

APPENDIX

Appendix

Partition of Midnapore: A chiaroscuro in Bengal politics

The history of the partition of Midnapore had an earlier history. Long before the announcement of Mr. Hare, the Divisional Commissioner of Burdwan, in 1907 it was a widespread rumour that the District of Midnapore would be divided into two districts. In his address to the town people of Midnapore, Hare pointed out that Midnapore Main (North) Ghatal and Jhargram would form one district with Midnapore as its headquarters, and that Midnapore south along With Tamruk and Contai would form the other with its headquarters at Higli near Kharagpur¹. 800 bighas of land was acquired for the proposed Higli district.² But it is learnt from the *Nihar* that before this announcement of Hare regarding the partition of Midnapore the people of Midnapore were informed by the district authority that the notables and the zamindars of the district must inform the District Magistrate and the Collector of their opinion about it³. It is also stated in the *Nihar* that so large a district with an area of 5,186 square miles and a population of 27,89,114 was too heavy a charge for the administrative authority⁴. That is why the partition of the district would be a satisfactory and wholesome solution of all their civil and judicial problems. In this

connection the *Nihar* writes that the Subdivisional Magistrate of Contai was directed by the District Collector to acquire 300 bighas of land for the setting up of the new district.⁵ Hatabari, a place close to Contai town might be the suitable spot for the purpose.⁶ This caused a sensation and agitation too in different places of the district. Public meetings and assemblages were held to discuss the pros and cons of the governmental design relating to the partition of the district.⁷ The general tone of the meetings was that the government would thus inflict an arbitrary and inhuman punishment on the people of Midnapore, and so this vindictive attitude and sinister design of the government had to be protested with all sorts of vehemence.⁸

Meanwhile the government gained the experience that the anti-Bengal-partition movement though mostly an elite movement in character, had made the people of Bengal politically much sensitive to and mentally furious and uproarious against the government intentions. Probably that is why the plan for the partition of Midnapore was not implemented. In this connection the *Nihar* writes 'The Government at last has repealed the partition of the district.'⁹

The question of partition came up again after a few years. After the first Midnapore Bomb Case Lt. Governor Lord Carmichael on the

recommendations of the District Administrative committee announced after his visit to Contai in 1913 that Midnapore was to be partitioned and that the headquarters of the new district town of Hijli would be located at Kharagpur¹⁰. Narendranath Das writes in this connection, "The Government of Bengal was then engaged in working out the scheme in detail behind the scene, while outwardly the costly buildings were begun to be erected on the outskirts of the Kharagpur Railway Settlement."¹¹ As a result the district roared in protest. Strangely enough the government of Lord Reading and the then Secretary of State dropped the partition scheme without expressing the government's intention.

Later in January 1915 the Bengal government again raised the issue and in accordance with the recommendations of the District Administrative Committee took the decision to partition the two districts Midnapore and Mymensingh as an essential part of the government's anti-terrorist strategy.¹² The Midnapore partition plan was made public on January 26, 1915.¹³ The announcement of the partition provoked widespread resentment among zaminders, lawyers, businessmen and so on.

A critical assessment of the anti-partition movement reveals that it

had no popular basis, and it never became a serious threat to the administration. Yet the government could not stick to its plan of partitioning Midnapore. Only just a year ago the government pleaded that the most appropriate step for the introduction of local-self-government in India was to divide up larger districts. But during the heyday of the Non-Cooperation Movement the Bengal government shelved the partition scheme principally for financial reasons. And since then the district became assured of its territorial integrity and solidarity.¹⁴

In 1931 the Midnapore partition question was presented before the people of Midnapore in a newer and stronger form. Now the question was the incorporation of Midnapore with the newly proposed Orissa Province. The question gained much weight and gravity when it was placed before the Federal Structure Committee.¹⁵ Sasmol and other leaders of Midnapore felt the seriousness of the situation. Protest-meetings were held, Sasmol sent protest letters and telegrams to higher authorities of the British Empire and also of the British India in which he pointed out "Midnapore refuses amalgamation with Orissa to a man. There is no cultural and linguistic unity between the two".¹⁶ Besides he prayed in a telegram to the Prime Minister, to see that Midnapore was properly represented in the Boundary Committee.¹⁷ The writings of Sasmol pregnant with facts and figures and logical arguments bore fruit; the policy of incorporating Midnapore with Orissa withered away.

Thus the rebellious spirit of Midnapore i.e. the spirit of fighting against all odds at all phases was crowned with heroic success, and Midnapore as a result remains to day in her old territorial grandeur holding her heroic ballads to future generations.

The partition of Midnapore resembles the partition of Bengal. But in depth and gravity and by nature these two were poles apart: because one was a district affair and the other was a provincial political matter. The protesters including lawyers, zamindars, businessmen and others against the Midnapore partition plan were guided by material interests, and the defenders gave weight to the partition plan only for regional interests. Here one may be reminded of Sasmol who at one point of time defended partition thinking that it would allow the people of Contai to enjoy the benefits of a district town.¹⁸ In the case of the partition of Bengal, despite the prevalence of sectarian and separatist attitudes, such a thing as one notices in the partition of Midnapore was inconceivable. Though weak in character this agitation against partition had definitely certain important bearings which greatly influenced the anti Union Board movement and the violation of the Salt-Law in Midnapore. It is thus evident that the history of anti-partition movement in Midnapore is a history of histories in the chiaroscuro in Bengal politics.

Note &References:

1. *Nihar*, July11, 1905, V - 4, N -46.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Nihar*, December20, 1904, V - 4, N -17.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Nihar*,January10, 1905, V - 4, N -20.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Nihar*, May21, 1907, V - 6, N - 38.
10. Narendra Nath Das, *Fight for Freedom in Midnapore (1928-38) [C. D. and Revolutionary Movements]*, Midnapore Itihas Rachana Samiti, Sangat Bazar, Midnapore, 1980, p.-116.
11. *Ibid.*
12. West Bengal State Archives, Home - Poll 11/1915, FR, Bengal (1 st half), February 1915.
13. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, November17, 1917.
14. West Bengal State Archives, Bengal Political Proceedings, December 1921, Nos. 20-5.

15. *Advance*, September 10, 1931.

16. *Advance*, September 11, 1931.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Bengal Political Proceedings, Political Department, March 1915, quoted
in S. Dasgupta, *Local Politics in Bengal*, p.-80.

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