

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

SPECIAL ISSUE MARCH WEEK 2



Special Issue

March (Week 2)

Contents

All about the Surat SIMI gathering case of 2001	2
All about Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's opposition to the United Bengal plan.....	3
All about the Bamiyan Buddhas	5





All about the Surat SIMI gathering case of 2001

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Over 19 years after they were arrested, the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate of Surat has acquitted all 127 persons accused of “promoting a banned organisation”, the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in 2001.*

What is the 2001 case?

- On December 28, 2001, over two months after the 9/11 attack, the Surat city police arrested 127 people from 10 different states, gathered at the Rajeshree Hall in Athwa Lines area of the city under the banner of the All-India Minority Education Board.
- They were arrested under Sections 3 (declaration of an association as unlawful), 10 (punishment for being member of an unlawful association), 13 (punishment for unlawful activities) and 15 (terrorist act) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967, which was then not as stringent a law as its amended version is now.
- Police seized from them blank enrolment forms for the SIMI that had been banned by the union government in September that year, verses in praise of Osama Bin Laden of Al-Qaeda, handouts in Urdu and Arabic and mobile phones. The two-day seminar that began on December 28 was to discuss “Educational Rights and Constitutional guidance.”
- “We conducted the raids around midnight and found some of them sleeping. Some had mobile phones which were rare those days, and some even chewed up the SIM cards (to destroy evidence),” Roushan said.
- He said that on verification, it was found that the organisation, said to be registered in Delhi, did not exist. This was the biggest case made out against SIMI then.

Who were the big names among the 123 booked?

- Police picked up 123 persons from the spot. According to Roushan, the gathering included “two vice-chancellors from Rajasthan, 4-5 professors, doctors, engineers, and one retired judge”.
- The hall was booked by Alif Majid Mansuri, brother of Sajid Mansuri who was associated with SIMI. Other people gathered included government officers, teachers and religious scholars among others.
- Those from SIMI included its Gujarat zone president Arif Kagzi, former SIMI presidents of Ahmedabad Asif Shaikh and Sohel Patel, and former Ansar group leader Rafik Deedar.
- Those acquitted include 44 people from Maharashtra, 25 from Gujarat, 13 from Madhya Pradesh, 11 from Karnataka, 10 from Uttar Pradesh, nine from Rajasthan, four each from West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, two from Bihar and one from Chhattisgarh.
- Of these, 111 were present as the chief judicial magistrate pronounced the order in Surat. Seven have died and the case against them was abated, and five are in jail for other offences, while four others are bedridden.

What did the court say?

- The court acquitted all 127 accused holding them “not guilty” of the charges under various sections of the UAPA and ordered their release.
- Giving them the benefit of doubt, the court observed, “The arguments of the prosecution about the gathering of the people, to give momentum to the SIMI activities, is not reliable or satisfactory, which leads to many doubts in the case. As a result of which the accused can be given benefit of doubt”.
- The accused had in their statements under CrPC Section 313 mentioned that they are not members of SIMI. They came to attend the educational seminar at Surat organised by the All India Minorities



Education Board. The court observed that the prosecution had failed to prove that the accused were members of SIMI.

The link with 2008 serial blast case

- Sajid Mansuri, who was evading arrest, was captured in August 2008 and charged for his alleged involvement in the Ahmedabad serial bombings on July 26, 2008, which killed 56 persons. The bombings were alleged to have been carried out by Indian Mujahideen.
- Then Bharuch District Superintendent of Police Subhash Trivedi said Mansuri had gone underground to evade arrest after his name cropped up during investigations in the 2001 case and was finally arrested by the Ahmedabad police.
- Incumbent chief of the Gujarat police force, DGP Ashish Bhatia who was joint commissioner in Surat at that time and later was involved in the serial blast investigations says, “They (the alleged SIMI members) continued to hold camps in Halol in Gujarat, Kerala and other places as we found in the investigations in the blast case”.

Why the prolonged trial

- According to IGP Roushan, this was a huge case for the Surat police to handle. “We got a remand of 14 days in the very beginning, and then the issue was of where to keep them. So we used the lock-ups of all the ten police stations of Surat city to keep them on remand,” he said.
- The case was registered for trial in 2002, and the hearing in the case completed in 2015, pending verdict. The government first appointed advocate Akhil Desai from Ahmedabad as special prosecutor in this case. The accused got bail from the Gujarat High Court, after almost one year.
- Later the government appointed Jagrupsinh Rajput as public prosecutor. He conducted the case hearing and later on he resigned to contest the local Assembly election from Ahmedabad on a BJP ticket and won in 2012. Advocate Nayan Sukhadwala, District Government Pleader was then appointed to carry out proceedings of the case.
- Sources told that five judges were also transferred in the mean time and the entire case went on for 19 years and nine months. said subsequently five judges were transferred, sources in Surat district court, said.

What next?

- All the acquitted in this case are out on bail, except five who are in jails in Gujarat. Government Pleader Sukhadwala said it is not yet decided whether the order of acquittal will be challenged in the Gujarat High Court.

All about Shyama Prasad Mukherjee’s opposition to the United Bengal plan

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: In a recent election rally in Muchipara, West Bengal, BJP politician Suvendu Adhikari spoke about the contributions of the party’s founding father, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. “Without Syama Prasad Mukherjee’s contribution, this country would have been an Islamic country and we would be living in Bangladesh,” he said about the founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the predecessor of the BJP.

Details:

- Mukherjee, who was president of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha between 1943 and 1946, is known to have been the man behind the Partition of Bengal in 1947.



- He was one of the strongest voices to have opposed the united Bengal plan of the Bengal provincial Muslim League leader and prime minister of Bengal Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, as per which Bengal would be a separate nation, independent from both India and Pakistan.

How was the United Bengal plan conceived?

- A most striking aspect of the Partition of Bengal was the fact that the same Bengali Hindus who had vociferously opposed the 1905 partition of the region by Lord Curzon, were the ones who demanded the division of the province on communal lines less than half a century later.
- One way to understand this is by noting the fact that the communal skirmishes that had started in 1905, reached its peak by 1947. But there was also the fact that Bengal politics changed dramatically in 1932 with the introduction of the Communal Award.
- It gave more seats in the Legislative Council to Muslims than Hindus. It also provided separate electorates for the Dalits. Consequently, Bengali Hindus ceased to be as significant and visible in provincial politics as they were before.
- Political scientist Bidyut Chakrabarty in his book, '1932-1947' writes that in the aftermath of the 1937 elections when the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and the Muslim League formed a coalition government in Bengal, they took a number of legislative steps to ameliorate the condition of the Muslims in the state.
- "In a situation where Muslims constituted a majority but lived under the socio-economic condition of the Hindu majority, any attempt to improve the conditions of the former was bound to provoke opposition from the Hindus," he writes. "Hindu politicians both within and outside the legislature characterised them as well-engineered devices to squash the Hindus."
- What further aggravated the situation was the communal violence in Calcutta in August 1946 and those in Noakhali just seven weeks later. Historians of Bengal Partition agree that the Calcutta riots were by far the most cataclysmic event leading to the Partition of the region. Consequently, in February 1947, the Hindu Mahasabha under Mukherjee put forward the demand for dividing Bengal on religious grounds.
- In the meantime, however, Suhrawardy along with few other top Bengal politicians like Sarat Bose and K.S. Roy came up with an alternative for the Partition. They argued for a united Bengal, independent from India and Pakistan. Suhrawardy had realised that the Partition of Bengal would mean economic disaster for East Bengal since all jute mills, coal mines and industrial plants would go to the western part of the state. "Suhrawardy argued strongly for a united Bengal because Bengal was indivisible in view of its 'economic integrity, mutual reliance and the necessity of creating a strong workable state'", writes Chakrabarty
- Further, Suhrawardy argued that Bengal remained economically backward because of the presence of a large number of non-Bengali businessmen who exploited the people of the region for their own benefit. Hence, if Bengal was to prosper economically, it had to stand independent and in charge of its own resources. There was also the factor that Calcutta, which was the largest city in India at that time and the commercial capital of the country, would go to the western part, were Partition to happen.

Why did Mukherjee oppose the united Bengal plan?

- The Hindu Mahasabha under Mukherjee spearheaded a fierce attack against the united Bengal scheme, which he thought would force Hindus to live under Muslim domination.
- In a letter to Viceroy Mountbatten, as reproduced in Chakrabarty's book, Mukherjee argued, "if ever an impartial survey is made of Bengal's administration in the last ten years, it will appear that Hindus have suffered not only on account of communal riots and disturbance, but in every sphere of national activities, educational, economic, political and even religious."
- He further defended the Partition to the Viceroy by drawing upon Jinnah's two nation theory. He argued that since according to Jinnah Hindus and Muslims are two separate nations and Muslims must have their own state, therefore Hindus in Bengal who constitute almost half of the region's population may well demand that they must not be compelled to live under Muslim domination.



- Finally, for Mukherjee the idea of a united Bengal was not appealing because he believed that a 'sovereign undivided Bengal would be a virtual Pakistan'.
- Eventually, the idea of a united Bengal failed to garner sufficient support from among the Muslim League and the Congress. It also did not find sufficient support from the grassroots as most Hindus favoured the Partition of Bengal.

All about the Bamiyan Buddhas

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *In March 2001, the Taliban began blowing up two monumental Buddha statues in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley. Once among the tallest statues in the world, the ancient Bamiyan Buddhas were lost to the world forever, turned into smithereens through Taliban's shelling. Now, two decades later, on the anniversary of the annihilation, the Bamiyan Buddhas have been brought back to life in the form of 3D projections in an event called "A Night With Buddha".*

The legacy of the Bamiyan Buddhas

- In their Roman draperies and with two different mudras, the Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles. They are said to date back to the 5th century AD and were once the tallest standing Buddhas in the world.
- Salsal and Shamama, as they were called by the locals, rose to heights of 55 and 38 metres respectively, and were said to be male and female. Salsal means "light shines through the universe"; Shamama is "Queen Mother". The statues were set in niches on either ends of a cliff side and hewn directly from the sandstone cliffs.

The significance of Bamiyan

- Bamiyan is situated in the high mountains of the Hindu Kush in the central highlands of Afghanistan. The valley, which is set along the line of the Bamiyan River, was once integral to the early days of the Silk Roads, providing passage for not just merchants, but also culture, religion and language.
- When the Buddhist Kushan Empire spread, acting as a crucible of sorts, Bamiyan became a major trade, cultural and religious centre. As China, India and Rome sought passage through Bamiyan, the Kushans were able to develop a syncretic culture.
- In the rapid spread of Buddhism between the 1st to 5th centuries AD, Bamiyan's landscape reflected the faith, especially its monastic qualities. The two colossal Buddhas were only a part of several other structures, such as stupas, smaller seated and standing Buddhas, and wall paintings in caves, spread in and around surrounding valleys.

Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas

- The hardline Taliban movement, which emerged in the early 1990s, was in control of almost 90 per cent of Afghanistan by the end of the decade.
- While their governance supposedly curbed lawlessness, they also introduced so-called "Islamic punishments" and a regressive idea of Islamic practices, which included banning television, public executions, and lack of schooling for girls aged 10 and above.
- The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas was part of this extremist culture. On February 27, 2001, the Taliban declared its intention to destroy the statues, despite condemnation and protest from governments and cultural ambassadors world over. Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf and the Dalai Lama were among those who voiced their concern; India offered to arrange for a transfer and safeguard of artefacts.
- However, it seemed that the Taliban was interested not just in destroying the Buddhas but also in the spectacle. On March 2, the destruction started with guns and artillery; when that proved ineffective, they progressed to mines and a rocket. It took nearly a month for the statues to be razed to the ground.



- In interviews, a Taliban supreme leader had given various reasons for wanting to destroy the Buddhas, ranging from pride in smashing idols in accordance with Islamic law to teaching people a lesson on diverting funds for humanitarian work.
- Not the first attack: While this year marks the 20th anniversary of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, the Taliban wasn't the first group to target the statues or the Bamiyan Valley. In the 17th century, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb had the giant statues defaced using artillery.

The aftermath of the destruction

- The Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas met with global criticism, many of whom saw it as a cultural crime not just against Afghanistan but also against the idea of a global syncretism. Unfortunately, the event paved the way for similar attacks on cultural heritage, such as the ISIS' destruction of the ancient city of Nimrud in 2016, along with the murder of archaeologist Khaled al-Asaad, when he refused to disclose the location of Palmyra's valuable artefacts, in 2015.
- Following the fall of the Bamiyan Buddhas, UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003, with subsequent efforts made to restore and reconstruct the Buddhas in their niches with the pieces available.
- The question has become a heated discussion, however. One of the prime concerns raised is about the need to rebuild Buddhist statues in an Islamic country, which no longer has the same sense of syncretism as during the Kushan Empire. Some others have pointed out that the empty niches must be kept as they are, as a reminder of the fanatic acts that led to the destruction of the statues.

Resurrecting the Buddha, virtually

- "A Night with Buddha" started in 2013 as a way of creating a bridge between different cultures and in memory of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic heritage.
- On March 9, the minifestival featured a projection of Salsal, the taller of the two Buddhas, into the niche where it once stood. In the midst of tight security, the event was attended by several locals with lanterns, accompanied by dancing.
- In a world where several artefacts have been lost to both extremist attacks as well as colonial plunder, 3D projections and holograms may be one way of restoring things to their past glory while simultaneously reminding audiences of the permanent loss incurred through human fanaticism and greed.