

Communalism, Partition and Freedom of India

You are already familiar with the rise and growth of communalism in India upto 1940. It was in 1940 at the Lahore session of the Muslim League, that the highest communal demand, i.e. the demand for Pakistan was put forward. Henceforth, the 1940s formed the most crucial phase of communalism, culminating in the actual birth of Pakistan in 1947.

PERIOD OF EXTREME COMMUNALISM (BACKGROUND TO THE DEMAND FOR PAKISTAN)

The demand for Pakistan was the result of certain changes that took place in the Indian political scene after 1937. The period after 1937 witnessed elements of extreme communalism in the politics of both- the Hindu communal forces as well as the Muslim communal forces, with the British playing the role of a catalyst. In modern Indian history, this is known as the **Communal Triangle**—the British forming the base of the triangle, the Hindu and the Muslim communal forces forming its two arms. Let us examine the role of each of the three forces one by one.

Extremist Phase of Muslim Communal Forces

Flashback

Extreme Communalism, after 1937: the Muslim League performed badly in the 1937 provincial elections and decided to resort to extreme communalism. Demand for a separate state for Muslims now gained rapid momentum.

The year 1937 was a turning point in the history of communalism in India. In the 1937 provincial elections, the League performed badly, winning only 109 out of 492 reserved seats and only 4.8 per cent of the total Muslim votes. The message was clear—the League needed to shed its elite character (dominated by princes and zamindars) and create a base among the Muslim masses. How was this possible? If the League took up the socio-economic grievances of

the Muslim masses, it ran the risk of annoying and thus losing the existing base of princes and landlords.

Hence, the League decided to appeal to the religious sentiments of the Muslim masses. Jinnah and other League leaders raised the cry of '**Islam in Danger**' from the threat of impending 'Hindu Raj', a cry which appealed to all Muslims, equally. They declared that the aim of Congress was not independence but to establish a Hindu Raj in India which would enable them to fulfil their real motive, i.e. domination over Muslims and extermination of Islam. Once the fear of Hindu Raj became entrenched in their psyche, it would be easy to convince them about the need for a separate homeland for Muslims, where they could practice their religion freely and fearlessly.

Thus, Jinnah and other League leaders appealed to the Muslims to support the League, if they wished to save their religion from 'Hindu onslaught'. Such a communal propaganda was inevitably full of **fear, contempt** and **bitter hatred**. The demand for Pakistan clearly flowed from such politics of fear and hatred adopted by the League after 1937.

Flashback: Finally in 1940, at the Lahore Session of the Muslim League, Jinnah propounded his two-nation theory that India comprised of two nations—a Hindu nation and a Muslim nation, who were different economically, politically, socially, culturally and historically. That Muslims were not a minority but a nation and therefore they were rightfully entitled to a nation of their own (the press was quick to describe the resolution as a demand for Pakistan; some also began to call it the **Pakistan Resolution**).

Thus, 1940 onwards, Muslim communalism was no longer based on mere fanning of minority fears but instead on an assertive-aggressive demand for a separate Muslim state. The above activities of the Muslim League headed by Jinnah transformed communalism into a mass force ultimately leading to the partition of India and formation of the separate state of Pakistan.

Extremist Phase of Hindu Communal Forces

In 1937 provincial elections, the Hindu communalists had fared even worse than their Muslim counterparts. They also needed to expand their mass base and they too decided to appeal to the religious sentiments of the Hindu masses.

The **Hindu Mahasabha** and **Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh** were now led by more radical leaders such as VD Savarkar (who replaced Madan Mohan Malaviya) and MS Golwalkar respectively. Savarkar had publicly announced, 'The only way to deal with Hindu-Muslim schism was to insist that all India was Hindustan (i.e. land of the Hindus) and that the Muslims must reconcile themselves to the status of a minority community in a democratic state which orders life by majority rule.' Golwalkar's book **We** became the manifesto of Hindu Communalism.

Thus, the Hindu communalists asserted that India was a nation of the Hindus and the Muslims should either leave or live as second-class citizens, let alone any privileges or special treatment as minorities. Such was the Hindu Communalists version of two-nation theory. They not only spread hatred for the Muslims but also bitterly criticised the Congress for supporting the 'enemies of the Hindus'.

By 1946–47, the language of the Hindu communalists became extremely vicious. As communal riots spread like wildfire and Congress was unable to stop them, the Hindu communalists tried to project themselves as saviours of Hindus. They condemned the Congress for their 'emasculating' talks of non-violence and communal harmony and instead instigated the Hindus to retaliate and teach a lesson to the Muslims. In this way, Hindu communalism only reinforced the fears of the Muslims.

At the time of partition, the communalised atmosphere provided a fertile ground for the growth of the Hindu communalists and their stand became even more aggressive. Now that a separate state for the Muslims had been carved out, they demanded that the rest of India be declared as a Hindu state. They tried to overthrow the state and capture power and when they were unable to do so, they became bitterly critical of the Congress government. Even Gandhiji was not spared and charged of treason to the Hindu nation.

Role of the British Forces

The British policy of 'divide and rule' played a very significant role in the growth of communalism in India. Under this policy, Muslim communalism received wholesome support and patronage of the British government. Since the very beginning, the British had tried to divide Indians along the already existing fault lines of class, caste and religion. But it was the fault line of religion that proved to be the most potent; the British nurtured the Muslim League since its very inception and encouraged communalism to foster their own imperial interests in India.

In October 1939, when the Congress ministries resigned over the Second World War issue and the party drifted away from active politics, the League moved in to fill the political vacuum and consolidated its position through Jinnah's manoeuvrings with the Viceroy (Linlithgow).

In 1940, the League raised the demand for Pakistan to counter the Congress demand for immediate transfer of substance of power. The British too lost no time in making this demand as a major plank for delaying transfer of power. The British declared that so long as Hindus and Muslims do not come to an agreement on the manner of transfer of power, it could not be done.

In 1942, through the Cripps proposals, the British government tried to accommodate the Pakistan demand through the back door (by giving the provinces the right of non-accession and secession from the Indian Union). At a time when the Pakistan demand had hardly been taken seriously by Indians, its serious consideration by British leaders gave legitimacy to the Pakistan demand and greatly served the cause of the Muslim League.

In June 1945 at Simla Conference, Viceroy Wavell's attitude implied official recognition of the League's monopoly to speak for all Muslims and conference of the veto power onto the League for all future negotiations (even as its performance in the previous elections hardly sustained this claim). On the other hand, the British had perpetually raised questions on the 'national character' of the Congress.

In March 1946, when the Cabinet Mission was sent, a change in British Policy towards the Muslim League was noticed. The British were of the opinion that the old policy of divide and rule would no longer be suitable. Instead they felt that the British interests could be better served in

future by a united India. They believed that a united India, friendly with Britain, could emerge as an active partner in the defence of the Commonwealth. Accordingly, on 15th March 1946, PM Attlee declared in the House of Commons, 'We cannot allow a minority to place a veto on the advance of the majority.' The statement indicated a change in the British policy towards the Muslim League. Contrast this with the Simla Conference, where Wavell had allowed Jinnah to veto and wreck the negotiations. At the same time, it is also true that the scheme of Pakistan was kept alive and allowed entry through the backdoor, via the controversial provision of grouping.

The failure of the Cabinet Mission so frustrated the Muslim League that it decided to act upon its post-election slogan, 'Ladke Lenge Pakistan' and 16th August 1946 was observed as **Direct Action Day** by the League. What followed was a communal holocaust that spread like wildfire in the country and continued throughout 1947.

In September 1946, at the time of the formation of the Interim Government, the British were in a dilemma whether to wait for the League and the Congress to agree on a plan or to go ahead with the Interim government with the Congress alone. Once again, Wavell would have called off the talks, as he had happily done in Simla, had it not been for the **widespread popular unrest** that had begun to rage the country. Moreover, His Majesty's Government was of the opinion that the support of the Congress was a prerequisite for their long-term interests and future good relations with India. Accordingly, on 2nd September 1946, the Congress was invited to form an Interim Government- a sharp departure from earlier British practice.

However, in October 1946, i.e. within a month's time, the British went back to their policy of placating the Muslims. In the context of communal fire and the possibility of a civil war that could be unleashed by the League, Wavell persuaded the League to join the Interim Government (26th October 1946).

Flashback: Thereafter, this government got sharply divided into two perpetually warring camps.

On 9th December 1946, the Constituent Assembly first met at New Delhi. Even though the League had joined the Interim Government, it refused to participate in the Constituent Assembly and instead demanded dissolution of the Assembly calling it unrepresentative. On 5th February 1947, the Congress members of the Interim government sent a letter to Wavell with a demand that the League members be asked to resign. Clearly, a crisis was in the offing.

PARTITION AND FREEDOM

Attlee's Announcement (20th February 1947) (Setting the time limit for British withdrawal)

On 20th February 1947, the impending political crisis was temporarily averted by Attlee's announcement to the effect that-

- The British would withdraw from India by 30th June 1948.
- Wavell would be replaced by Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy.

- Power shall be transferred to more than one authority if the Constituent Assembly did not become fully representative, i.e. if the Muslim majority provinces did not join it.

The statement had been made in the context of irreversible breakdown of government authority and in the hope that the date will bring the two warring parties together. However, the hope proved only illusory.

Jinnah now knew that he alone will have to stick firmly to his demand of Pakistan. With regard to the announcement, the Governor of Punjab had warned that the announcement was a prelude to the final communal showdown with everyone out to 'seize as much power as they can, if necessary by force'. His statement was soon proved right with the League launching a tearing-raging campaign for partition of the country. It unleashed unrestricted violence in Punjab, Assam and NWFP with a view to bringing down the non-League Ministries in these provinces (to ensure that power is not transferred to non-League provincial governments here) and even succeeded in dislodging the Punjab coalition ministry led by Khizr Hyatt Khan. The League was clearly on a war path now.

Lord Mountbatten Arrives in India

Mountbatten was sent to India with the task of winding up the Raj by 30th June 1948. On 22nd March 1947 Lord Mountbatten arrived in India and plunged straight into the constitutional problem with the objective of finding a solution on the basis of the Cabinet Mission Plan. He set about his task in the most zealous manner but he was soon convinced, particularly after talks with Jinnah, that there could be no solution to a united India.

While trying to push for the Cabinet Mission Plan with Jinnah, Mountbatten had concluded, 'He gave the impression that he was not listening. He was impossible to argue with...He was, whatever was said, intent on his Pakistan.'

Hence, he began directing his energies towards an alternative plan based upon Atlee's Statement of 20 February according to which power could be transferred to more than one authority.



Lord Mountbatten

Plan Balkan/Dickie Bird Plan/Ismay Plan

This Plan was put forward by a committee comprising Lord Mountbatten, General Sir Hastings Ismay and Sir George Abell during March–May 1947, before Mountbatten presented the 3rd June Plan. It envisaged the transfer of power to several provinces (in accordance with Atlee's declaration which had talked about transfer of power to more than one authority if the Constituent Assembly did not become fully representative). The Punjab and Bengal Assemblies would vote on the partition issue and in case they voted in favour of partition, the various units thus formed along with the princely states rendered independent upon the lapse of paramountcy would have the choice of joining India or Pakistan or remaining independent. The plan was, however, quickly abandoned when it evoked severe reactions from Indian leaders, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru. The plan was also rejected by the League as it wanted a united Pakistan.

Clearly, the plan came to be known as the Balkan Plan as it provided for balkanisation of India into several sovereign states and the dismemberment of Indian nationhood. The plan also came to be known as the Ismay Plan as it was General Ismay who had presented the plan before the provincial governors in Delhi.

Mountbatten Plan: Partition Plan (Also known as 3rd June Plan)

The Plan

- The Legislative Assemblies of Bengal and Punjab were to meet in two sections (representing Muslim majority districts and the rest of province) to decide by a simple majority whether the province was to be partitioned or not. In case they vote for partition, **two dominions** and two constituent assemblies shall be created.
- It declared that transfer of power would take place by **15th August 1947** on the basis of dominion status to two successor states, India and Pakistan.
- It provided for a **referendum** in the NWFP to decide whether the province would join India or Pakistan. It also provided for a referendum in Muslim majority district of Sylhet (Assam) to decide whether the district would join East Bengal or remain part of Assam. Sindh would take its own decision.
- It provided for setting up of a **Boundary Commission** to demarcate boundaries in case partition was to be effected.
- It proposed to introduce a legislation in the current session for transfer of power on a Dominion Status basis on one or two successor authorities which may decide, in due course of time, whether or not they wish to remain in the British Commonwealth.
- With the lapse of Paramountcy, the **Indian states would be free to join any dominion** they liked, India or Pakistan (but this statement did not make clear the position of the princely states regarding the option of independence, leaving them to luxuriate in wild dreams of independent power!).

Concessions given to Congress in the Plan

Since Congress was making the bigger concession- of compromising with its ideal of united India, all its other demands were to be upheld by the Mountbatten Plan:

- Princely states were not to be given the option of independence (though Mountbatten supported Congress on this, the provision in 3rd June Plan left scope for ambiguity)
- Independence for Bengal was ruled out
- Accession of Hyderabad to Pakistan was ruled out

Indian Response

The Mountbatten Plan was accepted by all political parties in India, although with great unwillingness. They had now recognised the inevitability of partition. By early 1947 itself, the Congress had begun to acknowledge it:

- On 20th April 1947, Nehru had said in a public speech, 'The Muslim League can have Pakistan, if they wish to have it, but on the condition that they do not take away other parts of India which do not wish to join Pakistan.'
- On 28th April, Rajendra Prasad had declared in the Constituent Assembly, 'It may be that the Union (of India) may not comprise all provinces...For this, we must be prepared.'

Result

The Hindu members of the Bengal and Punjab Assemblies decided in favour of partition. While East Bengal and West Punjab decided to join Pakistan, West Bengal and East Punjab joined India.

- Referendum in Sylhet and NWFP went in favour of Pakistan.
- Two Boundary Commissions were constituted, one in respect of each province.

Thus, the Mountbatten Plan became the basis of partition of India.

Analysis of Mountbatten Plan

- **Divide India while retaining maximum unity:** This Plan was drafted keeping in mind the demand of both the Congress and the League. Pakistan would be carved out, but it would be kept as small as possible to accommodate Congress demand of a united India. Moreover, since Congress was making the bigger concession of compromising with its ideal of united India, all its other demands were to be upheld (For instance, princely states were not to be given the option of independence). This was also important if Britain wished to retain the goodwill of Congress and persuade India to accept the Dominion Status and join the Commonwealth. Between India and Pakistan, Britain was keener on having India in the Commonwealth as its economic and defence potential was deemed sounder.
- **Dominion Status:** The Congress accepted Dominion status as the only means of ending the deadlock and taking charge of the worsening communal situation. It would also give some breathing time to the new administration as the British officers could stay on for a while and let Indian leaders settle in and take charge.
- **Early Date, 15th August:** Hence, the 3rd June Plan declared that transfer of power would take place by 15th August 1947 on the basis of dominion status to two successor states, India and Pakistan. The early date of 15th August was fixed in order to secure Congress agreement to Dominion Status. It also allowed the British to forsake responsibility of the fast deteriorating communal situation.



Mountbatten with Gandhi



Mountbatten with Jinnah

Indian Independence Act, 1947

On 4th July 1947, the Indian Independence Bill was introduced in the House of Commons by the Labour government of **Clement Attlee** and Governor General Lord Mountbatten after Indian leaders agreed on the Mountbatten Plan, the last Plan for independence. The Bill was introduced with the objective of transferring power to the people of India and received Royal assent on 18th July. Its main provisions included:

- As from 15th August 1947, two independent Dominions shall be set up in India, to be known respectively as India and Pakistan.
- The boundaries between the two dominions shall be determined by Boundary Commissions (headed by **Sir Cyril Radcliffe**, hence also known as Radcliffe Commissions).
- The territories of Pakistan shall include the areas covered by the Provinces of East Bengal (including Sylhet district of Assam province), West Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province.
- The Constituent Assemblies of both the Dominions were free to make constitutions for their respective countries.
- Pending the adoption of a new constitution, the existing Constituent Assembly of each Dominion would function as **Dominion Legislature** and each Dominion shall be governed by the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935.
- For each of the new dominion a new Governor-General was to be appointed by the Crown. Further, the same person could be the Governor General of both (Mountbatten became the first Governor General of free India and Jinnah the first Governor General of Pakistan).
- The Governor General was invested with adequate powers until March 1948 to issue orders for effective implementation of the provisions of the Indian independence Act 1947.
- The Act terminated the suzerainty and paramountcy of the British Crown over the Indian states. Agreements between the States and the new Dominions were to be negotiated.
- The **Indian States** were free to accede to either of the two new Dominions (the Act released the States from all their obligations to the Crown and they were now technically independent).
- The Office of the Secretary of State was abolished and his work was to be taken over by the **Secretary of Commonwealth Affairs**.
- The words 'Emperor of India' and 'Indian Emperor' were dropped from the Royal style and titles.

The Indian Independence Act 1947 was acclaimed as 'the noblest and greatest law ever enacted by the British Parliament'. This Act closed the last chapter of British India and opened a new chapter of free India.

The Disastrous 72-day Timetable

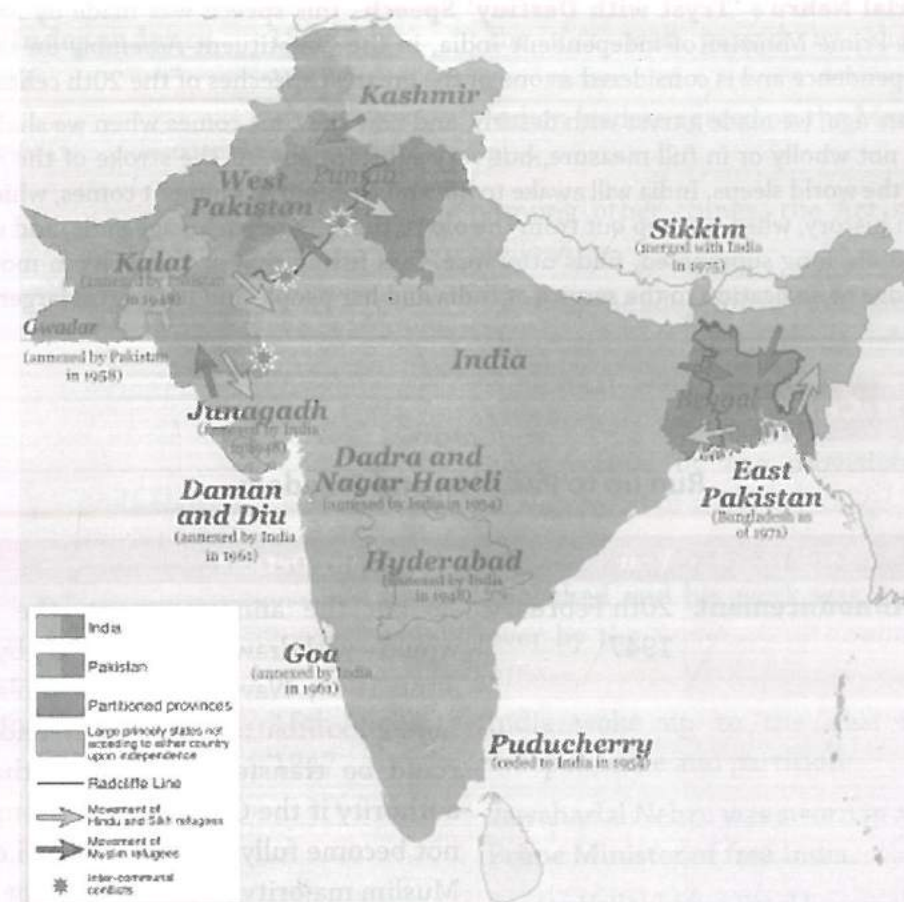
From 3rd June to 15th August 1947, i.e. in 72 days—both the transfer of power and the partition of the country were hurried through at lightning speed. From the Indian standpoint, this proved disastrous. According to some senior British officers (including the Commander-in-Chief Auchinleck), a minimum period of say a few years was needed to carry out a peaceful partition. The Plan provided for no institutional framework for resolving issues arising out of partition. Jinnah worsened matters by refusing to allow Mountbatten to act as a common Governor-General for both India and Pakistan as he wanted that position for himself. In December 1947, the Joint Defence machinery also broke down. By then, Kashmir had already become a ground for military conflict.

Massacres- the Tragedy of Partition

Partition of the country was accompanied by widespread Hindu-Muslim riots and massacres which comprised the tragedy of partition and were a result of several factors including the following:

- **Role of Mountbatten:** Two of Mountbatten's decisions—early date of 15th August as well as delay in announcing the Boundary Commission Award, played a key role in worsening situation in Punjab. As per senior British officers including Commander-in-Chief Lockhart (CnC of Indian Army from 15th August to 31st December 1947), the Punjab tragedy would not have occurred had the partition been delayed for a year. Further, even though the Boundary Commission Award was ready by 12th August, Mountbatten withheld the announcement until transfer of power, to forsake responsibility of further disorder. As a result, people living in the villages between Lahore and Amritsar continued to live in their homes thinking that they were on the right side of the border. Once the award was announced at the last minute, migrations took place in frenzy, often culminating in massacres. The officials too were busy arranging their own transfers rather than serving on duty which might have prevented the tragic killings.
- **Refusal to accept the finality of partition:** Millions of people refused to accept partition long after it was announced, making it a last-minute frenzied affair. Even leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru believed the partition to be only temporary.
- **Belief that partition will be peaceful:** Most unrealistically, it was simply assumed that the partition would be a peaceful one. Once Pakistan was granted, what was there to fight for? No preparations were made for transfer of population and no riots anticipated.

Radcliffe Commissions: As stipulated by the Act of 1947, the two Boundary Commissions were formed and were headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe (hence the name Radcliffe Commissions). The divisions on both sides were carried out in secret and the final Boundary Awards were ready by 12th August. The Awards were, however, published only on 17th August to avoid further delays and disputes and gave details about the boundary demarcation line between India and Pakistan which came to be known as the Radcliffe Line. Today, the two sides of the Line in the west and in the east, continue to serve as Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh Borders respectively.



Map of the partition of India

Independence Day (15th August 1947)

On the night of 14th August, the Constituent Assembly met and in a memorable speech, Jawaharlal Nehru called upon the members to take a pledge of service to the nation. At the stroke of midnight, independence was granted to both India and Pakistan. On the morning of 15th August, free India woke up to the dual reality of independence and partition. A new Cabinet, headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, was sworn in. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel became the Home Minister.

Thus, was born a new nation, ending nearly 200 years of British rule in India.



National Flag of India hoisted at the Red Fort

Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny' Speech- This speech was made by Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of independent India, in the Constituent Assembly on the eve of India's independence and is considered as one of the greatest speeches of the 20th century.

'Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.'

Prelim Capsule

Run up to Partition and Freedom

Events	Year	Important Details
Attlee's Announcement	20th February 1947	As per the announcement, the British would withdraw from India by 30th June 1948 , Wavell would be replaced by Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy and Power could be transferred to more than one authority if the Constituent Assembly did not become fully representative, i.e. if the Muslim majority provinces did not join it.
Mountbatten Plan	3rd June 1947	It declared that transfer of power would take place by 15th Aug 1947 on the basis of dominion status to two successor states, India and Pakistan if the Legislative Assemblies of Bengal and Punjab voted in favor of partition. It also provided for a referendum in the NWFP and Sylhet (Assam) and for setting up of a Boundary Commission . The Indian states would be free to join any dominion they liked, India or Pakistan.

Indian Independence Act 1947	18th July 1947	The Act was passed by the Labour government of Clement Attlee after the Indian leaders agreed on the Mountbatten Plan. Among other things, the Act stated the following- Pending the adoption of a new constitution, the existing Constituent Assembly of each Dominion would function as Dominion Legislature and each Dominion shall be governed by the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935 . The Office of the Secretary of State was abolished and his work was to be taken over by the Secretary of Commonwealth Affairs .
Independence Day	15th August 1947	India woke up to the dual reality of independence and partition. Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in as the first Prime Minister of free India. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel became the Home Minister.

Princely States and Partition

As per the India Independence Act, the princely states were free to join either of the two Dominions. In the context of States' People's Movements and the tactful diplomacy of Sardar Patel (Indian Home Minister), most of them decided to accede to India. Those who held back their decision for some time were the following:

- 1. The Nawab of Junagarh:** Junagarh was a small state on the coast of Kathiawar. Its Nawab announced accession to Pakistan even though the people of the state wanted to join India. Finally, Indian troops occupied the State and a plebiscite was held which went in favour of India.
- 2. The Nizam of Hyderabad:** The Nizam held back his decision as he was contemplating to remain independent. However, an internal revolt broke out in Telangana region following which Indian troops marched into Hyderabad and forced the state to accede in 1948.

3. **The Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir:** The Maharaja also delayed his decision and decided to accede to India only after the irregular armed forces of Pakistan invaded Kashmir.

Congress and Partition

Some scholars accuse the Congress leaders, including Nehru and Patel, of succumbing to the temptation of power and striking a deal with the British by which they got immediate power at the cost of country's partition. In reality, partition was not a result of personal failings of some leaders of the Congress party but a failure of the entire organisation. The independence-failure duality was nothing but a reflection of success-failure dichotomy of the anti-imperialist movement led by the Congress.

Failure on two fronts:

1. The Congress had failed over the years to bring the Muslim masses into the national mainstream.
2. It had also failed since 1937 to stem the advancing tide of communalism. Once communal riots engulfed the country, the situation became intractable and the Congress leaders concluded that partition was the lesser of the two evils—either partition or civil war.

Choice before Congress: Either Partition or Civil War: Failure of the Interim Government had virtually sealed the fate of the nation in favour of partition. The Interim Government had been reduced into another arena of struggle for Pakistan. It had no power to intervene in the provinces and when riots broke out in Calcutta and Noakhali, the Congress leaders could do nothing except watch the massacres as helpless onlookers. They had begun to feel that it was meaningless to hold office in such circumstances and an immediate transfer of power even at the cost of partition would at least give them real power to restore order and bring an end to such killings.

Choice before Congress: Either Partition or Balkanisation: Another choice facing the Congress leaders was 'partition versus balkanisation'. If they chose partition, the British government was willing to uphold all other stands of the Congress, including eliminating the option of independence to princely states, thus ruling out the possibility of balkanisation of the country. Hence, the choice was clear— independence to princely states was a graver threat to Indian unity than Pakistan was.

Choice before Congress: Either Secular body or Hindu body: Jinnah demanded that the Muslim League be recognised as the sole representative of Indian Muslims. Accepting this meant Congress was required to close its doors for Muslims and effectively turn non-secular. Secularism was among the cherished goals of the Congress leaders with which they were not willing to part. Moreover, turning non-secular would have also betrayed the Muslim members of the Congress as well as the Indian people and their future.

The Communal Tangle: In its final years, the communal tangle was such that the more you tried to solve it, the more badly tangled the threads became. Every time the Congress made a concession, Jinnah pegged his demand a notch higher. Every time the Congress yielded, more

and more persons joined the ranks of the Muslim League, impressed by their success. Hence, every round of concession only strengthened the foothold of the communal forces—both Hindu as well as Muslim. The Hindu communalists lost no time in championing themselves as the only saviours of Hindu interests while accusing the Congress of emaciating the Hindus in the name of communal harmony!

What was needed was not appeasement but an all-out struggle against communalism. The Congress failed to understand this communal logic and failed to formulate a long-term strategy to counter the forces of communalism.

Accepting Partition—A Final Act of Surrender: Though Congress leaders refused to accept Jinnah's two-nation theory and give up their secular ideology, they made several significant concessions to the League.

- In 1942, at the time of Cripps Mission, autonomy for Muslim majority provinces was accepted.
- In 1944, in his talks with Jinnah, Gandhi recognised that the Muslim majority provinces would have the right to self-determination.
- In 1946, at the time of Cabinet Mission Plan, Congress was willing to accept all optional provisions such as Muslim majority provinces (groups B and C) would set up a separate Constituent Assembly if they wished. Congress only opposed compulsory grouping which would force NWFP and Assam into groups they may not wish to join.
- In December 1946, when the British Cabinet upheld the League's version of grouping, Congress silently accepted.
- In February 1947, after Attlee's announcement, Nehru appealed to Liaquat Ali Khan for cooperation.

Thus, accepting partition under the 3rd June Plan was final act of surrender before Jinnah's unshakeable demand for a separate Muslim state. At the same time, it must be remembered that even though the nationalist leaders accepted partition, they did not accept the two-nation theory and strove to establish a secular state in independent India.

Most ironically, even Jinnah tried to roll back his two-nation theory once Pakistan was created. On 11th August 1947, he declared in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 'You may belong to any religion or caste or creed— that has nothing to do with the business of the state.' He was in vain trying to put back in the bottle the genie he had released to practice communal politics.

In the words of Bipan Chandra: 'The fact is that communalism is basically an ideology which could not have been and cannot be appealed, it had to be confronted and opposed. The failure to do so was the real weakness of the Congress and the national movement.'

Gandhi and Partition

The prospect of partition was immensely distressful to Gandhi. He is believed to have felt disappointed with not only Jinnah for his obduracy but also with his disciples, Nehru and Patel for their alleged lust for power. But he felt most betrayed by his people—the masses that had

been communalised beyond repair. It was not just the Muslims but also the Hindus and the Sikhs who now wanted partition.

Gandhi remarked (in a prayer meeting, 4th June 1947), 'The demand has been granted because you asked for it. The Congress never asked for it...But the Congress can feel the pulse of the nation. It realised that the Khalsa as also the Hindus desired it.'

When the Socialists appealed to Gandhi to start a struggle on his own for unity of the nation as he was willing to do in 1942, Gandhi refused. For what was a mass leader without the masses behind him? He could 'instinctively feel what is stirring in the hearts of the masses...and give a shape to what was already there.' In 1947, he confessed that 'Today I see no sign of such a healthy feeling. And therefore, I shall have to wait until the time comes'.

However, the time never came. Things were moving way too fast, as the partition was announced on 3rd June to be implemented on 15th August. At this juncture, it is believed that Gandhi wished to end his life, yet he stood up heroically, keeping the flame of united India ablaze in his heart and the mantra of 'Ekla Chalo' on his mind.

On 14th June 1947, Gandhi walked bravely into the AICC meeting and advised the Congressmen to accept partition as an unavoidable necessity but not to accept it in their hearts and continue to strive to reverse it later, once passions had subsided.

He walked barefoot through the villages of East Bengal and Bihar, trying to comfort the Muslims by his presence. He tried to fight the senseless communal frenzy single handedly by persuading people to give up arms and by threatening them with fast- 'One man boundary force' as he was famously called by Mountbatten.

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of Our Nation, spent the Independence Day, fasting and spinning in a locality of Calcutta, worst affected by communal riots. On 30th January 1948, he was shot dead while on his way to evening prayer ground at Birla House (now Gandhi Smriti) by Nathuram Vinayak Godse, a Hindu fanatic. 'Light has gone out of our lives, and there is darkness everywhere', mourned Jawaharlal Nehru along with millions of others.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Partition

Maulana Azad served as the Congress President during 1940-46. He was an outspoken opponent of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Partition and represented a collective will of Muslims to co-exist in a secular India. In a press statement on 15th April 1946 as Congress President Maulana had said, 'I have considered from every possible point of view the scheme of Pakistan as formulated by the Muslim League...Considering the scheme in all its aspects I have come to conclusion that it is harmful not only for India as a whole but for Muslims in particular. And in fact, it creates more problems than it solves.'



Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

As is evident from his autobiography, *Indian Wins Freedom* (1957), his basic argument against partition was that it would be a loss to Muslims on both sides and give birth to two nations that would be in constant confrontation with each other. 'The two countries will focus on military, and society will not develop', he had aptly predicted.

In his attempts to change Jinnah's rigid attitude, Maulana Azad had to face stern criticism and even outright insults. He was accused of being a 'Show-boy President', appointed to hood-wink the world. Azad, however, continued to proclaim his faith in Hindu-Muslim unity.

Britain and Partition

The British could have kept India united, only if they had the determination to do so. It demanded of them proactive intervention in that direction while putting down the communal forces with a firm hand. However, they preferred to take the easy way out by trying to mediate between the Congress and the League in the hope of juicing out some goodwill for themselves.

In the final analysis, the partition of India was primarily the result of determined efforts of the Muslim League from 1940 onwards to obtain a separate sovereign state for the Indian Muslims. Through a combination of political and direct actions, the League, under the astute leadership of Jinnah (known as Quid-e-Azam or Great Organiser), was able to force the situation into a deadlock, from where partition was the only escape. Throughout this process, the League received active patronage from the British who were interested in using the communal card to counter the national movement. The Congress, on its part, not only failed to appeal to the Muslim masses but also failed to understand the communal logic and devise a long-term strategy to combat the communal forces. On 15th August, as India awoke to the dual reality of partition and freedom, the gloom of bloodshed sat heavily on the shoulders of young India. What had been thrown off was the foreign yoke, while years of backwardness and inequality now weighed on the land and the long haul had just begun.

Opinions

Jawaharlal Nehru: 'I suppose it was the compulsion of events and the feeling that we wouldn't get out of that deadlock or morass by pursuing the way we had done; it became worse and worse. Further a feeling that even if we got freedom for India with that background it would be very weak India, that is federal India with far too much power in the federating units...And so we accepted it (partition) and said, let us build up a strong India. And if others do not want to be in it, well how can we and why should we force them to be in it?'

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: 'I felt that if we did not accept partition, India would be split into many bits and would be completely ruined...We would not have had one Pakistan but several.'



Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

- Who among the following suggested the winding up of the Indian National Congress after India attained independence?
[UPSC 1996]
(a) C Rajagopalachari
(b) Acharya Kripalani
(c) Mahatma Gandhi
(d) Jayaprakash Narayan
- Consider the following statements about Jawaharlal Nehru:
[UPSC 1996]
1. He was the president of the Congress party in 1947
2. He presided over the Constituent Assembly
3. He formed the first Congress ministry in United Province before India's Independence
Choose the correct answer from the following options.
(a) 1, 2 and 3 are correct
(b) 1 and 3 are correct
(c) 1 and 2 are correct
(d) None of these are correct
- With what specific instruction did Lord Mountbatten come to India as Viceroy?
[UPSC 1998]
(a) Balkanise the Indian subcontinent
(b) Keep India united if possible
(c) Accept Jinnah's demand for Pakistan
(d) Persuade the Congress to accept partition
- At the time of India's Independence what was Mahatma Gandhi was
[UPSC 1998]
(a) A member of Congress Working Committee
(b) Not a member of the Congress
(c) The President of Congress
(d) The General Secretary of the Congress
- Why did the Indian National Congress mainly agree to the partition of the country in 1947?
[UPSC 1998]
(a) The principle of two Nation theory was then acceptable to them
(b) It was imposed by the British government and the Congress was helpless in this regard
(c) They wanted to avoid large-scale communal riots
(d) India would have otherwise lost the opportunity to attain freedom
- As an alternative to the partition of India, what had Gandhiji suggested to Mountbatten?
[UPSC 2000]
(a) Postpone granting of independence
(b) Invite Jinnah to form the government
(c) Invite Nehru and Jinnah to form the government together
(d) Invite the army to take over for some time
- At the time of partition of India, which one of the following provinces of British India came forward with a plan for a United and independent existence?
[UPSC 2000]
(a) Punjab (b) Assam
(c) Bengal (d) Bihar
- Who was the brainchild of the Balkan plan for fragmentation of India?
[UPSC 2000]
(a) Winston Churchill
(b) M A Jinnah
(c) Lord Mountbatten
(d) V P Menon
- Who was the President of Indian National Congress at the time of partition of India?
[UPSC 2002]
(a) C Rajagopalachari
(b) J.B. Kripalani
(c) Jawaharlal Nehru
(d) Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

- Why was the Radcliffe Committee appointed?
[UPSC 2014]
(a) solve the problem of minorities in India

- (b) give effect to the Independence Bill
(c) delimit the boundaries between India and Pakistan
(d) enquire into the riots in East Bengal



Previous Years' Questions – Main Exam

- Narrate the last phase of the India's freedom movement especially from the beginning of 1947 till attainment of Independence.
[UPSC 1991]
- Do you think that the partition of India was inevitable? Discuss the attitudes of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad towards the crucial question of partition.
[UPSC 1995]
- What were the circumstances that led to the partition of India in 1947?
[UPSC 1997]
- What was Mountbatten plan? Discuss the reactions of Gandhi and Azad to the plan.
[UPSC 2000]
- Review the 'Dickie Bird Plan'.
[UPSC 2002]
- Why and how did the Congress come to accept the partition of the country?
[UPSC 2005]



Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

- Which of the following were among the provision of the Mountbatten Plan?
1. The princely states were given the option to join either of the two new Dominions or remain independent.
2. Whether Punjab and Bengal were to be partitioned or not was to be decided by referendum.
3. Referendum was to be held in NWFP and Sylhet.
Choose the correct answer from the following options.
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 and 3
(c) 3 only
(d) None of the above
- Which of the following formed part of Attlee's Announcement of February 1947?
1. The British would withdraw from India by 30 June 1947.
2. Wavell would be replaced by Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy.
3. Power shall be transferred on Dominion status basis.
Choose the correct answer from the following options.
(a) 1 only (b) 2 and 3
(c) 2 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
- Consider the following statements with regard to Viceroy Mountbatten-
1. He was sent with the aim of reviving British Raj in India.
2. He was the first Governor General of free India.
3. He was the last Viceroy of British India.
4. He formulated a Plan known as the 3 June plan.
Which of the above is/are incorrect? Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 and 4
(c) 1 and 4 (d) 1, 3 and 4
4. Which of the following is/are true, close to the attainment of independence in 1947?
1. Referendum in Sylhet went in favour of India.
 2. Referendum in Bengal went in favour of partition.
 3. Representatives of Punjab voted in favour of partition.
- Choose the correct answer from the following options.
- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 2 and 3
(c) 1, 2 and 3 (d) 3 only
5. _____ became the basis of partition of India.
- (a) Mountbatten Plan
 - (b) Cabinet Mission Plan
 - (c) Cripps Proposals
 - (d) Attlee's Announcement
6. Examine the following statements with regard to Congress acceptance of Dominion Status
1. The Congress accepted Dominion status as the only means of ending the political deadlock.
 2. Dominion status would also give some breathing time to the new administration to settle in and take charge.
- Which of the above statements is/are correct? Choose the correct answer from the following options.
- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither
7. Which of the following is/are untrue with regard to the Mountbatten Plan?
1. It was a compromise between the demand of the Congress and the Muslim League.
 2. Since Congress was making the bigger concession, all its other demands were met.
 3. It declared that transfer of power would take place by June 1948.

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
(c) 2 and 3 (d) 3 only
8. Examine the following statements with regard to the Indian Independence Act 1947-
1. Pending the adoption of a new constitution, each Dominion was to be governed by the provisions of the Indian Independence Act 1947.
 2. The Indian States were free to accede to either of the two new Dominions.
- Which of the above statements is/are correct? Choose the correct answer from the following options.
- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither
9. Which of the following was/were among the factors responsible for fixing an early date of 15 August 1947 for transfer of power?
1. to secure Congress agreement to Dominion Status.
 2. to allow the British to forsake responsibility of the fast deteriorating communal situation.
 3. to please Jinnah who was terminally ill with Tuberculosis.
- Choose the correct answer from the following options.
- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 2 only
(c) 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
10. Which of the following factors were responsible for the massacres accompanying partition of India?
1. Mountbatten's decision to delay the Boundary Commission Award.
 2. Refusal of the masses to accept the reality of partition.
 3. No anticipation of riots.
- Choose the correct answer from the following options.
- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 2 and 3
(c) 1 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3



Practice Questions – Main Exam

1. Write Short Notes on the following-
(a) Atlee's Declaration, February 1947
(b) Partition and Gandhi
2. Congress acceptance of partition was the final act of surrender. Do you agree? Why?
3. Why did the British finally agree to leave India? Analyse.
4. Was the partition of India avoidable? Critically Analyse.
5. Why did the Muslim League raise the slogan of 'Islam in Danger'? How did the Hindu communal forces react? Explain by giving appropriate examples.

Answers

Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

- | | | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| 1. (c) | 2. (d) | 3. (b) | 4. (b) | 5. (c) |
| 6. (b) | 7. (a) | 8. (c) | 9. (b) | 10. (c) |

Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

- | | | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| 1. (c) | 2. (c) | 3. (a) | 4. (d) | 5. (a) |
| 6. (c) | 7. (d) | 8. (b) | 9. (a) | 10. (d) |