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The Independence of Bangladesh - I

Lead: In late 1971 the eastern provinces of Pakistan broke away and formed a separate nation. The state of Bangladesh was born.

Intro.: "A Moment In Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: The vast sub-continent of India has for centuries been the scene of ethnic and religious conflict with various languages and sects vying for control. The Buddhism that swept over India in the Third Century was soon washed away by Hinduism which itself was supplanted in many areas around

A.D. 1200 by militant Islam. One of those regions where the general population was attracted to the Moslem faith was Bengal, the area east of the city of Calcutta and shaped by the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers.

In the 1700s the British East India Company established its base at Calcutta and through its trading and military presence became the dominant force in the region. Reluctant to become involved in the day to day administration of India the Company supported local rulers. In Bengal some of these were Muslim but most were Hindu rajahs. They in turn appointed agents, usually upper-class Hindus who collected taxes from the

peasants, who were mainly Muslims.

Though Islam was the dominant religion in Bengal and in far western India, this was not true across all of India. The resulting conflict between minority Muslim and majority Hindu intensified in the twentieth century with the Muslim community drawing ever closer to the British and most Hindus with increasing ferocity advocating independence from the British Empire. The Islamic faithful did this for very practical purposes. Should the British leave, they feared their status as a Muslim minority in a sea of Hindus. The British played upon this fear and used the Muslims as a political counterweight to seditious Hindu forces, but this was a game that

could not last forever. The Indian independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi was growing stronger as each year passed. Attempts as cooperation between Gandhi's National Congress Party and the Moslem League led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah failed in the 1920s and it was increasingly clear that a united India embracing all faiths and languages was going to be impossible. By the end of World War II, the pressure for the British to get out was becoming irresistible and for the Muslims that created an enormous problem. Next time: The partition of India.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Wilcox, Wayne Ayres. *The Emergence of Bangladesh: Problems and Opportunities for a Redefined American Policy in South Asia*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, 1973.

Wright, Denis. *Bangladesh: Origins and Indian Ocean Relations, 1971-1975*. London, UK: Oriental University Press, 1988.

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