

The result of all these events was an atmosphere of excitement and violence: and Tilak was convicted of sedition for having published the above verses and his speech at the Shivaji festival in connection with the killing of Afzal Khan.

4. *THE PARTITION OF BENGAL AND THE NEW SPIRIT.*

The scene again shifts from the Maharashtra to Bengal. Circumstances were there conspiring to give the agitation, started by Tilak in the nineties of the last century, a nation-wide character. The year 1905 constitutes one of the great landmarks in the history of Indian nationalism. Lord Curzon had brought with him the ideal of administrative efficiency and was trying to enforce it in the country. Lord Curzon may have meant well; but his measures and still more his words, were not calculated to check the growing tension of the popular mind in India. He was fond of exchanging swords with the nationalists, and made no secret of his contempt for the democratic aspiration of the intelligentsia. He had set before himself twelve administrative problems, the solution of which was bound to produce wide-spread alarm in the country. People felt that his ideal of centralization would virtually put the political clock back, and deliberately reverse the generous policy enunciated in the Queen's Proclamation and carried out to some extent by Viceroys like Lord Ripon. His attempt in 1899 to reduce the elected members of the Calcutta Corporation to half their original number and to vest its administration in a General Committee was thought to lay an axe at the root of Local Self-Government. This was followed by "the officialization of the Universities, the curtailment of high education, the abolition of open competitive tests for the Provincial Civil Services, the enactment of the Civil

Official Secrets Act: " acts keenly resented by the public. His imperial tendencies which brought him into conflict with the rising nationalism of the country were equally revealed by the Durbar held in 1902 at Delhi, and his Tibetan expedition (1903-4) to establish Imperial prestige in Central Asia. The Durbar of 1902, like the Durbar of 1877, followed a terrible famine, and the Congress remarked: " On what ground did they protest? Not because they were wanting in loyalty to the Sovereign whose coronation it was intended to celebrate, but because His Majesty would have been the first - had he known - to forbid his representative to offer a pompous pageant to a starving population." The Tibetan expedition caused resentment because the people were opposed to see fresh extensions of British imperialism at the expense of poor India. Gokhale in 1905 as the President of the Congress gave Lord Curzon full credit for his wonderful intellectual gifts, his brilliant powers of expression, his phenomenal energy and his boundless enthusiasm for work: but remarked that he lacked sympathetic imagination without which no man can understand an alien people.

Lord Curzon expressed rather frankly his views: and this even gave greater offence to the susceptibilities of a sensitive people than many of his measures. His administrative acts were the outcome of a diplomatic policy, of the adoption of a new programme, of the application of a new ideal and principle. It was said of Lord Ripon that he tried to shift the very foundations of British rule in India. The same is true in an opposite sense of Lord Curzon. His attempt to whittle down the Proclamation called forth a spirit of rejoinder from Surendranath Bannerjee in 1904: " Lord Curzon from his place in the Imperial Council...declared that by our environments, our heritage, and our upbringing we are unequal to the responsibilities of high office under British rule. I

venture to say, sir, that never was a deeper affront offered to the people of India by the representative of the sovereign. It is bad enough to repudiate the Proclamation, but it is adding insult to injury to cast a slur upon the people of this country."

In 1905, Lord Curzon with his usual bluntness made a sweeping charge against the Bengalees as regards their love of flattery and disregard for truth, at the convocation of the University of Calcutta.

"I hope I am making no false or arrogant claim when I say that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception. I do not thereby mean to claim that Europeans are universally or even generally truthful, still less do I mean that Asiatics deliberately or habitually deviate from the truth. The one proposition would be absurd, and the other insulting. But undoubtedly truth took a high place in moral codes of the West before it... had been similarly honoured in the East, where craftiness and diplomatic skill have always been held in much repute."

The remarks were cautiously and carefully made with due qualifications and reservations: but in a public utterance of this type, these qualifications and reservations were overlooked and the general statement stood. There was a storm of indignation all over the country at this allegation that the Orientals were liars. The *Amrit Bazaar Patrika* came out with the rejoinder about Lord Curzon himself: this may be irrelevant, but it served the purpose of an effective counter-attack.

But the crowning act of his administration was undoubtedly the Partition of Bengal in 1905. It really proved the signal for a general explosion of anti-British feeling all over the country. Bengal might have been too

large a charge for a single man: and the existing boundaries of some of the provinces were no doubt "antiquated, illogical, and productive of inefficiency." But there were other ways of serving the end of efficiency than the dismemberment, cold-blooded vivisection of a homogeneous province, with people sharing identical aspirations, in total disregard of the wishes and feelings of the people themselves. Here is the official explanation: "It cannot be for the lasting good of any country or any people that public opinion, or what passes for it, should be manufactured by a comparatively small number of people at a single centre, and should be disseminated thence for universal adoption, all other views being discouraged or suppressed." "From every point of view, it appears to us desirable to encourage the growth of centres of independent opinion, local aspirations, local ideals, and to preserve the growing intelligence and enterprise of Bengal from being cramped and stunted by the process of forcing it prematurely into a mould of rigid and sterile uniformity." No wonder that the people of Bengal saw in this an attempt, a direct attack, at their growing national solidarity. The educated classes of Calcutta had begun to dominate the whole intellectual and political life of Bengal: and hence this attempt to divide them and to weaken them. The Indian politician further saw in it a deliberate attempt to pit the Hindus and the Mahommedans against one another. It was a deliberate counter-blast to the national agitation of the Congress. The Hon. Mr. Chaudhari wrote that the main object of the Curzon policy was "to drive a wedge between Hindu and Mahommedan. Lord Curzon apparently took the Vambery view that India could only be held on the basis of racial animosity. He feared that a *rapprochement* between Hindu and Mahommedan would be fatal, for underneath the old antagonism there was developing a political unity. The whole Curzon official attitude was directed to feeding the racial fires. That was the reason

for the Partition of Bengal—to carve a Mahommedan State out of one which, as a whole, was Hindu: to set up in Dacca a rival Mahommedan centre to the Hindu centre of Calcutta. The idea ran through all the Curzon tradition. Foster Mahommedanism at the expense of Hinduism. Where Mahommedanism was weak, the rights of the minority must be sustained; where it was strong, the rule of the majority must prevail.”

The way in which the measure was carried out was as provoking as the measure itself. The scheme was concocted in the dark and forced upon the people in the teeth of their fiercest opposition. The Indians felt themselves “insulted, humiliated, and tricked.” Gokhale saw in it the worst feature of the bureaucratic rule in India its utter contempt for public opinion, its arrogant pretensions to superior wisdom, its cool preference of Service interests to those of the governed. If, he said, the Indians whom the whole country delighted to honour are to be made to realise the utter humiliation and helplessness of their position in their own country, then “Goodbye to all hope of co-operating in any way with the bureaucracy in the interests of the people.”

The country was thus driven to a desperate fight for its existence: and sentiment proved a more powerful force in rousing and uniting the people than the cogent reasonings of the Moderate orators, or the tales of economic exploitation circulated for nearly half a century by the nationalist press. Reactionary rulers have again and again proved the greatest benefactors of the people in the history of India. The fanaticism of Aurungzeb, with his extraordinary zeal for political and religious unification, paved the way for the downfall of the Mahommedan Empire. it was the over-centralised rule of Aurungzeb which, to a great extent, brought about the famous

Hindu awakening in the Maharashtra and elsewhere. It was the same partiality for efficiency, the same tradition of strong personal rule, the same disregard for popular opinions which Lord Curzon displayed, that brought another famous national awakening in India. It is thus that history repeats itself: and the autocrats prove virtually, in spite of themselves, the founders of the great movements of their times. Lord Curzon will no doubt go down to posterity as the maker of the Indian nation.

5. *GROWTH OF AN ANTI-BRITISH FEELING.*

The Partition of Bengal was only a signal for the national outburst: there was in preparation for a long time a movement in the minds of men which made them more and more discontented with things as they were. There was a certain disloyalty, a certain type of sedition, a kind of political and economic unrest, long before the Congress was born—a feeling which from time to time found expression in the Vernacular Press. Sir Richard Temple wrote in his Administrative Reports of the leanings of the Vernacular Press towards “political observations of an evil tendency, of the increasing disposition to complain of everything that exists,” and he wrote after his retirement: “this uneasiness and restlessness all the more irksome as arising from no definable cause, and not being susceptible of any specific remedy—found vent in the Vernacular Press. Of these utterances, some were certainly disloyal, or even worse, while others were merely captious, peevish, fractious, petulant.” That there always was a certain amount of extremism there, is clear from a remark made by the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* of January 23, 1875, in an article tending to justify the attempt to poison Col. Phayre at Baroda, “Surely to poison...an obscure Colonel is by far a lighter crime than to emasculate a nation, that the government may rule without trouble!”