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Notes for pg semester 2

Formation of Bihar Province in 1912: Historical Background and Its Political, Social, and Administrative Causes

The creation of Bihar as a separate province on 22 March 1912 was a landmark event in the regional and political history of eastern India. Prior to 1912, Bihar was administratively part of the Bengal Presidency under British rule. The separation of Bihar from Bengal and the formation of the new province of Bihar and Orissa was not merely an administrative adjustment; it was the result of sustained political consciousness, regional assertion, and socio-cultural awakening among the people of Bihar.

The historical background of the formation of Bihar province can be understood through political, social, and administrative dimensions.

I. Political Causes

1. Growth of Regional Political Consciousness

By the late nineteenth century, an educated middle class had emerged in Bihar. Influenced by modern education and nationalist ideas, Bihari leaders began to articulate the need for a separate political identity. Leaders such as Sachchidananda Sinha, Mahesh Narayan, and Ali Imam played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion.

They argued that Bihar had distinct historical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics that were being neglected under Bengal's dominance.

2. Reaction to Bengal Partition (1905)

The partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon intensified political debates about administrative restructuring. Although the partition primarily affected Bengal, it opened discussions about the reorganization of provinces on administrative and cultural grounds.

The annulment of Bengal Partition in 1911 created a new opportunity to reorganize eastern India, which ultimately led to the creation of Bihar and Orissa in 1912.

3. Demand for Representation

Bihar was politically marginalized under the Bengal Presidency. Government jobs, educational institutions, and administrative opportunities were largely dominated by Bengalis. Bihari elites felt underrepresented in legislative councils and civil services. The demand for a separate province was therefore closely linked with aspirations for political representation and participation.

II. Social and Cultural Causes

1. Assertion of Regional Identity

Bihar possessed a rich historical legacy dating back to ancient Magadha and Pataliputra. However, during British rule, it was often treated as a backward appendage of Bengal. Educated Biharis began to assert pride in their historical and cultural heritage.

The movement for separation was closely linked with the development of a distinct Bihari identity rooted in language (Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi), culture, and traditions.

2. Role of the Press

The regional press played a decisive role in awakening public opinion. Newspapers and journals highlighted economic exploitation, neglect of education, and lack of infrastructure in Bihar. The press argued that separation was necessary for balanced development and protection of local interests.

3. Educational Backwardness

Compared to Bengal, Bihar had fewer educational institutions and lower literacy rates. Calcutta (Kolkata) was the centre of higher education and administration, which marginalized students and intellectuals from Bihar. The demand for a separate province was also a demand for educational reform and institutional development within Bihar.

III. Administrative Causes

1. Administrative Inconvenience

The Bengal Presidency was one of the largest provinces in British India. Governing such a vast territory was administratively inefficient. Bihar, being geographically distant from Calcutta, suffered from bureaucratic delays and neglect.

British administrators increasingly recognized the need for decentralization to improve governance efficiency.

2. Economic Neglect

Despite its agricultural richness and mineral resources, Bihar remained economically underdeveloped. Revenue generated from Bihar was often utilized for the development of Bengal. There was inadequate investment in irrigation, roads, railways, and industry within Bihar.

Administrative separation was seen as a way to ensure better financial allocation and focused governance.

3. Reorganization after the Delhi Durbar (1911)

At the Delhi Durbar of 1911, King George V announced major administrative changes, including the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. As part of this broader reorganization, Bihar and Orissa were carved out of Bengal in 1912 to create a more manageable administrative structure.

IV. Significance of the Formation (1912)

The formation of Bihar province marked:

The recognition of regional aspirations within the colonial framework.

The rise of modern regionalism within Indian nationalism.

A new phase in Bihar's political development, which later contributed significantly to the national movement (Champaran, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience).

Although initially Bihar and Orissa remained a combined province until 1936 (when Orissa became separate), the 1912 formation laid the foundation of modern Bihar.

Conclusion

The formation of Bihar province in 1912 was the outcome of a combination of political assertion, socio-cultural awakening, and administrative necessity. It reflected the emergence of regional identity within the broader framework of Indian nationalism. While the British justified it as an administrative measure, for the people of Bihar it represented the fulfillment of a long-standing aspiration for self-governance, dignity, and development.

Thus, the creation of Bihar was not merely a bureaucratic restructuring but a milestone in the evolution of modern regional consciousness in India.