime Minister Clement Richard Attlee announced in the House of Commons that Britain intended to take the necessary steps to transfer power to responsible Indian hands by June 1948. Soon after this declaration, the British Parliament passed the "Indian Independence Act" in July 1947, in which they stated that the British Parliament was creating two new independent dominions, India and Pakistan, in August 1947, and thus it announced the end of the British Indian Empire (Norman, 1972, p. 41). However, problems arose with this approach because the partition did not end religious hostilities but fueled further social and political strife. These conflicts have led to four Indo-Pakistani wars, an insurrection in Kashmir, recent year's terrorist bombings and mass murders, and hearts full of bitterness on each side. It seems surprising that the same Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs who had lived together since medieval times, and who inspired Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolence and noncooperation movements, were divided so easily by an invisible wall that forced millions of people to leave their homes behind. The partition created deep hatred that lingers sixty-five years later.

2. THE PARTITION IS AN OLD ACT: THE FIRST BENGAL PARTITION IN 1905

The British decision to partition India was not a new idea. When Lord George Nathaniel Curzon became viceroy of India on July 19, 1905, he formulated a policy that would make the country "a homogeneous compound instead of a heterogeneous mixture" (Marsey, 1949, p. 106–107). He believed that Britain would only be able to rule the region properly by dividing Bengal, because Hindu Bengalis were becoming prominent in administrative levels of the government and were sometimes the biggest critics of the British Raj. From his experience as governor general, Curzon understood that "Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways" (Baxter, 1997, p. 39). In his book *Modern India 1882–1947*, historian Sumit Sarker pointed out how the regions were separated: "East Bengal and Assam eventually including Chittagong, Dacca, and Rajshahi divisions (excluding Darjeeling), Hill Tippera and Malda apart from Assam," and West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa as a separate province (Sarkar, 1989, p. 106). Bengal had to surrender the eastern sides of its territory as well as giving five Hindi-speaking regions to the central province. The main political reason behind the partition of Bengal was to weaken the educated Hindu Bengalis and the rising Bengali politicians; the way that Curzon, Home Secretary H. H. Risley, and Lieutenant Governor Andrew Fraser drew up the partition made it clear that the Hindu Bengalis would be the minority in Assam and the Muslims would be the majority. Before the partition, Bengal had an area of 189,000 square miles and a population of 80 million. However, the new area of Bengal was reduced to an area of 141,580 square miles and a population of 54 million. Eastern Bengal and Assam consisted of an area of 106,540 square miles and a population of 31 million, of which 18 million were Muslim and 12 million were Hindu (Chandra, 2009, p. 248–249). The elite Hindu Bengalis felt that they would be at a disadvantage in the new states in two respects—religion and language.

In his speeches on February 7 and December 6, 1904, H. H. Risley said with utter frankness that the reason for the partition of Bengal was "to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule" (as quoted in Sarkar, 1989, p. 107). Soon after the declaration of the partition, the leaders of anti-partition movements declared that the nation would mourn on the day of inauguration. Everyone who did not support the partition would follow the detailed mourning programs. For example, the cooking of food was prohibited except for those who were sick, businesses would not sell any foreign-made goods and many shops stayed closed, and people would walk barefoot, and people would bathe early in the Ganges River while taking vows to reunify the divided Bengal and show brotherhood to everyone (Gopal, 1967, p. 147).

2.1. The Advantage and Disadvantage of the Partition

The partition of Bengal in 1905 created huge political tension. It was criticized all over India and attracted the leaders of the Indian National Congress (INC) to its cause. The Muslims in East Bengal, who until that time were somewhat neglected by both elite educated Hindus and British officials, suddenly understood how they could use the partition to gain financial, political, and official favors. They knew that a separate region would give them a strong foundation, which they had not enjoyed since they lost the battle of Plassey in 1757 under Mirza Muhammad Siraj ud-Daulah and later the Battle of Buxar (October 23, 1763) under Mir Muhammad Qāsim Alī Khān. By showing favoritism toward Muslim Bengalis, the British Raj brought the separation of Hindus and Muslims to the foreground, where it stayed and grew stronger from that time onward. At the same time, the Muslim population made a new ally who could potentially help them in their quarrel with Hindu political leaders. Soon, powerful Muslim politicians like Nawab of Daaca, Sir Khwaja Salimullah Bahador, started to feel the need to unify the Muslims under one party. Because of Sir Salimullah's efforts, Muslims in other parts of India began to see the need to create a party that would speak in favor of Muslims in India and negotiate with Britain and the Indian National Congress. For that reason, Sir Salimullah initiated correspondence with Nawab Mohsin-UI-Mulk of Aligarh, who believed in the vision and philosophy of Sir Syad Ahmed, the leader of the Aligarh movement and founder of Aligarh Muslim University.

With the effort and support of Nawab Mohsin-UI-Mulk, Sir Salimullah founded the All-India Muslim League (AIML) in October 1906 in Dacca, where the elite Hindu politicians tried to turn the middle- and upper-class Muslims in favor of the *Swadeshi* ("'[buy] home goods,' a weapon later used by Gandhi in his long-continuing campaign for khaddar, that is, home-spun and home-woven cloth") and create a boycott movement (1905–1908) in an effort to strengthen the unity between Hindu and Muslim Bengalis in Bengal and prevent the division (Brown, 1972, p. 79). Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk Kamboh became the first president of the AIML conference in Dacca, and Sir Salimullah, who was a strong supporter of the partition of Bengal, believed that a separate Bengal could be good for the Muslim community. He became the founding president of the Bengal Muslim League in 1907.

The partition of Bengal was widely welcomed by Muslim because the Muslims in the newly created regions of East Bengal and Assam felt that a separate region would give them more opportunities for education, employment, and other advancements. Meanwhile, numerous Bengali political leaders like Surendranath Basenji and Ramendrasunder Trivedi, journalists like Bipin Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh, Satisschandra Mukherji, and Aswinikumar Dutta, and the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore, along with his family members Dejenranath Tagore and Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, joined in the *Swadeshi* and boycott movement to stop the partition and encourage a new friendship and brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims.

2.2. The Role of Rabindranath Tagore

The partition stimulated an enormous amount of nationalist sentiment and literature. Most famous among this literature were the songs composed by Tagore to "emphasize the cultural heritage of India" and inspire youth with the confidence that religious diversity does not separate one Indian from another, but actually unifies by reminding all Indians that they were born in the same motherland and are being nurtured by the same air and water (Pradhan, 2002, p. 33). In the time of *Swadeshi*, Tagore composed the songs "Ekla Cholo Ray" ("Go Thou Forth Alone"), "Desher Mati" ("The Soil of the Motherland"), "Hobe Hobey" ("It Must Happen"), and, more famously, Tagore composed "Amar Shonar Bangla" ("My Golden Bengal") in 1906, which became the national anthem of Bangladesh in 1972 after it won freedom from Pakistan. The songs spread rapidly by word of mouth among youth who were inspired and felt a strong bond not only with their motherland, but also with each other. To strengthen the bond of brotherhood, Tagore and the national leaders came up with the idea that *Rakhi Bandhan* (*Rakhi* means sacred thread and *Bandhan* means tying) should be popularized and people should fasten *Rakhi* on each other's wrists without showing any religious or provincial differences. Tagore wrote, "The *Rakhi* ceremony will indicate that no monarch's sword, however powerful, can cut asunder the bond of union implanted by Providence amongst people forming one and the same race" (as quoted in Bose, 1965, p. 39).

Tagore found passion and motivation in *Swadeshi* ideology, which led him to believe that the force behind the movement was not destructive, as some Muslims and British Officials tried to argue, but constructive. He believed that *Swadeshi* chose to "take the best of the West and assimilate it with the best of Bengal so as to create a self-reliant country, able ultimately to dispense with its dependence on alien rule" (As quoted in Dutta and Robinson, 1997, p. 62). In a letter addressed to Dinesh Chandra Sen on November 17, 1905, Tagore showed what provoked the *Swadeshi* movement and why the boycott of the British Raj in all fronts was effective. In that same letter, Tagore explained how making *Swadeshi* art, games, poems, and clothes, especially *Swadeshi Mela* (established by Nabagopal Mitra), and a steamer service from Khulna to Barisal

opened by Jyotirindranath Tagore inspired some Bengalis with *Swadeshi* accomplishments:

Ashu Chaudhuri, speaking at the Bardhaman [Burdwan] conference, was reviled for the country had been gradually coming round to *Swadeshi* feelings. When the matter of Partition arose, it was merely a convenient trigger for the full blossoming of the *Swadeshi* Movement (As quoted in Dutta and Robinson, 1997, p. 64).

2.3. The Changing Relationships between Hindus and Muslims

By showing favoritism toward Muslim Bengalis and by emphasizing the benefits of creating more jobs for Muslims, the British Raj achieved considerable success for the first time. By strengthening the invisible yet prominent religious wall between Hindus and Muslims, Lord Curzon was literally able to separate the followers of two religions who had been living side-by-side for almost one thousand years. Despite eloquent pleas for communal unity and some memorable scenes of fraternization by the elite Bengalis, still the British were able to sway the upper- and middle-class Muslims against the *Swadeshi* movement (Sarkar, 1989, p. 121–122). Several communal riots broke out in East Bengal: Iswargunj in the Mymensingh district in May 1906, Comilla in March 1907, and Jamalpur, Dewangonj, and Bakshigunj in April–May 1907. Ordinary, lower-class Muslims attacked the Hindu *Zamindars* (means landlords) and *Mahajans* (means wealthy businessmen) who were trying to leave East Bengal to avoid the newly appointed Muslim Nawab Salimulla of Dacca, whom they thought the British were putting in charge of East Bengal and the Assam province. The British encouraged the situation by granting a loan of 1.4 million rupees to Salimulla and recognizing him as a great and important political personality. The Lt. Governor of the new province of East Bengal and Assam, Bamfylde Fuller was somewhat successful in playing both sides and turned the Hindus and Muslims on each other (Sarkar, 1989, p. 141). According to Sumit Sarkar, Muslim religious leaders often had connections with emerging rich peasant made relatively prosperous by jute (Sarkar, 1989, p. 122). Moreover, Muslim propaganda literature like the *Red Pamphlet* (1907) or the later *Krishakbandhu* (1910) idealized a kind of *Kulak*, or capitalist farmer development, while identifying the *zamindar-mahajan* exploiter with the Hindu (Sarkar, 1989, p. 122). The majority of nationalists and congressional politicians dismissed this kind of Muslim propaganda and Muslim activities as just some hired-gun activities of the British and gave them no importance whatsoever. They actually ignored the fact that, based on the first Bengal partition, not only had extremist leaders tried to grab power in the National Congress, but terrorism had also spread widely in Bengal. In April, 1909, the excitement reached such a pitch that the British Raj felt concerned that a second Sepoy Revolt might start (Gopal, 1967, p. 180). In Bengal, as well as in places like Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Ferozepore, and Multan, people started to organize meetings and were urged to rise against the British and even attack them if necessary (Gopal, 1967, p. 181).

At this time, Muslims found their voice through the All-India Muslim League (AIML) and understood that Britain's dislike toward Hindus and Sikhs could be used to their own advantage. In 1919, Hindus and Muslims were granted separate elections, which made them feel even more divided from each other. Soon, the efforts of the AIML and its leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, to promote the two-nation theory actually divided Bengal once more in 1947's partition. However, the 1905 Bengal partition did not succeed. In 1911, after six years of partition, King George V himself announced that the partition of Bengal was nullified and "Bengal was once more amalgamated and Bihar and Orissa formed a new province," which was separated into two provinces in 1935 (Kulke & Rothermund, 1990, p. 214).

3. THE RISE OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND ALL INDIAN MUSLIM LEAGUE: A SPLIT IN IDEAS

It seemed that the partition of Bengal not only brought the Indian National Congress unequivocally into politics, but it also brought the division between moderates and extremists inside the INC into the limelight. G.K. Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, Pherozeshah Mehta, Sankaran Nair, and others were the most prominent leaders of the moderates in Congress, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra, Lala Lajpat Rai of Punjab, and Bipin Chandra Pal (known as Lal-Bal-Pal) of Bengal became the most prominent extremist leaders. The *Swadeshi* and burning patriotism that started in Bengal created an excellent breeding ground for extremist ideas, and from that radical ideology the idea of *Swaraj* came to be. In his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote about this political environment that "From 1907 onwards for several years India was seething with unrest and troubles . . . the way the masses of Bengal were taking the *Swadeshi* and boycott pledge stirred all us Indians in England." (Bose, 1965, p. 45)

However, due to Gokhale's influence, the moderates stayed on a little longer. Because of the moderate leaders who never tried to exploit the differences between Hindus and Muslims, the rising tension between the followers of the two religions stayed somewhat controlled. Yet the psychological separation, which

started with the Bengal partition in 1905, seemed to broaden. The British tried to broaden it further with the 1909 Morley–Minto Reforms, during which they passed a new law declaring that special representation from the Muslim community would be appointed in the Legislature Council in the government of India (Parkin, 1945, p. 51).

In Bengal, the birthplace of the anti-British armed nationalist movement, it seemed that mistrust toward Muslims continued after the failed partition because revolutionaries tried to exclude Muslims from their groups and exclusively sought group members from the Hindu middle class. It was clear that the Hindu revolutionary groups were anti-Muslim, and the reason behind this attitude was the favoritism that Muslims suddenly received from British officials who no longer felt that they could trust Hindus in higher official positions. Britain started to use the Muslims; for example, they imported Muslims officials from the United Provinces to be police officers in the Intelligence Branch, which stirred dislike among Hindu Bengali nationalists who felt that “Muslims were an obstacle to the attainment of Indian freedom and must, like other obstacles, be removed” (Azad, 1960, p. 5). According to Azad, the Hindu Bengalis felt that Muslims were against political freedom as well as against the Hindu community. In his autobiography, Azad remembered that when Shyam Sunder Chakravarty introduced him to other Hindu revolutionaries in Bengal, he noticed how surprised and suspicious they were to see his willingness as a Muslim to join the cause of freeing the nation as a member of a nationalist group, so he began to argue with them that “they were wrong in thinking that Muslims as a community were their enemies. I told them that they should not generalize from their experience with a few Moslem officials in Bengal,” (Azad, 1960, p. 6). He felt that, if efforts were made to welcome the Muslim community with open arms, the Muslims would certainly join the Hindus in their political struggle against the common enemy of the British Raj, because achieving freedom for India should be a common goal for both religious sects. Azad’s persuasion led the nationalist groups to extend the olive branch outside of Bengal. Although they were hesitant at first because the group members felt that being part of a broad circle could affect their status as a secret society, history proved that Bengali nationalists were able to befriend Punjabi, Marathi, and Lahore nationalists. For some time, it seemed that Hindus and Muslims could work together without constantly clashing with each other, and the *Khilafat* movement became an example of the Hindu and Muslim communality as the INC and AIML, most prominently worked together for the common cause. It was at the *Khilafat* Conference in September 1920, that Mahatma Gandhi preached his noncooperation principle for the first time in India, and Azad gave Mahatma Gandhi his full support. In the noncooperation movement, it was not only Azad but Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Shaukat Ali who became companions. However, at the end of the noncooperation movement, Jinnah left the Congress (Azad, 1960, p. 12).

3.1. The Problems between Hindus and Muslims: Communalism and Caste

To understand why Muslims felt attracted to the idea of a separate nation, it is essential to understand that Hindus and Muslims have shared India since the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192, when Hindu King Prithviraj Chauhan was defeated and killed by sultan of the Ghurid Empire, Shahāb-ud-Din Muhammad Ghori and Muslims, Arabs, Afghans, and Turks became mutual inhabitants of India. Soon after the Muslims established their reign in India, they started to convert millions of mostly low-caste Hindus into Islam. Some scholars in Indian history believe that eighty-nine percent of Muslims in India are of Hindu origin (Parkin, 1945, p. 15).

However, there are some very strong differences between these two religions. The most important is the caste system, which is a foundation of Hindu social structure that Muslims oppose. “Islamic law treats property as individual, while Islamic custom does not create family responsibilities and obligations of the sort that characterize Hindu society,” wrote Raleigh Parkin in his book *India Today: An Introduction to Indian Politics* (Parkin, 1945, p. 15). Additionally, Muslims do not get married as early as Hindus do. Muslim marriage law gives men and women the same rights and marriage is a civil contract, whereas Hindus are married very young and for life.

Additionally, there was a sharp economic difference between the two religious sects. After the British came, most of the Hindus embraced Western education and started to get richer than their Muslim neighbors. After they became moneylenders and employers with good jobs, Hindus became the target of Muslim hatred and envy. It should be noted here that, even though Hindus and Muslims stayed separate for generations while living on the same land, some Hindu customs lingered inside Muslim customs and vice versa. This still did not stop the riots. According to Parkin, the main reason for the riots was communal: “The communal problem is the root cause of the failure of India to develop any deep feelings of national unity” (Parkin, 1945, p. 16).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, communalism became much more intense, especially in Muslim communities. These communities started to feel more aggressive toward Hindus because Muslims did not like the idea of being dominated by Hindus and because they were becoming more self-conscious as a

different religious group with different ideologies. Also, in 1935, the British government declared that they would not reach any constitutional agreement until all minority groups, especially Muslims, agreed to it. This made the Muslims realize that they held a powerful bargaining chip.

Some historians argued that Jinnah was a communalist whereas Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, and Patel were secularists and that, because of Jinnah's communalism, India had to go through the partition. It was not baseless for Jinnah to feel threatened, however, because it was clear that most of the leaders in Congress came from Hindu families and some of the same members of Congress were also members of the Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

3.2. The Two-Nation Theory Versus the One-Nation Theory

In 1930, Jinnah introduced the two-nation theory, which some historians believe originated from his friend Sir Mohammad Iqbal. However, according to Professor Richard Bonney, the two-nation theory was actually created by T.W. Holderness in 1911. At the end of the Bengal partition, Holderness said that the British administration considered Indian Muslims "for many purposes a nation" (as quoted in Bonney, 2004, p. 6). In 1924, Lala Lajpat Rai wrote in *The Tribune* that, if it were up to him, there would have been four Muslim states: "the Pathan Province or the North-West Frontier, Western Punjab, Sindh, and Eastern Bengal" (as quoted in Bonney, 2004, p. 6).

To Mahatma Gandhi and many leaders, India was the motherland, and, at first, Azad and Nehru shared the same view as Gandhi. In 1942, Nehru told Sir Stafford Cripps that he would go to whatever length necessary to keep India whole. However, when Nehru chose independence over unity in 1947, he accepted the idea of partition because he felt that it was inevitable (Azad, 1960, p. 217) yet instead of addressing the about to be created new nation as "Pakistan," he spoke of "a procedure for self-determination in certain areas of India" (as quoted in Khan, 2007, p. 3).

In his lecture to the Commonwealth in 1976, Nicholas Mansergh compared the Indian struggle for independence with the Irish struggle for independence, as he felt that both Irish and Indian national movements did not grasp the importance of conciliating minority communities in their "deep felt need to safeguard" the interest of the majority (Mansergh, 1978, p. 9). Mansergh argued that even though the majority vote may win an election, the voice of the minority still matters. Nehru did not care enough to understand how Jinnah or the AIML might have felt when he said that there were two forces in India, British imperialism and Indian nationalism. Although this dismissed the AIML as a third party, it claimed to represent 94 million Muslims out of a population of 389 million (Parkin, 1945, p. 91). Still, it became quite clear to Jinnah that, when Muslims did not win a sole majority in any state and only won 108 out of 482 Muslims seats in 1937, it was not possible to achieve a strong voice in India if Britain left and Muslims stayed in India as a minority group. That is why, after the August Offer in 1940, Muslims felt the need for a separate country. To avoid being dominated by Hindus in Congress, the AIML announced that partition was the only way. Jinnah felt that Pakistan (which literally means "Sacred Land") did not mean separation, but rather a place where Muslims could be free, independent from other races and religions, and able to preserve their ideology.

The Hindu and Muslim communities grew apart in the period between 1932 and 1947 and became political adversaries. The rift increased when the communal electorate was introduced in the 1937 provincial election. Muslims automatically became the most powerful community in Bengal and Punjab as they outnumbered the Hindus and Sikhs.

The effect of the two-nation theory in Bengal let the AIML win an impressive total of 114 seats in the 1946 Bengal Legislative Assembly election, as opposed to the 87 seats won in Congress. Soon after, the tolerance between the two religions started to fade away. Based on Jinnah's urge, the AIML adopted a resolution rejecting the May 16th plan on July 29, 1946, which gave Congress one seat more than the AIML, and called on Muslims throughout India to observe a "Direct Action Day" in protest on August 16, 1946 (www.massviolence.org/The-Calcutta-Riots-of-1946).

3.3. The Great Calcutta Killing

The Great Calcutta Killing, the darkest day in the history of Bengal, occurred on August 16, 1946, creating "bloodbath and disorder" (Das, 1982, p. 117). The leader of Bengali Muslims at that time was Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who believed in power, money, and getting whatever he wanted through his personal *goondas* (henchmen). In an effort to control Calcutta, Suhrawardy started the riot and killings (Das, 1982, p. 119). During the four days of the killing, between five and ten thousand people died and almost fifteen thousand were injured. The violence made the British realize that they were losing control over Indians and made Congress realize that Bengal was a place they should be worried about. The riot taught Jinnah that if

Muslims stayed in India, there was a chance that the Hindu majority could slaughter them.

4. THE ROLE OF MOUNTBATTEN

On March 31, 1947, Viceroy Lord Mountbatten wrote in one of his personal reports that “unless I act quickly I may well find the real beginnings of a civil war on my hands” (as quoted in Tunzelmann, 2007, p. 148). He ultimately advocated a treaty that caused more bloodshed and devastation than that which he intended to prevent. Despite having until 1948, Lord Mountbatten pushed his plan for partition to the leaders of the Congress Working Committee and AIML because he was eager to go back to his naval career and life in England. He assured them that if partition was accepted by the majority, he would stop all bloodshed and rioting by force, even if he had to use the military or armed police. Yet, when the actual partition happened, he did nothing, which proved the theory that, just like most of the British officials, he did not care what happened to Indians. Lord Mountbatten was able to persuade the British parliament to agree with his plan that the “provinces of Bengal and Punjab would be partitioned on the basis of majority population in the districts” (Bose, 1965, p. 115). No one blamed Lord Mountbatten or the British for rushing the freedom process and not letting the leaders of Congress or the AIML help the citizens of India understand what was actually happening and how the partition would impact them. Sir Cyril Radcliffe was given only forty days to draw the dividing lines, although he should have been given at least two years. Millions of lives were in the hands of a man who had neither any interest in Indian politics nor was allowed to converse with the Indian politicians; Radcliffe followed the main idea of 1905’s partition of Bengal when he designed the partition of India in 1947. East Pakistan was created in 1947 based on almost the same provincial lines drawn in 1905, except that the northern part of hill areas remained with India this time, making a corridor through which Indians could have access to Assam and other provinces in the eastern border regions.

4.1. Freedom at Last

Lord Mountbatten went to Karachi to inaugurate the dominion of Pakistan on August 14, 1947, and the next day at midnight, the Indian dominion was formed (Azad, 1960, p. 241). At 4:00 pm on August 15, 1947, the flag of free India was hoisted and people felt joyful to be part of a free nation. However, the joy did not last more than forty-eight hours because only Congress and the AIML accepted the partition. The people of India, mainly Bengali Hindus and Sikhs, rebelled against the partition because they felt deeply betrayed and hurt. The news of communal riots, murder, death, and cruelty spread all over the country. “Even the Muslim League was horrified by the result and started to say openly that this was not what they had meant by partition,” wrote Azad (Azad, 1960, p. 242). In fact, Jinnah did not want to divide Bengal. He was a smart man, and he understood that it would be impossible to rule over East Pakistan from such a distance. Jinnah wanted the whole of Punjab, not half of both Punjab and Bengal province. According to Jinnah, he “should be delighted” if Bengal “remain[ed] united and independent,” since Calcutta would not be part of East Pakistan (Tunzelmann, 2007, p. 201). Nonetheless, Bengal became divided.

Who was responsible for the division? It seemed that Congress did not want Bengal to become an independent nation, nor did the East Bengal Muslim League want to join India. Nehru might have shared the British sentiment and fear that controlling all of Bengal or Punjab would not be an easy task, so he ignored both Mahatma Gandhi and Azad, who strongly argued against partition and went along with the British plan of division. Sadly, this action cost the lives of millions of innocent people in the partition and rioting (Azad, 1960, p. 222–223). The fact is that the partition achieved nothing for many Muslims. After the partition, Jinnah left for Karachi to be with those Muslims who were moving to Pakistan or were already living there. Those that were living in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar had to stay in India, and they became an insignificant minority group (Azad, 1960, p. 242–244).

Shortly after Pakistan was created, west and east parts of Pakistan started to grow apart based on their cultural and language differences. In 1971, with the help of Indian military, East Pakistan finally declared its independence from Pakistan and became a separate nation-state called Bangladesh.

5. THE STORIES OF REFUGEES

Mr. K. Bandyopadhyay, a Brahmin Hindu Bengali District Magistrate under the British Raj, had to leave everything behind when his house in Dhaka was surrounded by a few hundred Muslims who wanted to make an example out of him and his family by killing them and burning their house to the ground. Eleven sentries, who were also Muslims, guarded the house and made the family run for their lives in the middle of night with only the clothes on their backs. When they reached West Bengal, they had nothing and were forced to live under a tree, cooking whatever they found growing near the outskirts of a pond. The suffering was so intolerable that his wife died shortly after they reached West Bengal, leaving behind five daughters and a

baby boy.

There are thousands of tragic stories that can be found in each side of Bengal, and some are darker than what was described above. Women were often raped or had to use their bodies to earn money to feed their families. In the refugee camps, young women were sold for money and both religious groups used women to their advantage. Decent people became beggars, thieves, and murderers. One of the famous post-partition writers, Manik Bandyopadhyay, wrote *Padma Nadir Majhi*, a novel based on the life of a fisherman before and after the partition. Producer and screenplay writer Ritwik Ghatak made *Megha Dhaka Tara*, a movie portraying a refugee family's struggle for survival. Numerous other books and movies were made based on the suffering and consequences associated with the 1947 partition.

6. THE LEGACY OF PARTITION

There were many immediate disadvantages of the partition of Bengal. According to historian Tunzelmann, East Pakistan "was deliberately" created "to be incapable of supporting itself" because Bengal had been one united province for many centuries, its economy was based on the whole region (Tunzelmann, 2007, p. 201). For instance, the cash crop jute was produced in regions that became part of East Bengal, whereas the factories required to produce jute merchandises were on the Hugli River in West Bengal near Calcutta, making it impossible for either country to continue this particular industry and most certainly affecting hundreds of thousands of people's ways of living. A main struggle that both Bengalis faced was how to continue to grow or produce jute. In West Bengal, some of the land that grew rice was converted into jute, and in East Pakistan, they made jute factories. Furthermore, the worldwide demand for jute products fell because of the rise of plastic, which affected the economy greatly. However, in recent years, jute has been in demand again and it became one of the most popular export goods in Bangladesh, leaving West Bengal far behind. In the interest of labor, the Communist Party launched many strikes in West Bengal. As a result, most of the jute factories are now closed and the Indian economy lost a great deal of profit in this particular area.

The representation of the border in the lives of Bengalis can be explained by looking at the line that geographically separates the two nations. In some places, like Murshidabad and Nadia districts in West Bengal or Jessore and Khulna districts in Bangladesh, the border divides the same house into two, putting one side in West Bengal and the other side in Bangladesh. In most of the ordinary human senses, the existence of the border does not signify anything at all, and every day thousands of people cross this invisible wall and enter into each territory quite easily. The urge to make a better living compels many poor Bangladeshis to cross the border in the dawn. From the rail stations of Krishnanagar or Ranaghat, they catch the local train to work as servants in the homes of the vast suburbs of twenty-four Parganas, Hugli and Calcutta (Kolkata) districts in West Bengal. Since the value of the Bangladeshi rupee is lower than the Indian rupee, these poor Bangladeshis are able to buy small lands in Bangladesh to have a better future. Many people simply cross the border by bribing the border guards to gain entrance into India, and the local-level politicians provide them with the necessary official documents to become citizens of India in exchange for their allegiance to that member and their promises to cast their votes to the party that member represents.

The partition of 1947 divided Bengali communities into two sectors; *Bangal*, who were Bengali refugees (Bengali refugees from 1947 or 1971 or even when the military coup took over Bangladesh under the leadership of Hussain Muhammad Ershad in 1981 or 1982), and *Ghoti*, who originally resided in West Bengal. The suburbs of the greater Calcutta (Kolkata) region contain many *paras*, small areas consisting of approximately one hundred houses with a distinct name to identify them and separate them apart. Some *paras* were sometimes dominated by the *Bangal* and some were dominated by the *Ghoti*. A mild neighborly hostility between *Bangal* and *Ghoti* exists among the inhabitants of these *paras*, and some even refuses to marry someone from the other sectors of Bengalis. The rivalry between *Bangal* and *Ghoti* seems an unending problem that even stretches into how residents support local provincial-level, Kolkata-based football teams; East Bengal and Mohun Bagan. The majority of East Bengal football team supporters are *Bangal*, while the majority of Mohun Bagan football team supporters are *Ghoti*. Those who were refugees still speak with a distinct local accent of Bengali inside their homes in order to maintain their originality as Bengalis from the other side of the border. Surprisingly however, neither party ever used its strength to erase the border, but rather spent its energy reminiscing about the past while maintaining its position as the victim of an unjust cruelty, or feel guilty that they were not.

7. CONCLUSION

Partition happened, and, in the end, it seemed that nobody but the British won. They had to leave India, but they also left India in a situation in which India would face numerous problems for many generations. The

unwillingness of the British Raj to depart from India was clear from an article written by Clair Price in the *New York Times* on July 10, 1921, in which she stated that "British imperialism would be compelled to evacuate Great Britain itself before it would willingly evacuate India" (Price, 1921, para. x).

The foundation of the two newly established countries was hollow, and it seemed that political trouble in India was about to start because many Muslims stayed behind in India and felt that the Indian government would provide for their needs. A division of land that started in 1905 and became wider in 1947, and in 1971, formed three countries with an unfathomable amount of bitterness and hatred for each other. Tagore's *Swadeshi* and Mahatma Gandhi's one-nation theory seem to be only a dream when looking at the current situation and foreign relations between India and Pakistan or Pakistan and Bangladesh. The tension and hostility between these countries so high that Bashabi Fraser expressed her surprise that these countries were ever united. In her poem "This Border," she describes the border as a wall which "denies centuries of friendship and families," and "Makes you my friend, my enemy" (Fraser, 2008, p. 594). It seems that the invisible wall has an emotional, political, and social presence in the lives of the Bengalis, and no one knows how to cross over it!

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