

CHAPTER - 5

UNDERSTANDING PARTITION

POLITICS, MEMORIES, EXPERIENCES

Key concepts in nutshell

Sources: Oral testimonies - narrations, memories, diaries, family history and handwritten accounts.

Partition or Holocaust

- i. Almost 15 million people had to cross borders
- ii. They were rendered homeless, having suddenly lost all their immovable property and most of their movable assets, separated from many of their relatives and friends as well.
- iii. Thus stripped of their local or regional cultures, they were forced to begin picking up their life from scratch.
- iv. The Holocaust in Germany is remembered and referred to in our contemporary concerns so much. Yet, differences between the two events should not be overlooked.
- v. In 1947-48, the subcontinent did not witness any state-driven extermination as was the case with Nazi Germany
- vi. The “ethnic cleansing” that characterized the partition of India was carried out by self-styled representatives of religious communities rather than by state agencies

The power of stereotypes -

- The stereotypes of the extraterritorial and Pan Islamic loyalty comes fused with other objectionable ideas about both the communities, the Hindus as well as the Muslims.
- Some of these stereotypes pre-date Partition, but they were immensely strengthened because of 1947.
- The relationship between Pakistan and India has been profoundly shaped by this legacy of Partition.

Why partition took place –

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1. Mr. Jinnah's two nation Theory (the Hindus and Muslims in colonial India constituted two separate nations can be projected back into medieval history).
 2. The British policy of divide and rule.
 3. Separate electorates for Muslims, created by the colonial government in 1909 and expanded in 1919, crucially shaped the nature of communal politics.
 4. Hindu Muslim conflict and communal riots in different parts of the country.
 5. The secular and radical rhetoric of the Congress merely alarmed conservative Muslims and the Muslim landed elite, without winning over the Muslim masses.
 6. The Pakistan Resolution of 23rd March 1940 demanding a measure of autonomy for the Muslim-majority areas of the subcontinent.

Post-war development -

- Muslim league emerged as the sole representative of Indian Muslims in the provincial elections of **1946**.
- Cabinet mission proposal of a loose three-tier confederation in 1946 which failed.
- Direct action day by Muslim league on 16th August 1946. On this day, violence spread to many parts of the country.
- In March 1947 the Congress high command voted for dividing the Punjab and Bengal.

Post Partition Developments

- The collapse of the institutions of governance.
- Gandhiji's valiant effort to restore communal harmony and principle of Non-violence

· Gendering partition -----

- Women were raped, abducted and sold. Families were uprooted.
- Some began to develop new family bonds in their changed circumstances.
- But the Indian and Pakistani governments were insensitive to the complexities of human relationships and sent them back to their earlier families or locations.
- **Preserving honor -**
- Ideas of preserving community honor came into play in this period of extreme physical and psychological danger.
- The men feared that their females would be molested by the enemies, they killed their own women.

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- For the community of survivors, the remembrance ritual helps keep the memory alive.