

12-2011

The Final Transfer of Power in India, 1937-1947: A Closer Look

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**THE FINAL TRANSFER OF POWER IN INDIA, 1937-1947:
A CLOSER LOOK**

THE FINAL TRANSFER OF POWER IN INDIA, 1937-1947:
A CLOSER LOOK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

By

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Abstract

The long freedom struggle in India culminated in a victory when in 1947 the country gained its independence from one hundred fifty years of British rule. The irony of this largely non-violent struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi was that it ended in the most violent and bloodiest partition of the country which claimed the lives of two million civilians and uprooted countless millions in what became the largest forced migration of people the world has ever witnessed. The vivisection of the country into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan did not bring the hoped for peace between the two neighbors. The partition of the sub-continent created many new problems and solved none. In the last sixty years or so since partition, the two countries have gone to war with each other three times. When not in war, they have engaged in a non-ending cycle of accusations and counter-accusations at the slightest provocation and opportunity. The two most fundamental questions about the partition - was it inevitable and who is responsible for it - have not been fully answered despite countless theories and arguments that have been put forward by historians. This thesis attempts to answer those questions by objectively examining and analyzing the major events of the decade preceding the partition, unquestionably the most critical period to understanding the causes of partition.

This thesis is approved for
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Introduction

The partition of India was the defining moment in the country's history and perhaps its saddest chapter too. The events that accompanied partition were cataclysmically violent even for a land which had witnessed many tragic events in the past. The partition of India uprooted entire communities and left unspeakable violence in its trail. Communal massacres triggered a chaotic two-way flight, of Muslims from India to Pakistan, and of Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan to India. An estimated 15 million people were displaced in what became the largest forced migration the world had ever known to that point.¹ The death-toll that accompanied the horrendous events surrounding the partition has been estimated as high as 2 million.² The whys of partition have intrigued and fascinated historians since it took place and countless books, essays and memoirs have been written about it. The partition debate has raged on since independence and would continue to be a heated topic not only among academic historians but also among the general public, for centuries to come. Historians have been wrestling with some basic questions about the partition: Why did the partition occur? Could it have been avoided? Who was to blame for it? In answering these questions, they have propounded many theories. I have outlined below a select few from the available historiography on the topic.

Sucheta Mahajan, a nationalist historian from India, argues in his book *Independence and Partition* (2000) that Britain's retreat from India was a triumph of Congress nationalism over British imperialism. She attributes the cause of India's partition to two factors – Jinnah's unwavering insistence on Pakistan and the British appeasement of communal elements in India. In her opinion the partition could have been avoided had the British been firm and suppressed the

¹ Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The partition of India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

² *Ibid*, 2.

communal tendencies of the Muslim League forcefully. In her analysis, Mahajan completely absolves the Congress of any wrongdoing.³

Similarly, B. R. Nanda, a noted historian from India, in his book *The Making of a Nation* (1998) puts the blame for India's partition squarely on Jinnah's shoulder. He writes that Jinnah used the slogan of 'Islam in danger' and raised the specter of 'Congress tyranny' and 'Hindu raj' to arouse Muslim antipathy against the Hindus and widen the communal gulf between them. According to Nanda, Jinnah was able to create a climate in which the idea of partition thrived and ultimately became a reality. He argues that Jinnah was rigidly uncompromising and had little flexibility. Per Nanda, Jinnah did not meet the Congress halfway or even quarter way. Indeed, he did not even budge an inch from his demand of Pakistan. As we shall see in the course of this thesis that Nanda's assertion is not entirely true. Jinnah did display the ability to compromise during the Cabinet Mission negotiations and it was the Congress which fell short of that very essential quality often needed to reach an agreement. Like Mahajan, Nanda sees India's independence as a result of unrelenting nationalism of the Congress. He writes: 'It was the aim of Indian National Congress to wear down the British reluctance to part with power...The brunt of the struggle for the liberation of India was borne by the Congress. The Muslim League had no part in it.'⁴

Anita Inder Singh in *The Origins of the Partition of India* (1990) argues that the social division between the Hindus and Muslims in religious terms was not the root cause of partition. She points to the fact that the two communities had lived side by side harmoniously for

³ Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Limited, 2000), 21.

⁴ B. R. Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 303.

centuries. According to her, it was the successful politicization of the religious differences by Jinnah that made partition inevitable. She writes that the importance of Jinnah's address at Lahore, where the Pakistan Resolution was adopted, lay in his assertion that the Indian problem was not inter-communal but an international one as between two nations. Singh argues that the British deliberately propped up the Muslim League during the war years as a counterpoise to the Congress demand for independence. She writes 'The prestige thus acquired from the British helped make Jinnah's League the only plausible representative of Muslims at all India level.'⁵ She points out that once the war was over the British were no longer interested in building up the League. They wanted to transfer power to a united India. She goes on to argue that Jinnah's call for Direct Action in 1946 and the resulting worsening of the communal situation made it impossible for the British to hold India much longer. Per Singh, Mountbatten's decision to quit India in record time was a direct consequence of the worsening communal situation. She is mostly correct in her analysis, except in one respect: she does not hold the Congress responsible for the partition of India, just like Nanda and Mahajan and other pro-Congress historians.

Not all historians, of course, hold a pro-Congress view. In *The Sole Spokesman* (1994), Ayesha Jalal propounds the theory that Jinnah did not want the partition of India. It was the Congress led by Nehru and Patel who pushed for it. She writes 'Jinnah's ultimate goal was to get a seat at the center...⁶ Jinnah's Pakistan did not entail the partition of India, rather it meant a union between Pakistan and India which would stand tall against the common enemy. This was no clarion call for pan-Islam; this was not pitting the Muslim India against Hindustan; rather it was a secular vision of a polity where there was real political choice and safeguards, the India of

⁵ Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of Partition of India, 1936-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 241-242.

⁶ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994), 84.

Jinnah's dream, a vision unfulfilled but noble nonetheless.'⁷ Jalal's argument is partially correct. She is right when she says Congress pushed for the partition. However, her statement that Jinnah really didn't want Pakistan is stretching one's imagination a bit too far in the name of arguing something new. There is overwhelming historical evidence that Jinnah demanded a separate homeland for Muslims of India from 1940 onwards and to brush aside that is to look askance at the proof that is plain as daylight. In support of her thesis, Jalal argues that Jinnah did not want to come out openly in favor of the union scheme in the Cabinet Mission Plan fearing that it would expose his Pakistan demand as phony in the eyes of his supporters. Jalal adds that Jinnah did not want to seem too eager for the union scheme because he feared that he would then lose his bargaining lever with the Congress.

Others place blame for partition on earlier historical events. Uma Kaura in *Muslims and Indian Nationalism* (1977) traces Muslim alienation from the Congress Party to 1928 when the Nehru Report rejected several of their demands for safeguarding Muslim interests. She writes that in 1928 a majority of top Muslim leaders were prepared to give up having a separate electorate provided their other demands were met.⁸ These demands included separation of Sind from Bombay province, one-third Muslim representation in the Central legislature, constitutional reforms in North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, and statutory Muslim majority in Punjab and Bengal. She points out that none of these demands were a threat to the unity of India. Yet, Motilal Nehru, in order to placate the Hindu Mahasabha, rejected the demands of the Muslims. Kaura asserts that the failure of the Nehru Report to satisfy Muslim demands embittered the Muslim leaders. According to Kaura, the Muslim dissatisfaction that started in

⁷ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, 122.

⁸ Uma Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism: The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition, 1928-40* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1977), 163.

1928 intensified in 1937 when the Congress refused to establish coalition ministries in the provinces. She adds that the pro-Hindu policies of the Congress Ministries further alienated the Muslims of India. Kaura's main thesis is that the events between 1928 and 1940 were primarily responsible for Muslim alienation from the nationalist cause and the emergence of the demand for Pakistan.

According to Kaura, the Congress leaders did very little to address the Muslim grievances. Nehru maintained a complacent attitude towards the whole situation. For him, the problems of unemployment and poverty, and the international situation were more real and urgent than the communal problem. Like Gandhi, he believed that once the British left India, the communal situation would resolve by itself. Kaura adds that Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, played the game of divide and rule by taking advantage of the Muslim dissatisfaction and encouraging them to move further on the road of separatist politics.⁹ She writes that Linlithgow was jubilant at the adoption of the Pakistan Resolution in 1940 at Lahore. Obviously he thought that he could use it as a handy tool against the Congress. Kaura's analysis is right on the mark. Her main argument that it was the Congress's attitude towards the Muslims that was primarily responsible for their alienation from nationalist cause and which drove them towards separatist tendencies is correct. However, her analysis is incomplete as it stops at the year 1940 and does not dive into the crucial years leading up to the partition in 1947.

In *The Making of Pakistan* (1967), K. K. Aziz, an eminent historian from Pakistan, traces the beginning of Hindu-Muslim rift back even further to the years 1906 through 1911. In 1905, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, partitioned the province of Bengal into two parts, a Muslim-

⁹ Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism: The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition, 1928-40*, 165.

majority East Bengal and a Hindu-majority West Bengal. According to Aziz, the Bengali Hindus feared that as a result of partition they would lose their monopoly over trade, business, and governmental positions. So, they launched anti-British agitation. Azad comments that the Muslims interpreted the Hindu agitation against the Bengal partition as an attempt by the Hindus to maintain their superiority over the Muslims.¹⁰ Per Aziz, the orthodox religious views and belligerent political actions by some Congress leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak alienated the Muslims from the mainstream of Indian nationalism.¹¹ The Morley-Minto Act of 1909 granted the Muslims separate electorate which angered the Hindus. The repeal of the partition of Bengal in 1911 was received by the Muslims with shock and bitterness.¹²

Aziz points out that the years 1911 to 1922 saw cooperation between the Congress and the Muslim League against the common enemy, the British. The Lucknow Pact of 1916 was a result of this entente in which the Congress accepted in principle the separate electorate provision for the Muslims. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918 culminated in the India Act of 1919. The 1919 Act erected a system of Dyarchy i.e. a division of power between the popularly elected representatives and the British Governors in the provinces. Some subjects became the responsibility of elected representatives and the rest remained with the Governors. Aziz mentions that the Congress support for the Khilafat movement brought the two communities closer. The Khilafat movement was a pan-Islamic campaign launched by the Muslims of India after World War I to protest the dismemberment of Ottoman Empire and the harsh treatment meted out to Caliph, the Sultan of Turkey. The Hindus, led by Gandhi, made common cause with the Muslims in the Khilafat movement and participated in the extremist

¹⁰ K. K. Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2009), 27.

¹¹ Ibid, 29.

¹² Ibid, 32.

agitations of 1919-1921. But this unity did not last long. The 1920s witnessed the worsening in the Hindu-Muslim relations manifested through communal clashes in places like Malabar.

The Simon Commission came to India in 1927 to look into advancing constitutional progress in the country. The Indians protested the all-white composition of the Commission and boycotted it. Like Kaura, Aziz argues that the Nehru Report of 1928 made the Hindu-Muslim rift final and irrevocable.¹³ The Report recommended the immediate abolishment of a separate electorate for the Muslims. Aziz asserts that from 1928 onwards the Congress became all but in name a Hindu body.¹⁴ Aziz goes into great details in outlining the Congress atrocities perpetrated in the provinces against the Muslims during the period from 1937 to 1939. According to Aziz, the Congress's behavior during these two and half years further alienated the Muslims.¹⁵ He writes: 'The Congress might have treated the Muslims on an equal footing, tolerated their existence, acknowledged their separate status and honestly tried to meet their wishes. This is how Britain and, to some extent, the United States have dealt with their minorities. But the Congress refused to adopt this method.'¹⁶

Aziz's line of argument follows from what Jinnah had said in his Presidential address to the Muslim League at Lahore in 1940 i.e. India was composed of two nations and Hindus and Muslims were fundamentally different and hence could not be forced to live together. Aziz writes that the Muslims are closer to the Christians than the idol-worshipping Hindus. He adds 'With the Hindus one was always on one's guard against breaking some caste restriction or polluting a Brahmin household.' Aziz argues that the Muslims in India feared that once the

¹³ Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism*, 42.

¹⁴ Ibid, 43.

¹⁵ Ibid, 51.

¹⁶ Ibid, 84.

British left, they would be subjected to discrimination and oppression in a Hindu raj, and that was the main reason behind the demand for Pakistan. Aziz argues that it is a myth to suggest that the Hindus and the Muslims had lived in complete harmony and peace in India for a thousand year. According to Aziz, that assertion overlooks the fact that the Muslims came as conquerors to India and as long as they occupied that position the Hindus dared not show their enmity.¹⁷ Aziz rejects the notion that the Hindu-Muslim rift was a product of British divide and rule policy. He says that the Muslims were not put in India by the British and hence the British could hardly be blamed for the minority problem. Aziz adds that a separate electorate was not imposed upon the Muslims against their wishes. He writes ‘The Muslims rarely made a nuisance of themselves. On the whole they were ‘good’ subjects – cooperative, loyal, law-abiding. On the contrary, the Congress thrived on non-cooperation and agitation. If, in these circumstances, the Government tended to lean a little towards those whom it could trust, this could hardly be called a calculated satanic scheme to divide the Indians.’¹⁸ Aziz’s analysis is very partisan and anti-Hindu and anti-Congress in tone.

Like Aziz, most of the Pakistani historians subscribe to the two-nation theory and argue that partition was inevitable as Hindus and Muslims would have never lived together in peace after the British departed. For example, Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, a respected historian in Pakistan, has argued that Islam was a distinctive social order that was fundamentally at odds with Hindu society. The demand for a separate state was thus a natural expression of this reality. Khalid bin Sayeed in *Pakistan: The Formative Phase* (1968) has advanced the two-nation theory

¹⁷ Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism*, 86.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 94.

and stated the inevitability of Pakistan as being a natural consequence of irreconcilable differences between Islam and Hinduism.¹⁹

In contrast to these Pakistani historians, R. J. Moore in *Crisis of Indian Unity* (1974) argues that the British policy of divide and rule was one of the primary causes of India's partition. According to him, the 1935 India Act widened the gulf between the Congress and the Muslim League. Moore writes that by giving constitutional guarantees to the Muslims as a separate community and the Princes as a separate estate, the 1935 Act hindered the emergence of unity based on a sense of common nationality.²⁰ He adds that the 1935 Act was an inducement to the Muslims to organize on communal lines for political ends. Moore points out that the 1940 August Offer, drafted by Churchill, gave a pledge to the Muslims that they would have a veto on any future political settlement that they disliked. This alienated the Congress, says Moore. Moore asserts that it was the British policy that enhanced the stature of Jinnah as the sole spokesman for the Muslims of India. Moore suggests that the British right, especially Churchill, tolerated Jinnah but viewed Gandhi as a wicked and malignant old man. Moore's thesis tells the story only partially as it does not take into account the Congress's role in the partition of the country i.e. the desire to remove Jinnah out of the way by giving him a moth-eaten Pakistan so that the Congress could proceed with the task of nation building. According to some Congress leaders, the post-Independence economic and social developments required a strong center, which would only be possible with Jinnah out of the way.

Reginald Coupland's take on the partition issue is completely opposite to R. J. Moore's. Coupland argues that the British had no role in promoting antagonism between the Hindus and

¹⁹ Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 107.

²⁰ R. J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 4.

the Muslims. In fact, he suggests that the continuance of British rule in India had a neutralizing effect on the two warring communities.²¹ The moment the British announced their intention to leave India, the antagonism between them intensified.²² According to Coupland, it was the Congress's impatience for independence that complicated the issue. The Congress was unwilling to wait until the war was over and did not trust the British promise of independence after the war. Coupland writes that the British could not have just handed over power to the Congress Party abnegating their responsibility towards the Princes and the minorities.

H. V. Hodson in *The Great Divide* (1971) argues that Britain did not promote the divide and rule tactic as suggested by many. According to Hodson, Britain's primary goal was to maintain peace and order in India and encouraging Hindu-Muslim rivalry was contrary to that goal. He writes that it is not possible to divide and rule unless the ruled are ready to be divided. Hodson says that the British might have used the Hindu-Muslim rivalry to their advantage, but they certainly did not invent it. He points out that the Hindu mode of life is quite different from the Muslim way of life. He adds that despite living together in India for centuries, the two communities had not integrated in any real sense. Each followed their own culture, custom and rituals with intermarriage a very rare phenomenon. Hodson's arguments are very similar to those by Pakistani historians as mentioned above.

Hodson points out that Jinnah was a nationalist who started his career as the private secretary to Dadabhai Naoroji. He was also a devoted disciple of another great Hindu nationalist, Gopal Krishna Gokhale. In 1916, Jinnah engineered the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League. Hodson suggests that by 1939, thanks to Gandhi's iron grip on the Party

²¹ Reginald Coupland, *The Cripps Mission* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 23.

²² *Ibid*, 23.

and the Party's anti-Muslim policies, Jinnah had been thoroughly marginalized and alienated. Jinnah was not a person who would accept defeat easily and run away from the battle field. He took up the challenge and set out to build Muslim solidarity behind the demand for a separate homeland and rest became history.

Hodson gives high marks to Linlithgow for holding the country together during the time of war and getting the provincial self-government working. He rejects the notion that Linlithgow was responsible for leaving the country divided politically more than when he started his Viceroyalty. Hodson writes 'Linlithgow had the power neither to create nor prevent the underlying causes that brought the failures for a political settlement. India was divided not by the want of self-government but by the prospect of it.'²³ Hodson also writes that it was not Mountbatten but the Indians who were ultimately responsible for the partition of the country. They were the ones who failed to reach an agreement among themselves. Hodson argues that Mountbatten strove for unity along the same lines as the Cabinet Mission but the Indian leaders were unable to rise to the occasion and forget their petty bickering in the interests of a united India. He comments that 'Pride, jealousy, and suspicion crowded out statesmanship and calm consideration.'²⁴

Stanley Wolpert's analysis on the partition issue is quite different from Hodson's. In *Shameful Flight* (2006), Wolpert argues that the British share of blame for partition of India is significant. Churchill and Linlithgow distrusted the Indians and thought very lowly of them. Churchill hated Gandhi very much and thought of him as a perfidious man and a perpetual trouble-maker. In fact, he favored Jinnah over Gandhi and supported the idea of Pakistan, even

²³ H. V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain – India – Pakistan* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 109.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 267.

‘Princhestan’.²⁵ Wolpert points out that Churchill forbade any correspondence between Gandhi and Jinnah when the former was incarcerated for calling the Quit-India Movement. Wolpert writes ‘His arrogance in doggedly refusing India’s two most popular leaders to meet served only to widen the gulf between the respective parties and exacerbated an already impossible situation.’²⁶ Churchill noted in his diary that he hated India and everything to do with it.

Wolpert argues that Mountbatten did not make an honest effort to avoid the partition of India. According to him, Mountbatten was in a hurry to get the partition done as quickly as possible so that he could go back to his naval career in England. Per Wolpert, Mountbatten ignored Gandhi’s proposal to invite Jinnah to form a government. He asserts that it was the only plan that could have avoided partition. Mountbatten disliked Jinnah and went so far as to describe him as a psychopath. In contrast, he liked Nehru very much and thought him as the best person to lead India. Wolpert argues that by 1947, India had become a burden on the British Empire. Hence the British Cabinet was eager to extricate Britain from the Indian albatross. The growing burden of Britain’s sterling debt had swiftly eroded British support for retaining their erstwhile ‘Jewel on the Crown’. Wolpert blames Mountbatten for rushing through the daunting task of partitioning a country of 400 million in a matter of few months and without adequate planning. The consequence of the hasty partition was death, destruction and mayhem of indescribable scale and magnitude.

The above discussion demonstrates that there are three very contrasting interpretations of the partition. Nationalist historians from India conclude that without Jinnah there would have been no Pakistan. They contend that it is the British who encouraged Muslim separatism in India

²⁵ Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 71.

²⁶ Wolpert, *Shameful Flight*, 58.

and that the partition of India is a direct result of Britain's divide and rule policy. In contrast, nationalist historians from Pakistan argue that the partition was inevitable given the unbridgeable gulf that existed between the Hindus and Muslims in terms of religion, custom, and way of life. They reject the notion that Muslim separatism was a product of British machinations. Some British historians have argued that the blame for the partition of India should not be attributed to British policies. They say that Britain wanted to transfer power to a united India but could not do so because the Congress and the League were too distrustful and suspicious of each other. The parties were unable to reach any agreement that would have facilitated the transfer of power to a united country. There is also a fourth interpretation advanced by Ayesha Jalal in recent times. She suggests that Jinnah's adoption of Pakistan cause was simply a bargaining tactic to get more power for the Muslim minority. He really did not want a separate state, she concludes. Her argument has not gone well among the scholars who find the notion that Jinnah said things on numerous occasions that he really did not mean, as downright perverse.

None of the above approaches taken on its own explain the partition puzzle in a satisfactory way. Each looks at the issue through narrow lenses and takes a very parochial view of the subject. They are very partisan in tone, colored by the biases of their respective authors. The causes of the partition have been explained by these historians in diametrically opposite ways. Sometimes political considerations and fear of backlash have prevented some from venturing outside what is acceptable in their respective communities. Taken individually, these approaches inhibit a broader appreciation of the complexities of the partition issue. This thesis takes a new approach, looking at the issue holistically in an objective and impartial way based on the available evidence. In doing so, it has tried to assimilate the various interpretations to craft a

plausible and more complete account that tries to answer two basic questions – Why did the partition happen?, and, Who is to blame for it?

As the research for this thesis progressed, it soon became apparent that the decade preceding the partition was the most important period and an objective analysis of the major events of that period is critical to understanding the dynamics that led to partition. Some of the major events in those ten critical years are the Congress rule in the provinces from 1937 to 1939, the Pakistan Resolution and the August Offer in 1940, the Cripps Mission and the Quit India movement in 1942, the Simla Conference in 1945, the Cabinet Mission and the Interim Government in 1946, and the Mountbatten Viceroyalty and the partition in 1947. Each of the following chapters goes into great detail describing one of the above events. Each chapter concludes with an analysis that explains how the particular event contributed towards partition of India and who were the bad actors in it. For example, the chapter on the Cabinet Mission goes into rather painstaking detail including all the negotiations that took place between the three sides involved in the process, the various proposals and schemes that resulted from those discussions, and how it all failed and who was responsible for the failure. The main argument of this thesis is that the three major players - the British, the Congress, and the League - are equally culpable for partition of the country. This thesis asserts that the complex issue of partition can't be explained away by a single theory such as the British policy of divide and rule, or Jinnah's intransigence, or the power-hungry Congress party rushing into partition. Rather, it is a combination of all these factors and much more.

Chapter One

Congress Rule in the Provinces, Lahore Resolution, and August Offer

Elections to the provincial legislatures under the 1935 India Act were held early in 1937. The Congress did extremely well in the elections. It won 711 out of 1585 Provincial Assembly seats with absolute majorities in five (Madras, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Province, and Orissa) out of eleven provinces.²⁷ In Bombay, it won nearly half of the seats.²⁸ In Assam and North-West Frontier Province, it was the single largest party. Only in Bengal, Punjab, and Sind, was it in the minority. In Bengal, the Krishak Praja Party, led by Fazlul Huq, won a large number of seats and in Punjab, the Unionist Party, led by Sikander Hyat Khan, captured the majority of seats. Nehru began his election tour in May 1936, and during the eight months preceding the elections, he travelled the length and breadth of the country, covering some 50,000 miles and addressing some ten million people.²⁹ His labors were richly rewarded as the election results showed. In contrast, the performance of the Muslim League in the elections was far from impressive. It won only 108 seats out of the total of 485 Muslim seats it contested.³⁰

The Congress demanded that the British give assurance that the Provincial Governors would not use their special powers and let the ministries govern independently before it could agree to form governments in the provinces.³¹ Gandhi said ‘there should be gentlemanly understanding between the Governors and their Congress Ministers that they would not exercise

²⁷ V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 55.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 55.

²⁹ B. N. Pandey, *The Break-up of British India* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 142.

³⁰ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 55.

³¹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (Chennai: Macmillan, 1983), 350.

their special powers of interference as long as the Ministers acted within the Constitution.’³² On 3 April, 1937, the Secretary of State, Lord Zetland, responded to the Congress demand: ‘I must repeat that the reserve powers are an integral part of the Constitution that they cannot be abrogated except by Parliament itself, and that the Governors therefore cannot treat the Congress as a privileged body which is exempt from the provisions of the Constitution by which the other parties are bound.’³³ The Congress Working Committee met on 28 April, 1937, and passed a resolution which said that it didn’t want an amendment to the Constitution as being misunderstood by Lord Zetland; it just wanted an assurance that the Governors’ veto powers would not be used unless under the most extreme conditions.³⁴ Finally, on 22 June, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, gave the assurance which the Congress was seeking: ‘There is no foundation for any suggestion that a Governor is free, or is entitled, or would have the power, to interfere with the day-to-day administration of a province outside the limited range of the responsibilities confined to him.’³⁵ The Viceroy added that if under any circumstance a Governor was compelled to use his special power, then he would have to first clearly explain his decision to the Ministers why he thought it was the right one. In view of the Viceroy’s assurance, the Congress Working Committee gave its permission on 8 July to the Provincial leaders to accept office

The expectation was that in the United Provinces a Congress-League coalition would be formed. Azad held out the hope that the two prominent League leaders of that province,

³² Gandhi’s Statement on Safeguards and Office Acceptance, 30 March, 1937, in K. K. Aziz, ed., *Muslims under Congress Rule: A Documentary Record*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Renaissance Publishing House, 1986), 77.

³³ Comments by the Secretary of State for India in the House of Lords on Congress’s refusal to take office, 8 April, 1937, in *Ibid*, 87.

³⁴ Indian National Congress Working Committee Resolution at Allahabad on safeguards and office acceptance, 28 April, 1937, in *Ibid*, 88.

³⁵ Broadcast by the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow at New Delhi on safeguards and office acceptance, 22 June, 1937, in *Ibid*, 100.

Khaliquzzaman and Nawab Ismail Khan, would be appointed as Ministers.³⁶ But Azad's efforts were frustrated by Nehru, who was President of the Congress at that time.³⁷ Nehru said that only one of the two leaders could be allowed in the Congress Ministry. The Congress stipulated the following condition as the price for a coalition with the Muslim League:

The Muslim League group in the United Provinces would cease to function as a separate group. The existing members of the Muslim League Party in the United Provinces Assembly shall become part of the Congress Party, and will fully share with other members of the Party their privileges and obligations as members of the Congress Party. They will be subject to control and discipline of the Congress Party...³⁸

This was tantamount to asking the League to sign its own death warrant as a separate political party. As expected, the League rejected the conditions for a coalition government. Azad writes that on many other occasions, the Congress failed in the test of its claim to be a national organization representing all ethnic groups in India. For example, in Bombay Provincial Assembly, Mr. Nariman, a Parsee, was the acknowledged leader. But he was bypassed, and in his place a Hindu was appointed as the Chief Minister of the province.³⁹ Sardar Patel felt that it would be unfair to appoint a Parsee as the Chief Minister of a Hindu majority province.⁴⁰ A similar incident took place in Bihar. Dr. Syed Mahmud, a Muslim, was the top leader in Bihar and when the Congress won the elections there, it was expected that he would become the Chief

³⁶ S. M. Burke and Salim AL-Din Quraishi, *Quaid-i-Azam: Mohammad Ali Jinnah, His Personality and His Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 224.

³⁷ Burke and Quraishi, *Quaid-i-Azam: Mohammad Ali Jinnah, His Personality and His Politics*, 224.

³⁸ Congress terms for a coalition with the Muslim League in the United Provinces, July, 1937, in Aziz, ed., *Muslims under Congress Rule*, vol. 1, 115.

³⁹ Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan Private Limited, 2009), 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Minister. However, he was sidelined in favor of Krishna Sinha, a Hindu. Dr. Rajendra Prasad played the same role in Bihar as Sardar Patel did in Bombay.⁴¹

The election results were a great disappointment to Jinnah and the Muslim League. Jinnah had pinned all his hopes on a separate electorate to see his party win the elections in Muslim-majority provinces and come to power there. Despite the safeguards of a separate electorate, the Muslim League met with an electoral disaster of the first magnitude.⁴² In Sind, it won only three seats, in Punjab only one seat, and in North-West Frontier Province none at all.⁴³ The results of the 1937 elections came as a great shock to the Muslims. It showed that they were weak, divided and disorganized.⁴⁴ It showed that there were only two foci of power in India, the British and the Congress.⁴⁵ Jinnah deliberately set out to rectify the situation by building a third force, the Muslim League.⁴⁶ At the Lucknow session of the League in October 1937, he said: 'No settlement with the majority is possible...An honorable settlement can only be achieved between equals, and unless the two parties learn to respect and fear each other, there is no solid ground for any settlement.'⁴⁷ Following the Congress example, Jinnah reduced the membership fee of the League to two annas. The members of the All-India Muslim League Council were selected from local Leaguers instead of handpicked from the intelligentsia.⁴⁸ Within 3 months of

⁴¹ Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 17.

⁴² Jaswant Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 188.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 189.

⁴⁵ Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 226.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ All-India Muslim League twenty-fifth session at Lucknow, October 15-18, 1937, in Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, ed., *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947*, vol. 2 (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research Center of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, 2007), 242.

⁴⁸ Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, 226.

the Lucknow session, 170 new branches of the League were opened and it was claimed that 100,000 new members were recruited in the United Provinces alone.⁴⁹

Jinnah, the ‘superb tactician’, launched an anti-Congress propaganda drive. Muslims were told that they could not expect fair play and justice under a Congress raj. Pro-Hindu measures of the Congress ministries played right into Jinnah’s anti-Congress propaganda. In his Presidential address to the League at Calcutta on 17 April, 1938, Jinnah described the Congress as a purely Hindu body masquerading under the name of nationalism.⁵⁰ In support of his claim he cited the use of the ‘Bande Mataram’ song in the legislatures by the Congress, the effort to make Hindi a compulsory language, the hoisting of a tricolor flag on top of government buildings, and the implementation of Vidya Mandir Scheme of education and so on.⁵¹ Jinnah accused the Congress of sheer arrogance and for its brutal, oppressive, and inimical attitude towards the Muslim community. In another Presidential address to the League at Karachi on 8 October, 1938, he said: ‘It is common knowledge that the average Congressman, whether he is a member by conviction or convenience, arrogates to himself the role of a ruler of this country and although he does not possess educational qualifications, training and culture and traditions of the British bureaucrats, he behaves and acts towards the Mussalmans in a much worse manner than the British did towards the Indians.’⁵²

Gandhi’s scheme of ‘Basic education’ called the Wardha Scheme was introduced in the Congress provinces in October 1937. The basic principle of the scheme was to associate book

⁴⁹ Jim Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2002), 196.

⁵⁰ Extracts from the presidential address of Jinnah at the Calcutta Session of All-India Muslim League, 17 April, 1938, in Aziz, ed., *Muslims under Congress Rule*, vol. 1, 154.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Extracts from Jinnah’s presidential address to the Sind Muslim League Conference at Karachi, 8 October, 1938, in Aziz, ed., *Muslims under Congress Rule*, vol. 1, 161.

learning with some kind of productive and manual work. It embodied Gandhi's favorite idea of village uplift through constructive work. Hand-spinning was included as part of the curriculum. The teaching of religion was completely ignored in the scheme. Muslim children were obliged to honor the Congress flag, to sing 'Bande Mataram', to wear home-spun cloth (Khadi), and to worship Gandhi's portrait. Hindi was encouraged as a medium of instruction. All these measures embodied in the Wardha Scheme were seen by the Muslims as attempts by the Congress to destroy their culture by inculcating Hindu ideals in the minds of the Muslim children. A report produced by the Muslim League detailed the anti-Muslim bias inherent in the Wardha Scheme. The All-India Muslim League passed a resolution listing its objections to the Wardha Scheme: '(1) The Scheme is calculated to destroy Muslim culture gradually but surely and to secure the domination of Hindu culture. (2) It imposes the Congress ideology and aims at inculcating the doctrine of *ahimsa*. (3) Its objective is to infuse the political creed, policy and programme of one party, namely, the Congress, into the minds of the children. (4) It has neglected the question of providing facilities for religious education. (5) Under the guise of the name Hindustani the scheme is meant to spread what is highly Sanskritised Hindi and to suppress Urdu which is really the lingua franca of India at present. (6) The text books prescribed and provisionally sanctioned by some Provincial Governments are highly objectionable from the Muslim point of view.'⁵³

Throughout the 27 months of Congress rule in the provinces, the League kept up an intense propaganda barrage, climaxing in the Pirpur Report, the Shareef Report on Bihar, and Fazlul Huq's *Muslim Sufferings Under Congress Rule*.⁵⁴ The broad impression created in the minds of the Muslims of the Congress rule was well summed up in the Pirpur Report published

⁵³ All-India Muslim League Working Committee Resolution on the Wardha Scheme of Education at Bombay, 2-3 July, 1939, in Aziz, ed., *Muslims under Congress Rule*, vol. 1, 191.

⁵⁴ Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, 355.

by a committee appointed by the All-India Muslim League to inquire into Muslim grievances in Congress provinces.⁵⁵ The charges included failure to prevent communal riots, encouraging Hindi at the expense of Urdu, singing of the 'Bande Mataram' song, prevention of cow slaughter, hoisting of the tricolor flag on top of office buildings, closing of Muslim burial grounds, suppression of the Urdu Press, and discrimination against Muslim candidates for official positions and many more. The Report accused the Congress Governments of not giving protections to the Muslims from Hindu atrocities during the communal riots.

On 3 September, 1939, Viceroy Linlithgow declared India's entry into the War without consulting any Indian leaders. The Congress Working Committee passed a lengthy resolution on 15 September, 1939, expressing its sympathy with democracies and condemning German aggression. However, the resolution declared that India could not associate herself in a war said to be fought for democratic freedom so long as that freedom was denied to her.⁵⁶ The resolution added that the Congress was prepared to cooperate with the British to end Fascism and Nazism, but it needed to know Britain's war aims as regards to imperialism. The Muslim League passed a resolution on 18 September, 1939, promising support to the British in the war efforts on condition that no constitutional advance should be made without consulting the Muslim League, the sole representative of Muslims of India.

The Viceroy issued a statement on 17 October, 1939, declaring that India would be granted Dominion Status at the end of the war. He added that for the present, the Act of 1935 was the best the Indians could hope for. The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha on 22nd and 23rd October. The resulting resolution condemned the Viceroy's statement as an

⁵⁵ Burke and Quraishi, *Quaid-i-Azam: Mohammad Ali Jinnah, His Personality and His Politics*, 226-227.

⁵⁶ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 61.

unequivocal reiteration of the same old imperialistic policy. It resolved to not give any support to Great Britain in her war efforts and called upon the Congress ministries in the provinces to resign.⁵⁷ All the Congress Ministries accordingly resigned between 27 October and 15 November, 1939. In early December, Jinnah called upon the Muslims all over India to celebrate 22 December as the 'Day of Deliverance'. He said:

I wish Mussalmans all over India to observe Friday, 22 December as the day of deliverance and thanksgiving as a mark of relief that the Congress Governments have at last ceased to function...This meeting therefore expresses its deep sense of relief at the termination of the Congress regime in various provinces and rejoices in observing this day as the day of deliverance from tyranny, oppression and injustice during the last two and a half years and prays to God to grant such strength, discipline and organization to Muslim India as to successfully prevent the advent of such a Ministry again...⁵⁸

On 23 March, 1940, at the Lahore session, the League adopted its famous resolution known as the Pakistan Resolution. In this session, the League formally adopted the idea that India must be divided into two parts, one for the Hindus and the other for the Muslims. In his Presidential address, Jinnah elaborated in great detail the case for a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. He said 'Islam and Hinduism are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders. It is a dream that the Hindus and the Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality...'⁵⁹ He added: 'The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religions, philosophies, social customs and literatures. They neither intermarry, nor interdine together and indeed they belong to two different civilizations which are based on

⁵⁷ R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3 (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd., 1977), 495.

⁵⁸ News report published in *Leader* titled "Resignation of Congress Governments: Muslims asked to celebrate event, day of Thanksgiving on 22 December", 9 December, 1939, in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence of India, 1939*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1826.

⁵⁹ Presidential address of Jinnah at All-India Muslim League Session at Lahore, March 22-24, 1940, in Pirzada, ed., *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947*, vol. 2, 309.

conflicting ideas and conceptions'⁶⁰. Continuing the theme, he said: 'It is quite clear that Hindus and Muslims derive their inspirations from different sources of history. They have different epics, their heroes are different, and they have different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other, and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single State, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and the final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a State.'⁶¹

Gandhi's first reaction to the two-nation theory and the demand for Pakistan was one of bafflement and bewilderment bordering on incredulity. In response, Gandhi said: 'Religion binds man to God and man to man. Does Islam bind Muslim only to Muslim and antagonize the Hindu? Was the message of the Prophet peace only for and between Muslims and war against Hindus or non-Muslims? Are eight crores of Muslims to be fed with this which I can only describe as poison?'⁶² In *Harijan* on 6 April, 1940, he wrote:

The two-nation theory is an untruth. The vast majority of Muslims in India are converts to Islam or descendants of converts. They did not become a separate nation as soon as they become converts. A Bengali Muslim speaks the same tongue as a Bengali Hindu does, eats the same food, and has the same amusements as his Hindu neighbor. They dress alike. I have often found it difficult to distinguish by outward sign between a Bengali Hindu and a Bengali Muslim. When I first met Quaid-e-Azam, I did not know that he was a Muslim. I

⁶⁰ Presidential address of Jinnah at All-India Muslim League Session at Lahore, March 22-24, 1940, in Pirzada, ed., *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947*, vol. 2, 309.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² An article by Mahatma Gandhi titled 'Hindu Muslim Tangle' which appeared in *Harijan* on 4 May, 1940, in K. N. Panikkar, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence of India, 1940*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 623.

came to know his religion when I had his full name given to me. His nationality was written in his face and manner.⁶³

Nehru's reaction to the Lahore Resolution was one of anger and deep resentment. He did not mince words in expressing his sentiments:

There have been complaints in the Press that the Congress leaders had not successfully negotiated with the League. The Lahore resolution has shown clearly the mentality of the League leaders and is an answer to such complaints. The whole problem has taken a new complexion and there is no question of settlement or negotiation now. The knot that is before us is incapable of being united by settlement; it needs cutting open. I want to say that we will have nothing to do with this mad scheme.⁶⁴

A change of Government took place in Britain in May 1940, and Winston Churchill became the Prime Minister. The Fall of France temporarily softened the attitude of the Congress.⁶⁵ Britain was in immediate danger of Nazi occupation.⁶⁶ On 2 June, Gandhi wrote 'We don't seek our independence out of British ruin'. On 29 June, Linlithgow and Gandhi met at Simla, but the talks didn't yield anything concrete. The Congress Working Committee met from 3 to 7 July at Delhi and passed a resolution that demanded an immediate declaration by Britain granting India complete independence and a construction of a 'National Government' without further delay.⁶⁷

The British Cabinet's reply to the Congress demand was the August Offer. On 8 August, 1940, Linlithgow made an announcement that stated His Majesty's Government's new offer. It

⁶³ Mahatma Gandhi's article titled 'A Baffling Situation' on Jinnah's Plan to divide India, appeared in *Harijan* on 6 April, 1940, in *Ibid*, 619-620.

⁶⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru's views on the demand for Pakistan, 13 April, 1940, in Panikkar, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence of India, 1940*, vol. 1, 622.

⁶⁵ Sailendra Nath Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, 1857-1947* (New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 2009), 133.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 134.

⁶⁷ Congress Working Committee's proposal for Provisional National Government, 3-7 July, 1940, in Panikkar, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence of India, 1940*, vol. 1, 171.

assured India 'Dominion Status' immediately after the end of the war. For the immediate future, the offer included expansion to the Viceroy's Council that would include a certain number of Indians from political parties and also the establishment of a War Advisory Council which would also contain Indians.⁶⁸ The August Offer also made clear that His Majesty's Government would not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities to any system of Government in India whose authority would be directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life.⁶⁹ The offer also added that the British Government would not be a party to any arrangement that coerced the minority to submission, by the majority.⁷⁰

'Deeply distressed' was Gandhi's reaction to the August Offer. The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha from 18 to 22 August and expressed its deep disappointment at the August Offer. The offer was rejected by the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on 15 September, 1940. The main ground of rejection was that its demand for a national government was not conceded in the offer, as was the ultimate demand of complete freedom for India. On 13 October at Wardha, Gandhi unfolded his plan for individual Satyagraha. Gandhi selected Vinoba Bhave to be the first satyagrahi. Bhave began to deliver anti-war speeches and was subsequently arrested and jailed. The next person to court arrest was Nehru followed by Patel and Azad. Nearly 30,000 Congressmen courted arrest as part of Gandhi's individual Satyagraha during the year 1940-41.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Viceroy's statement on expanding the Governor-General's Council and establishing War Advisory Council, 8 August, 1940, in *Ibid*, 173-174.

⁶⁹ Viceroy's statement on expanding the Governor-General's Council and establishing War Advisory Council, 8 August, 1940," in Panikkar, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence of India, 1940*, vol. 1, 174.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

⁷¹ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, 1857-1947*, 134.

The 1937 elections were the first occasion that gave the Congress the responsibility of administration. According to Azad, it was a test for the Congress to prove its national character and everyone watched how it would live up to that standard.⁷² Azad wrote that the Congress failed in that test in Bombay and in Bihar. Communal considerations trumped merit in the selection of Premiers to the two provinces. Also, the Congress's decision to form one party Cabinets in the provinces was a serious error in judgment. Drunk with success at the polls, the Congress set very stiff conditions for allowing the League members into the Cabinet in the United Provinces. The Congress was basically asking the Muslim League to self-liquidate itself as a precondition for coalition. Naturally, the League rejected the outrageous conditions set forth by the Congress. Jaswant Singh writes 'all such attitudinizing on the part of the Congress gave the Muslim League a new lease of life and set in motion a process that culminated in the partition of India.'⁷³ Menon writes 'this was the beginning of a serious rift between the Congress and the League and was a factor which induced neutral Muslim opinion to turn in the support of Jinnah.'⁷⁴ Azad commented that if the league's offer of cooperation had been accepted, the Muslim League party for all practical purposes would have merged with the Congress.

Another legitimate complaint against Congress policy was that it spurned offers of coalition at provinces where it had the majority, whereas it did not hesitate to join coalitions in provinces where it was in the minority. So, some historians have raised the question 'if coalition was bad, how it could be good in one place and bad in another?' Uma Kaura very correctly concludes that the Congress's refusal to form a coalition had a major impact on the evolution of

⁷² Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 116.

⁷³ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 191.

⁷⁴ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 56.

Muslim attitude towards it.⁷⁵ Jinnah was determined not succumb to the dictates of the Congress. He saw it as an attempt by the Congress to annihilate the Muslim League. According to Nanda, the reason why the Congress did not opt for a coalition in the United Provinces was because some of the Congress leaders feared that the League, with its feudal and landlord support, would oppose the Congress agenda of agrarian reforms, particularly the abolition of landlordism.⁷⁶ Another consideration for the Congress was whether a coalition government between the two parties would be able to maintain cohesion given the fact that they represented two contradictory urges.⁷⁷ The Congress stood for democracy, socialism, and Indian national unity whereas the League was primarily interested in the promotion of Muslim interests.⁷⁸

The Congress attitude made Jinnah realize that the only way to counter the Congress challenge was to build a first class organization. In order to unite the Muslims behind his organization, Jinnah raised the slogan of 'Islam in danger' and created an atmosphere of hatred against the Congress. At the Lucknow Session of the Muslim League, he called for solidarity and unity among the Muslims. It was in Lucknow that he launched a programme to make the Muslim League a truly mass organization. The greatest achievement at Lucknow was the recognition of the League by powerful provincial leaders such as Fazlul Huq and Sikander Hyat Khan as the sole organization representing the Muslims of India.

The Congress leaders failed to realize the seriousness of the growing ill-will among the Muslims on the pro-Hindu measures being taken by the Congress Ministries. The Congress turned a blind eye to the growing uneasiness, bitterness, and distrust among the Muslims of its

⁷⁵ Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism: The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition, 1928-40*, 112.

⁷⁶ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence*, 271-272.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 272.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

policies. The Muslim League did its best to fan the flames of discontent by publicizing the alleged insolent behavior of the Congress Ministries.⁷⁹ As has been mentioned earlier in this discussion, the All-India Muslim League instituted a commission to look into the Congress atrocities in the provinces and its findings were published in a report called the Pirpur Report. The report confirmed the charges against the Congress. A sub-committee was also appointed by the League to look into the alleged grievances and hardships of Muslims in Bihar under the Congress rule. The resulting report, called the Shareef Report, reached the conclusion that the Muslims in Bihar were living in a state of constant fear of attack upon their life and property.⁸⁰

According to Sumit Sarkar, the Congress totalitarianism was a bit of overstatement. Other historians have opined that the allegations against the Congress by the Muslim League were exaggerated. Even if the allegations were overblown, the fact remained that it created deep suspicion and mistrust among the Muslim community regarding the ability of the Congress to govern in a fair and just manner. The Congress did almost nothing to assuage the Muslim fears. Rajendra Prasad's response to the Muslim League's accusations was one of complete indifference.⁸¹ He wrote 'so far as I am concerned, the Congress Ministry has done nothing to prejudice the Mussalmans.' By the end of 1938, the Muslim League leaders were united in their determination to not let the Muslims be dominated by the Hindus in a future Central Government.⁸² They felt that the Congress demand for complete independence with a centralized government would place the Muslim minority perpetually at the mercy of a Hindu majority. Hence, they began to look for alternate schemes, partition being one of possibilities.

⁷⁹ Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism: The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition, 1928-40*, 124.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 125.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 127.

⁸² *Ibid*, 128.

Another accusation against the Congress Provincial Governments was that they were being ruled from the Center. They were not accountable to the electorate that had elected them, rather to the Congress High Command. Strict control was exercised over the Provincial Governments by the Congress High Command, even on minor matters. Hodson writes 'The main effect of 'dictatorship' by the High Command was to heighten Muslim fear.'⁸³ The value of Provincial autonomy was debased. Despite strict control from Center, the Provincial Governments were mired in corruption and nepotism. Tomilson comments: 'Congressmen were suddenly seized with a desire to capture power at all cost. So long it was a fighting machine, it was functioning on a high moral plane and followed strict moral discipline. Once they won the elections, they felt that it was time for reward for their past sacrifices.'⁸⁴ Tomilson adds: 'Khadi, which was the symbol of truth and non-violence, now, became a qualification for its wearers to secure jobs for themselves and for their friends and families.'⁸⁵

Nehru dismissed the communal problem as a 'nonsense' that needed no attention. For him the most vital factor was the problem of poverty and unemployment and everything else was subsidiary to it. Nehru had no idea about the power and potentialities of the Muslim League.⁸⁶ He dismissed it as a small upper class organization controlled by feudal elements which had no influence on the masses.⁸⁷ According to Majumdar, Nehru committed the same type of mistake as the British with respect to the Congress when they belittled it as an organization of English educated men constituting a microscopic minority.⁸⁸ Instead of conciliating with the Muslim

⁸³ Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain – India – Pakistan*, 74.

⁸⁴ B. R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942: the Penultimate Phase* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 106.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 466.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 466-467.

League, the Congress leaders set out to destroy it. Accordingly, Nehru announced the Muslim Mass Contact Programme to win away Muslims from the League. The strategy completely backfired. Jinnah took up the challenge thrown by Nehru and his brilliance as a leader never shone forth higher.⁸⁹ He completely turned the table on the Congress by playing the communal card adroitly. According to Majumdar, he turned Indian Politics into a battle between the Hindu-majority versus the Muslim-minority.⁹⁰

The Congress argument that since it was secular it represented all sections of India was spurious. It did not win enough Muslim seats to justify its claim. Moreover, the Congress ideal of a Westminster model of majoritarian democracy was unsuitable to the Indian condition, given her complex social arithmetic.⁹¹ Nehru and the Congress leaders were blind to the fact that under the system of separate electorate, which they had agreed to according to the 1935 Act (and a few times in the past such as Lucknow Pact of 1916), a government entirely majoritarian and not reasonably inclusive of minorities would be seen as an unrepresentative government.⁹²

The British saw the growing rift between the Congress and the Muslim League as their trump card.⁹³ During the early stages of the war, the British policy was to win Indian support without conceding anything grand. They viewed the communal approach taken by Jinnah as their most effective weapon to counter the Congress's demands. They saw the communal divide as the most useful trap for the forces of nationalism. Linlithgow tried halfheartedly to bring the two parties to an agreement, but he was chastised by Churchill as following a suicidal policy. For

⁸⁹ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 468.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁹¹ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 198.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, 144.

Churchill, the Hindu-Muslim tension was the bulwark of British rule in India.⁹⁴ The Congress committed a serious blunder by resigning en masse from the Provincial Ministries. As a result, it lost the power to bargain. The resignation of the Congress Ministries allowed the League to occupy the political center stage. Linlithgow's attitude towards the Congress changed as there was no need to placate it anymore. The Congress's insistence that Britain declare her war aims made the Viceroy suspect that the Congress was maneuvering to take advantage of Britain's difficulties. Hence the Viceroy sought support elsewhere and the obvious choice was Jinnah and the Muslim League.⁹⁵ He found it expedient to encourage the Muslim league to become a rival to the Congress at an all India level. In March 1940, the Muslim League passed its famous Pakistan Resolution and it never looked back on its demand for Pakistan from that point on.

The promise of Dominion Status at the end of war by the August Offer did not satisfy the Congress; first, it was unknown how long the war would last and second, the Congress was not very enthusiastic about Dominion Status. In Nehru's words: 'The conception of Dominion Status developed as between England and her own people spread out in various colonies. There was and is much in common between them. The common bonding is lacking here and it is difficult to see how Dominion Status fits in with India.'⁹⁶ Britain's obligations to the minorities were spelled out as a pledge in the August Offer. This was seen by the Congress as the old British policy of divide and rule. The Congress concluded that the British had no real interest to recognize India's independence and would do anything to keep her in perpetual bondage. However, the Congress's rejection of the August Offer hurt it politically. The acceptance of the August Offer would have meant a return of the Congress Governments in the provinces. Then it would have been in a

⁹⁴ Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, 144.

⁹⁵ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 225.

⁹⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru's confidential note on Congress Policy, 20 January, 1940, in Panikkar, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence of India, 1940*, Vol. 1, 119.

position to counter the growing influence of the Muslim League instead of handing the center stage to Jinnah on a platter. With the Congress in the wilderness and Jinnah's hands considerably strengthened, waverers among the Muslims began trickling into the League.⁹⁷ For all practical purposes, Jinnah was given a veto on further constitutional progress.⁹⁸ The balance of power altered in favor of Jinnah and the Muslim League.

⁹⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 70.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter Two

Cripps Mission

Prime Minister Churchill, Secretary of State for India Leo Amery, and Viceroy Linlithgow were all opposed to giving India more self-governance while the war lasted. Churchill wrote: ‘The idea that we shall ‘get more out of India’ by putting the Congress in charge at this juncture seems ill-founded.’⁹⁹ Amery thought that any settlement with the Congress Party would alienate the Muslims in India and it could hurt Britain’s war efforts as most of the military recruits came from the Muslim race.¹⁰⁰ Like Churchill, Linlithgow was an ardent imperialist who believed that the imperial interests would be best served by yielding nothing to India. He thought that any real transfer of power would exacerbate the racial and religious divisions in the country.¹⁰¹ Moreover, Linlithgow hated the Congress politicians and had a very low opinion of them. He wrote the following:

...there is no possibility of giving satisfaction to Congress or securing their real and wholehearted support. In my experience they are entirely ruthless politicians; will take all they can get; will do their utmost to maneuver us into a position in which we make sacrifices that are substantial and that will increase the prestige and power of Congress in the country.¹⁰²

Clement Attlee, who was the Lord Privy Seal in Churchill’s Cabinet, opposed the policy of “do nothing” being advocated by the Secretary of State and the Viceroy. He proposed that a representative from London be sent to India to find a settlement with the Indian leaders to

⁹⁹ Telegram from Churchill to Attlee via Naval Cypher, 7 January, 1942, in Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1970), 14.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram from Amery to Linlithgow, 10 January, 1942, in *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁰¹ Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery, 21 January, 1942, in *Ibid*, 48.

¹⁰² *Ibid*.

devolve more power into their hands. He thought that the hand-to-mouth policy being followed by His Majesty's Government was not statesmanship; rather it was short-sighted and suicidal.¹⁰³

Meanwhile the war situation in Asia changed rapidly. Singapore fell to the Japanese army on 15 February 1942, Rangoon on 8 March, and the Andaman Islands on 23 March. Despite the popular resentment against the British Raj, Indian participation in the Allied campaign was strong. As many as 2.5 million Indian troops were fighting the Axis forces in Africa, Middle East, South Asia, and Italy. But, as the war approached India's doorsteps, the Churchill Cabinet felt compelled to make some gestures to India to win her greater support for the war efforts.¹⁰⁴ During this time, President Roosevelt was pressuring the Churchill Government for a settlement of the Indian question.¹⁰⁵ After Pearl Harbor, American opinion became more vocal and urged Britain to make greater efforts to seek India's cooperation in the war.¹⁰⁶ In the newly reconstituted War Cabinet of Churchill, Attlee was appointed the deputy Prime Minister and Sir Stafford Cripps as the leader of the House of Commons and also the Lord Privy Seal. It was their influence that finally persuaded Churchill to agree to an offer that Cripps made to go himself to India as the representative of His Majesty's Government to negotiate fresh with the Indian leaders for a political settlement and in return get India's cooperation in the war. Another reason why Churchill agreed to send Cripps was that even if the Mission failed, it would at least show the world that the British were serious about giving India self-governance.

¹⁰³ Memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal Clement Attlee on the Indian Political Situation, 2 February, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 111.

¹⁰⁴ Sarkar, *Modern India*, 385.

¹⁰⁵ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, 1857-1947*, 136.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

After protracted negotiations, the War Cabinet finally approved a Draft Proposal in early March to be carried by Cripps to India. The salient features of the proposal were as follows:

- a) Immediately after the cessation of the war, steps would be taken to set up a Constituent Assembly which would frame a new constitution for India.¹⁰⁷
- b) The Indian States would be able to participate in the Constitution making process by sending their representative to the body.¹⁰⁸
- c) The right of any province to opt-out of the constitution. These non-acceding provinces would be allowed to frame their own Constitution.¹⁰⁹
- d) During the critical period of the war, His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defense of India as part of their world war effort.¹¹⁰

In the days following his arrival in India, Cripps conducted interviews with leaders of the Congress Party, the Muslim League, the Sikh Community, the Depressed Classes, and so on. Some of the features of the Cripps Proposal were unpalatable to the Congress such as the provinces being given the option to stay out and the inclusion of States' representatives (not elected by the popular vote) in the Constitution making body.¹¹¹ The Congress wanted the British Paramountcy in relation to the Princes to be transferred to the Indian Government when the British left India. Cripps said that it was not possible under the treaty obligations of His Majesty's Government with the Princes. Gandhi objected to autocratic Princely States persisting under British protection under the Cripps Proposal.¹¹² He said that the document was a virtual

¹⁰⁷ Draft Declaration by British War Cabinet for discussion with Indian leaders, 30 March, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 565.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 566.

¹¹¹ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 125.

¹¹² R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 87.

invitation to the Muslims to create a Pakistan.¹¹³ He described the declaration as a ‘post-dated check’. The Hindu Mahasabha rejected the plan on the ground that the option given to the provinces to stay out of the Union would destroy the unity of the country.¹¹⁴ The Depressed Classes denounced the scheme for its failure to provide adequate safeguards for them.¹¹⁵ The Sikhs also protested vowing to resist any attempt to separate Punjab from India.¹¹⁶ However, when Cripps showed Jinnah the draft proposal, he was surprised at the distance it went to meet his Pakistan demand and of course he did not oppose it. Once again, it appeared that British overtures were favoring the Muslim League above all else.

The Congress Working Committee met during the first week of April and deliberated on the Cripps Proposal. The resulting resolution raised objections to some provisions in the proposal. According to the resolution, although the Cripps Proposal accepted India’s right to self-determination in future, certain provisions in it fettered, circumscribed, and imperiled the development of a free and united India.¹¹⁷ The rights of the peoples in the States were vitiated by introduction of non-representative elements in the constitution-making body.¹¹⁸ The resolution said: ‘Complete ignoring of 90 million of people of Indian States and treatment as commodities at the disposal of their rulers is complete negation of democracy and self-determination.’¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Note by Stafford Cripps on his interview with Mahatma Gandhi, 27 March, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 499.

¹¹⁴ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 126.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 125.

¹¹⁷ Telegram from Cripps to Churchill, 2 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 617.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

The CWC resolution criticized the prior acceptance of the principle of non-accession for provinces as a severe blow to their conception of Indian unity. The resolution expressed Congress's concern that the Cripps Proposal would encourage and would lead to attempts by the provinces to break away from the Union at the very inception of it and just when utmost goodwill and cooperation were needed.¹²⁰ It accused the British Government of giving in to communal demands by a certain section of the Indian population, which could have grave repercussions by encouraging other minority communities to make similar demands. The resolution objected strongly to the provision in Proposal that stipulated that the defense of India would remain under British control until the war was over. It said that at any time defense was a vital subject, but at the time of war, defense was all important and covered almost every sphere of life and administration.¹²¹ By taking away that responsibility, the British Government had reduced the power to be given to the Indians to an absolute farce and nullity.¹²² The Working Committee argued that in order to rouse the Indian masses and get their enthusiastic support for the war, they must be made to believe that they were free and were in charge of maintaining and defending their own freedom.¹²³ Similarly, C. R. Rajagopalachari, one of the major leaders of the Congress, told Cripps that it was essential that the Indian leaders should be able to give some clarion call to the Indians which would stimulate them from their defeatist attitude. The proposal should explicitly make it clear that the Indian people were being asked to defend their own country and that it was not merely the obligation of the British Government.¹²⁴ He recommended that an Indian Defense Minister should be put in the charge of managing the war in the Indian

¹²⁰ Telegram from Cripps to Churchill, 2 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 617-618.

¹²¹ Telegram from Cripps to Churchill, 2 April, 1942, in *Ibid*, 618.

¹²² *Ibid*.

¹²³ *Ibid*.

¹²⁴ Note by Cripps on his interview with Rajagopalachari, 28 March, 1942, in *Ibid*, 511.

theater of operation. This would essentially put the Indian Army under Indian control while the British troops would continue to be under the control of British Commander-in-Chief.

Amery's negative reaction to the Congress Working Committee resolution is well-captured in the extracts below from a letter he wrote to Linlithgow in early April:

I have just seen Stafford Cripps' summary of CWC Resolution. It is certainly difficult to imagine a more purely negative document and I am afraid it looks as if Gandhi had once again persuaded that wrecking is the best policy. I am not sure that these people really want responsibility, and if we offered them the moon they would probably reject it because of the wrinkles in its surface...They must know equally well that they are quite incapable of taking on the whole defense problem or of 'galvanizing the people of India to rise to the height of the occasion'...I must say that the more I look at the Resolution the more doubtful I am whether people of that type would ever run straight, even if they could be brought for the moment to agree. They would be quite capable, not only of making endless difficulties for Wavell, but even of trying to negotiate a separate peace with Japan.¹²⁵

Cripps wrote a letter to Churchill suggesting that it might be a good idea to hand over the Defense Ministry to an Indian, subject to a convention in writing that the Defense Minister would not in any matter affect the prosecution of the war act contrary to the policy laid down by His Majesty's Government.¹²⁶ He also suggested as an alternative that if it was impracticable during the time of war to hand over the full responsibility of Defense to a Minister, then perhaps some non-critical functions could be delegated subject to the Commander-in-Chief's approval.¹²⁷ Essentially, Cripps's alternative proposal envisioned designating the Commander-in-Chief as the War Member, converting the Defense Department into the War Department, and creating a Defense Coordination Department to take over the transferred functions.¹²⁸ Cripps's Proposal to

¹²⁵ Letter from Amery to Linlithgow, 3 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 632.

¹²⁶ Telegram from Cripps to Churchill, 4 April, 1942, in *Ibid*, 638.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*.

¹²⁸ Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India, 1939-1945*, 99.

transfer the Defense Department entirely to Indian hands was voted down by Churchill, Amery, Linlithgow and Wavell. Amery argued that India was the key to the defense of the British Empire and putting that key in unskilled Indian hands might prove fatal for the conduct of the war.¹²⁹ Cripps's alternative proposal was, however, approved by the War Cabinet with the consent of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief.

The negotiations were further complicated by the intervention of Colonel Louis Johnson, a personal representative of President Roosevelt. He took an active part in the negotiations on the defense formula. The resulting proposal, called the Johnson-Cripps formula, inverted the original proposal approved by the War Cabinet.¹³⁰ The original proposal was that an Indian representative member should be added to the Executive Council who would be in charge of a new department called the Defense Coordination Department and it would be responsible for specified defense matters which would be separated from the Commander-in-Chief's War Department. The specified defense matters were an unexciting semi-civilian list which included items such as public relations, demobilization and post-war construction, stationary, printing, and forms for the Army, reception, accommodation, and social arrangements for all foreign missions, and dignitaries and so on.¹³¹ The Johnson-Cripps formula stipulated that the Defense Department would be placed in the charge of a representative Indian member, but certain functions relating to the conduct of the war would be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief, who would be in control of the armed forces in India, and who would be the member of the Executive Council in charge of the War Department.¹³² The Johnson-Cripps formula met strong disapprovals from the

¹²⁹ Telegram from Amery to Linlithgow, 5 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 641.

¹³⁰ Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain – India – Pakistan*, 100.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 129.

Viceroy who complained to London that Cripps was negotiating behind his back. The War Cabinet wrote the following letter chastising Cripps for going beyond his mandate:

War Cabinet deeply sympathizes with difficulties of your task, but is greatly concerned to find that latest formula was propounded to Nehru and to Working Committee without previous knowledge and approval of Viceroy and Wavell. There is also grave danger that Johnson's public intervention may be misunderstood as representing action on behalf of U.S. Government, which of course is not the case.¹³³

When Cripps was conducting interviews with the Indian Political leaders and giving press briefings, he had used language which implied that under his Proposal a wholly Indian National Cabinet would be formed in which the position of the Viceroy to the Indian Government would be similar to the position of the King to the British Government, a largely symbolic position with no real authority.¹³⁴ He subsequently pointed out that no major amendment to the Constitution was possible during the time of war, but he told the Congress leaders that the Governor-General could allow a National Government by means of a convention.¹³⁵ The War Cabinet was harshly critical of Cripps. It objected to his promised Indianization of the executive, which would severely curtail the Viceroy's powers and put him in an impossible situation.¹³⁶ On 9 April, 1942, when Azad and Nehru talked to him about the prospects of setting up a National Government, Cripps made it clear that there would be no change to the Constitution while the war lasted and any such changes to the workings of the government were matters for discussions with the Viceroy after a settlement had been reached.¹³⁷ It was in these circumstances that Azad

¹³³ War Cabinet's 13th meeting minutes, 9 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 707.

¹³⁴ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 130.

¹³⁵ Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery, 10 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, vol. 1, 718.

¹³⁶ Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 118.

¹³⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 131.

decided to place before Cripps a detailed statement of the position of the Congress towards the Cripps Proposal. Some extracts from Azad's letter to Cripps sent on 10 April are given below:

These proposals in effect asked for participation in the tasks of today with a view to ensure the future freedom of India. Freedom was for an uncertain future, not for the present...In our talks you gave us to understand that you envisaged a National Government which would deal with all matters except Defense. Defense at any time, and more particularly in war time is of essential importance; and without it a National Government functions in a very limited field. Apart from this consideration, it was obvious that the whole purpose of your proposals and our talks centered round the urgency of the problems created by the threat of invasion. The chief functions of a National Government must necessarily be to organize defense, both intensively and on the widest popular basis, and to create mass psychology of resistance to an invader. Only a National Government could do that, and only a Government on whom this responsibility was laid. Popular resistance must have a national background and both the soldier and the civilian must feel that they are fighting for their country's freedom under National leadership...The formula for Defense that you sent us gave a list of subjects or departments which were to be transferred to the Defense Department. This list was a revealing one as it proved that the Defense Minister would deal with relatively unimportant matters. We are unable to accept this...you had referred both privately and in the course of public statements to a National Government and a Cabinet consisting of Ministers. These words have a certain significance and we had imagined that the new government would function with full powers as a Cabinet with the Viceroy acting as a constitutional head; but the new picture that you placed before us was really not very different from the old...The new Government could neither be called, except vaguely and inaccurately, nor could it function as a National Government...¹³⁸

The Congress Working Committee rejected Cripps Proposal on 11 April. As soon as the Congress rejected the Proposal, the Muslim League Working Committee followed suit. The Muslim League resolution was very disingenuous in its reasons for rejecting the offer. It viewed the Cripps Mission as trying to create a new Indian Union and compelling the Muslims into a constitution-making body. Here is an extract from Muslim League's resolution:

In the Draft Declaration a constitution-making body has been proposed with the primary object of creating one India Union. So far as the Muslim League is

¹³⁸ Letter from Maulana Azad to Cripps, 10 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, 726-730.

concerned, it has finally decided that the only solution of India's constitutional problem is the partition of India into independent zones..."¹³⁹

The arrangement for defense proved to be the most vexed problem that was principally responsible for the breakdown of Cripps Mission.¹⁴⁰ The British wanted Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief, to continue being responsible for all major functions of the army but this was unacceptable to the Congress. The Congress's argument was that Indians should not be expected to fight a war unless they were given the responsibility for defending their own country. Another thorny issue that contributed to the failure of the Cripps Mission was the Congress's demand for the establishment of a truly National Government in the immediate future, with the Viceroy acting as the Constitutional head of such a Government. The British Government was not ready to concede such a demand as it would have entailed changes to the Constitution at a time of war. The truth of the matter was, Churchill had no intention of giving India freedom anytime soon. The main purpose behind sending Cripps to India was to show the world that Britain was making efforts to give India self-governance. The conservatives like Churchill, Amery, and Linlithgow didn't want Cripps, a labor leader, to succeed and they constantly opposed and sabotaged his efforts to accommodate Indian opinions.¹⁴¹ Churchill never trusted the Congress leaders and thought that Cripps was conceding too much of their demands. Louis Johnson, Roosevelt's personal envoy, commented that London wanted a Congress refusal.¹⁴² Roosevelt was highly critical of London's handling of the situation and he said that the deadlock was caused by the unwillingness of the British Government to concede to India the right of self-government.

¹³⁹ Resolution of the All-India Muslim League Working Committee, 11 April, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cripps Mission, January – April 1942*, 749.

¹⁴⁰ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 518.

¹⁴¹ Bipin Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1989), 455.

¹⁴² Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 138.

While the responsibility for the failure of Cripps Mission rests largely with the British, the Congress's intransigence and its all-or-nothing attitude also hindered reaching a settlement. Cripps's Proposal was a significant step towards granting India its freedom. In the long term, it promised India a post-war Dominion Status with a right to secede, and a constitution-making body elected from provincial legislatures.. In the short term, Cripps assured the Congress leaders that the new executive would approximate a National Government, not formally but in practice through conventions just as the Governors' special powers had not really hindered the Congress ministries from effectively ruling the provinces from 1937 to 1939.¹⁴³ The Congress should have taken the offer, which would have established a semi-National Government at the center and it could have hastened the attainment of India's freedom instead of another five long years that it took for India to get her freedom and that to after paying the heavy price of division of the country.

The War Cabinet had misjudged the mood of India.¹⁴⁴ For them, the crisis in the war called for immediate action to break the deadlock in the face of Japanese invasion. Churchill believed that by dangling the prospects of independence and self-determination after the war, he could get the support of Indian leaders in the war effort. But many Indians were doubtful of the victory of Britain and her allies; most of them were apathetic towards the war and did not believe that Japan would invade India.¹⁴⁵ The country was in no mood to sacrifice its political ambitions; instead, it wanted to take advantage of Britain's weakening position.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Sarkar, *Modern India*, 386.

¹⁴⁴ Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain – India – Pakistan*, 104.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Perhaps the biggest reason for Congress's rejection of the Cripps Proposal was the opt-out clause for the provinces. By giving the provinces that option, the Cripps formula conceded the partition of India. In one stroke, the British Government overturned the 1935 Act as a basis for a post-war constitutional settlement.¹⁴⁷ For the first time the British Government recognized the League's demand for Pakistan by incorporating the non-acceding clause for the provinces in the Cripps formula. It advanced the idea of Pakistan one stage further.¹⁴⁸ It led to an increase in estrangement between the two major communities in India. Jinnah now came to believe that the Pakistan idea was achievable. It would not be a stretch to say that Cripps Mission opened the doors to Pakistan for Jinnah and his followers.

¹⁴⁷ Singh, *The Origins of Partition of India, 1936-1947*, 77.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter Three

Quit India Movement, Gandhi-Jinnah talks, and I. N. A. Campaign

The failure of the Cripps Mission caused profound disappointment in India. The Congress leaders realized that Britain was unwilling to concede to India real constitutional advance while the war lasted. Apart from that, popular discontent was on the rise against the soaring prices and war-time shortages.¹⁴⁹ People resented high-handed actions by the Government such as the commandeering of boats in Bengal and Orissa to prevent those being captured by the Japanese army in case Japan decided to invade India.¹⁵⁰ There was a growing feeling of an imminent British collapse because of the Allied reverses in South-East Asia. The manner in which the British evacuated from Malaya and Burma further angered the people of India. It was common knowledge that the British had evacuated the white residents and generally had left the subject people to their fate.¹⁵¹ Letters from Indians in South-East Asia to their relatives in India were full of graphic accounts of British betrayal and their being left at the mercy of the dreaded Japanese. Against this backdrop, Gandhi started a series of articles in *Harijan* in which he urged the British to leave India.¹⁵² He was convinced that the time was now ripe for putting the maximum pressure on the British to quit India.

On 19 April, 1942, Gandhi wrote: 'If the British left India to her fate, non-violent India would not lose anything. Probably Japan would leave India alone.'¹⁵³ In that article he suggested

¹⁴⁹ Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, 458.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 140.

¹⁵³ Article in *Harijan* under the heading 'Foreign Soldiers in India', 26 April, 1942, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 76 (New Delhi: Publications Division of Government of India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1979), 49.

that the safety and interest of both Britain and India lay in an orderly and timely British withdrawal from India.¹⁵⁴ On 3 May, Gandhi wrote in *Harijan*: ‘I feel convinced that British presence is incentive for Japanese attack. If British wisely decided to withdraw and leave India to manage her own affairs, Japan would be bound to reconsider their plans. The very novelty of British stroke would confound the Japanese, dissolve subdued hatred against British.’¹⁵⁵

Continuing his theme in *Harijan*, Gandhi wrote on 10 May:

I feel British cannot suddenly change their traditional nature; racial superiority is treated not as vice but as virtue not only in India but in Africa, Burma and Ceylon. This drastic disease requires drastic remedy – complete and immediate orderly withdrawal from India, and from all non-European possessions. It will be bravest and cleanest act of British people. Clean end of imperialism is likely to be end of Fascism and Nazism; suggested action will certainly blunt edge of Fascism and Nazism which are offshoot of Imperialism.¹⁵⁶

On 16 May, during a press interview, Gandhi said: ‘I am convinced that we are living today in a state of ordered anarchy. It is a misnomer to call such rule as established in India a rule which promotes the welfare of India. Therefore, this ordered disciplined anarchy should go. And if there is complete lawlessness in India as a result, I would risk it.’¹⁵⁷ Gandhi believed that only an immediate declaration of Indian Independence by the British Government would give the people of India a stake in the defense of their own country.¹⁵⁸ He pushed for the acceptance of a draft by the Congress Working Committee that he had authored. The main points of the draft were: ‘(i) A demand to the British Government to clear out (ii) India a zone of war as a result of

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 50.

¹⁵⁵ Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery which included the summary of article by Gandhi in *Harijan* on 3 May, 6 May, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: Quit India, 30 April – 21 September*, vol. 2 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1971), 37.

¹⁵⁶ Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery which included the summary of article by Gandhi in *Harijan* on 10 May, 11 May, 1942, in Ibid, 71.

¹⁵⁷ Gandhi’s interview to the Press at Bombay, May 16, 1942, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 76, 114.

¹⁵⁸ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India’s Road to Independence*, 287.

British Imperialism (iii) No foreign assistance needed for the freedom of the country (iv) India has no quarrel with any country (v) If Japan invaded India it shall meet with non-violent resistance'.¹⁵⁹ Nehru and Azad were opposed to a demand for British withdrawal at a time when the enemy was knocking at the gate. Nehru said: 'The whole background of the draft is one which will inevitably make the world think that we are passively lining up with the Axis powers.'¹⁶⁰ But there were staunch supporters of Gandhi such as Sardar Patel, Acharya Kripalani, and Rajendra Prasad, who favored the proposals.

Meanwhile, the Viceroy Linlithgow and the War Cabinet of Churchill were getting increasingly nervous about Gandhi's call for British withdrawal from India at a time of war. The Secretary of State, Leo Amery, suggested to the Viceroy that if Gandhi continued to be a troublemaker, then the best thing to do was to put him in a plane and fly him to Uganda.¹⁶¹ Perhaps, the British Government decided not to take the extreme measure of deporting Gandhi to Africa fearing that it could lead to violent reaction from Indian people and generate adverse opinion from Britain's allies. Amery continued to advise the Viceroy to take strong measures against the Congress leaders if they remained defiant and challenged the British authority.¹⁶² If push came to shove, they should all be put in jail, Amery added.¹⁶³

Despite sympathy for the Allied cause and the fight against Fascism, a sympathy which prompted Nehru to take a soft line in not embarrassing the government at a time of crisis, the

¹⁵⁹ Enclosure to the letter from Sir M. Hallett, the Governor of the United Provinces, to Linlithgow, 31 May, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: Quit India, 30 April – 21 September*, vol. 2, 158.

¹⁶⁰ Enclosure to a letter from Sir M. Hallett, the Governor of the United Provinces, to Linlithgow, 31 May, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: Quit India, 30 April – 21 September*, vol. 2, 159.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Amery to Linlithgow, 17 June, 1942, in *Ibid*, 225.

¹⁶² Letter from Amery to Linlithgow, 13 July, 1942, in *Ibid*, 380.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*.

Congress Working Committee, at Gandhi's urging, passed a long resolution which came to be known as the 'Quit India Resolution'. It renewed the demand that 'British rule in India must end immediately'¹⁶⁴ and that 'the freedom of India is necessary not only in the interests of India, but also for the safety of the world and for ending of Nazism, Fascism, militarism, and other forms of imperialism, and aggression of one nation over the other.'¹⁶⁵ The resolution was confirmed by the All India Congress Committee in Bombay on 8 August. The historic Quit India Resolution at Bombay was followed by Gandhi's memorable utterance: 'I am not going to be satisfied with anything sort of complete freedom. We shall do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt.'¹⁶⁶ It was a clarion call for an unarmed non-violent revolt on a mass scale.¹⁶⁷ In contrast, Jinnah viewed the Quit India Resolution as a clever move by the Congress to coerce the British to transfer power to a Hindu raj, leaving the minority Muslim community at the mercy of the majority Hindu community. Jinnah and the Muslim League decided not to join hands with the Congress in any future movement unless the Congress accepted the Pakistan demand. The attitude of Jinnah and the Muslim League underscored how little chance there was now of unity between the League and the Congress.

Gandhi had made a serious miscalculation in thinking that because of the war the British Government would come to terms with the Congress as soon as he launched his movement. He thought that the Viceroy would at least give him time to negotiate with the Government as his predecessors had done during 1921 and 1930. Linlithgow, however, had no intention of playing the game according to the Mahatma's rules.¹⁶⁸ Faced with an impending foreign invasion, the

¹⁶⁴ Resolution of the Congress Working Committee, Wardha, 14 July, 1942, in *Ibid*, 385.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁶ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 140.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁸ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence*, 287.

Government was in no mood to tolerate an open rebellion.¹⁶⁹ In the early hours of 9 August, the Government struck hard. Gandhi and all other eminent leaders of the Congress Working Committee were arrested and put in jail. Before long, all the important leaders of the Congress throughout the country had been taken into custody including Nehru.¹⁷⁰ The Government declared all Congress organizations, both at the center and the provinces, unlawful and they were barred from operating.

The sudden removal of the leaders of the Congress from all levels left no responsible men to guide the movement. If the Government had thought that by removing the leaders from the scene the movement would die, they were in for a rude shock. The sudden attack by the Government produced an instantaneous reaction among the people. The pre-emptive strike provoked the people to come out in large numbers to protest the arrest of their leaders. Initially, the protests were peaceful and non-violent in the form of *hartals* and demonstrations. However, when the Government started taking stern measures such as *lathi-charge* (use of sticks or batons by police to discharge crowds) and firing on the crowds, the protests turned violent. There were clashes with the police in Bombay, Delhi, Allahabad, Kanpur, Pune, and many other cities and towns. There were strikes by millworkers in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Jamshedpur, and other places. The textiles strikes in Ahmedabad lasted three and half months and the city was described as the 'Stalingrad' of India.¹⁷¹ Students boycotted schools and colleges throughout India. The Government responded by gagging the press.¹⁷² The *National Herald* and *Harijan* ceased publication for the entire duration of the movement, and others for shorter durations. This was the first stage of the Quit-India movement.

¹⁶⁹ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 532.

¹⁷⁰ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 143.

¹⁷¹ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 140.

¹⁷² Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, 461.

In the second stage of the Quit-India movement, the scene of action shifted to the countryside. Government properties became the targets of people. Railway lines were sabotaged, post offices were attacked and destroyed, and telephone and telegraph lines were cut. In some places, police stations were attacked. Trains, buses and trams were set on fire. Parallel governments were set up in places like Midnapore in Bengal, Satara in Maharashtra, and other places in Bihar and the United Provinces. Linlithgow sent a telegram to Amery on 20 August describing the situation:

It now appears that in murders of policemen at Ashti reported yesterday two of the murdered constables were burnt alive in kerosene...Considerable damage at Kodarna, station raided by a mob of 500 with Congress flag...Attacks on communication continues. Real storm center is still Bihar where situation clearly remains a grave one...¹⁷³

The situation became so grave in some areas that Linlithgow ordered the machine gunning of saboteurs from the air.¹⁷⁴ Linlithgow struck hard to crush the revolt. The Whipping Act was revived and thousands of people were detained without trial.¹⁷⁵ Considered as the most serious threat to the Raj since the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the Government acted with utmost severity. 57 battalions were employed to crush the disturbances. By end of 1943, approximately 91,000 people had been arrested, 1,000 people had been killed in police firings, and 2,000 had been seriously injured.¹⁷⁶ Official estimates put the figures for sabotages as 250 railway stations damaged, 500 post offices attacked, telegraph and telephone lines cut in 3,500 places, 70 police stations burnt, and more than 85 government buildings damaged.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery, 20 August, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: Quit India, 30 April – 21 September*, vol. 2, 762-763.

¹⁷⁴ Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery, 15 August, 1942, in *Ibid*, 708.

¹⁷⁵ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 141.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁷ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 537.

The brutal and all-out repression succeeded in crushing the mass phase of the struggle within a period of six or seven weeks. But underground activities of some sort or other continued for another two years. It was led by Congress Socialists, Forward Bloc members, revolutionary terrorists, and even some Gandhians, who instigated strikes, cut telegraph and telephone wires and damaged railway tracks.¹⁷⁸ Bipin Chandra writes ‘Their success in disrupting communications may not have been more than a nuisance value, but they did succeed in keeping up the spirit of the people in a situation in which open mass activity was not possible because of superior armed might of the State.’¹⁷⁹

The Muslim League Working Committee met on 20 August, 1942, and passed a resolution condemning the Quit India movement. It described the movement as an attempt by the Congress to coerce the British Government to hand over power to a Hindu Oligarchy abandoning their obligations to the Muslims of India.¹⁸⁰ It went on to add:

The Working Committee are fully convinced that Pakistan is the only solution of India’s constitutional problem and is in complete consonance with justice and fair play to the two great nations – Muslims and Hindus – inhabiting this vast sub-continent whereas if the Congress demand is accepted it would bring the 100 millions of Muslims under the yoke of the Hindu Raj...In these circumstances the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League, call upon the Muslims to abstain from any participation in the movement initiated by the Congress and to continue to pursue their normal peaceful life.¹⁸¹

Jinnah appealed to the Muslims to keep away from the Quit India movement. The Muslims in general remained aloof from the movement. However, there was a total absence of

¹⁷⁸ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India’s Road to Independence*, 288.

¹⁷⁹ Chandra et al., *India’s Struggle for Independence*, 464.

¹⁸⁰ Resolution of the Muslim League Working Committee at Bombay, 20 August, 1942, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: Quit India, 30 April – 21 September*, vol. 2, 771.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 774.

communal clashes, a sure sign that although the movement did not arouse enthusiasm among the Muslims, it did not arouse their hostility either.¹⁸²

The decision of Jinnah to keep the League away from the Quit India movement kept the leaders of the League out of jail. This enabled the Muslim League party to gain in strength. In contrast, the Congress suffered severe setback by its absence from the political scene during crucial years. In addition, a violent agitation launched by the Congress Socialists, sharpened official animosities towards the Congress. The countrywide agitation that followed the adoption of the Quit India movement was interpreted by the British Government as a deliberate attempt to interfere with the war efforts. The principal concern of the British then was the proper conduct of war. The Congress party's stand about India's participation in the war had greatly exasperated the Conservative coalition government in Britain and also the bureaucracy headed by Lord Linlithgow.¹⁸³ Consequently, they did everything possible to help and strengthen the Muslim League and offset the Congress.¹⁸⁴

Gandhi was detained at the Aga Khan Palace in Poona after his arrest in Bombay on 9 August, 1942. The massive repression unleashed by the Government to counter Quit India movement distressed him. What pained him more was the Government's insistence that he and the Congress were responsible for the violence.¹⁸⁵ At the close of the year 1942, Gandhi embarked on a correspondence with Linlithgow to convince the Viceroy of his own commitment to non-violence and that of the Congress's innocence in relation to the violence that had taken

¹⁸² Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, 468.

¹⁸³ Singh, *India – Partition – Independence*, 259.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: The Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 341.

place.¹⁸⁶ The Viceroy replied that he was ‘profoundly depressed’ by the policy adopted by the Congress and even more so by the silence of Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee members over acts of destructive violence.¹⁸⁷ Gandhi replied to the viceroy that it was the Government that goaded the people to the point of madness.¹⁸⁸ He added: ‘If then I cannot get soothing balm for my pain, I must resort to the law prescribed for satyagrahis, namely, a fast according to capacity.’¹⁸⁹ The fast commenced on 9 February, 1943, for 21 days. The Government offered to release Gandhi for the duration of the fast. Gandhi refused by saying “Despite your description of it as ‘a form of blackmail’, it is on my part meant to be an appeal to the Highest Tribunal for justice which I have failed to secure from you. If I do not survive the ordeal, I shall go to the Judgment Seat with the fullest faith in my innocence. Posterity will judge between you as representative of an all-powerful Government and me as a humble man who has tried to serve his country and humanity through it.’¹⁹⁰

The British Government was put in a profoundly embarrassing situation. There was enormous pressure both in India and abroad for the release of Gandhi. The *Daily Worker* in London wrote: ‘If Gandhi dies during his fast, irreparable harm will be done to Britain in the eyes of the freedom-loving peoples.’¹⁹¹ The Government of India knew the risk of disturbances that would ensue should Gandhi die in jail. But Churchill remained adamant and refused to succumb to Gandhi’s pressures. The Viceroy contemptuously dismissed the consequences of

¹⁸⁶ Brown, *Gandhi: The Prisoner of Hope*, 341.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Linlithgow to Mahatma Gandhi, January 13, 1943, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 77, 445-446.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Mahatma Gandhi to Lord Linlithgow, January, 29, 1943, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 77, 56.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Letter from Gandhi to Linlithgow, February 7, 1943, in Ibid, 60.

¹⁹¹ News item in *Daily Worker* (London), 24 February, 1943, in Partha Sarathi Gupta, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for the Independence in India, 1943-1944*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1514.

Gandhi's death: 'India would be far more reliable as a base for operations. Moreover, the prospect of a settlement will be greatly enhanced by the disappearance of Gandhi who had for years torpedoed every attempt at a settlement.'¹⁹² The popular response to the news of his fast was immediate and overwhelming. All over the country, there were demonstrations, *hartals*, and strikes. The *Daily Worker* reported on 12 February, 1943: 'Following the beginning of Gandhi's fast, Indian students left schools and colleges at Karachi and Lahore...All textile mills at Ahmedabad were closed yesterday as on the previous day. Bombay markets are still shut...'¹⁹³ Prisoners in jails went on sympathetic fasts. Public meetings were held demanding Gandhi's release and the Government was bombarded with thousands of letters and telegrams from people from all walks of life.

Meanwhile, Gandhi's condition deteriorated as the fast progressed. On 22 February, the *Daily Worker* reported 'If the fast is not ended without delay, it may be too late to save Gandhi's life.'¹⁹⁴ The next day the *Daily Worker* reported, 'Mr. Gandhi entered a crisis at 4 P.M. He was seized with severe nausea and almost fainted and the pulse became nearly imperceptible.'¹⁹⁵ While the anxious nation appealed for his life, the Government went ahead with finalizing his funeral arrangement. Military troops were put in alert in case riots broke out if Gandhi died. But Gandhi, as always, got the better of his opponents, by refusing to die. The 21-day fast ended on 3 March, 1943. The courage with which Gandhi faced the Government and his unshaken resolve raised him to the height of glory among the millions of his countrymen. The depth of the national

¹⁹² Ibid, 690.

¹⁹³ News item in the *Daily Worker*, 12 February, 1943, in Gupta, ed., *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, vol. 2, 1482.

¹⁹⁴ Report on Gandhi's fast in the *Daily Worker*, 22 February, 1943," in Gupta, ed., *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, vol. 2, 1511.

¹⁹⁵ Report on Gandhi's health in the *Daily Worker*, 23 February, 1943, in Ibid, 1512.

will symbolized by Gandhi's fast convinced the British that their days of dominance in India were numbered.

Lord Linlithgow retired from his viceroyalty on 20 October, 1943. He served for seven and half years, longer than any other Viceroy. He was foremost in forcefully pursuing the policy of helping the League to consolidate its power. Whereas, at the beginning of the war there was not a single Muslim League ministry in any of the provinces, by the time Linlithgow left office in 1943, the League was in power in four provinces. The person who succeeded Linlithgow was Lord Wavell. Wavell had served India as Commander-in-Chief since January 1941. He realized that in order to retain India as a willing member of the British Commonwealth, a change of attitude in British policy was needed. He started his viceroyalty with a genuine sense of purpose and sincerity to find a solution to India's political problem and to transfer power to a united India when the time came. Imbued with that desire, Wavell released Gandhi in May 1944 on grounds of ill-health.

At the Karachi session of All-India Muslim League in December 1943, Jinnah coined the phrase 'Divide and Quit'.¹⁹⁶ In his speech at the session, Jinnah said: '...the only honest way for Great Britain is to divide and quit. Unity can only be realized on the basis of division of property and possessions between the two respective nations, the Hindus and the Mussalmans.'¹⁹⁷ He added: 'It is a question of defense against the attitude the Congress has taken up since 1937, to dominate Mussalmans and to establish, by hook or by crook, Hindu Raj and Hindu Government.

¹⁹⁶ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 153.

¹⁹⁷ Presidential address of Jinnah at the thirty-first session of the All-India Muslim League in Karachi, December 24-26, 1943, in Pirzada, ed., *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947*, vol. 2, 425.

We are defending ourselves against that monstrosity, those machinations and those designs.’¹⁹⁸ In that session, Choudhry Khaliqzaman expressed the determination of the Muslims of India to attain the objective of Pakistan at all costs.¹⁹⁹ He said “if any effort is made to keep us under the eternal yoke of slavery, we will resist it to our utmost’.²⁰⁰ In contrast, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, meeting in Amritsar, demanded the preservation of unity of India, the introduction of federation with a strong center, and the refusal to any province the right to secede.²⁰¹

On 26 July, 1944, Gandhi wrote a letter to Wavell proposing that he was prepared to advise the Congress Working Committee to withdraw mass civil disobedience and to extend full cooperation in the war efforts in return for a declaration of immediate Indian Independence by the British and the establishment of a National Government responsible to the Central Assembly.²⁰² Gandhi added that no further burden should be placed upon India to bear the cost of the war.²⁰³ The British Government rejected Gandhi’s offer as a non-starter. After this rebuff, Gandhi realized that his only hope lay in an agreement with the Muslim League.²⁰⁴

Meanwhile, Rajagopalachari had been working on a formula for a settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League. He had shown it to Gandhi while he was still in jail and had obtained his approval to negotiate with Jinnah. The Rajagopalachari Formula conceded partition of India but under certain conditions. It required that the Muslim League endorse the demand for independence and cooperate with the Congress for the formation of an Interim Government

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 427.

¹⁹⁹ Resolution adopted at the thirty-first session of the All-India Muslim League in Karachi, December 24-26, 1943, in Ibid, 431.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 153.

²⁰² Letter from Gandhi to Wavell, July 26, 1944, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 77, 426.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 573.

during the transitional period.²⁰⁵ After the termination of the war, a commission would be appointed to demarcate those contiguous districts in north-west and the north-east of India where the Muslims were in absolute majority, and in those areas, a plebiscite of all inhabitants would be held to decide whether they wanted to join Pakistan or not.²⁰⁶ In the event of separation, a mutual agreement would be entered into for defense, foreign affairs, communications, customs, and commerce.²⁰⁷ Any transfer of population should be on an absolute voluntary basis.²⁰⁸ On 17 July, 1944, Gandhi wrote a letter to Jinnah suggesting that the two of them meet: 'Let us meet when you wish to. Please do not regard me as an enemy of Islam and the Muslims here. I have always been a friend and servant of yours and the whole world. Do not disappoint me.'²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Jinnah rejected Rajagopalachari proposal as offering 'a shadow and a husk, a maimed, mutilated, and moth-eaten Pakistan, but he agreed to discuss the matter with Gandhi.²¹⁰

The Gandhi-Jinnah meeting took place on 9 September at Jinnah's residence in Bombay and continued till 26 September, with brief intervals. Gandhi visited Jinnah's residence as many as fourteen times and several letters exchanged between the two leaders during that period. The fact that the talks continued for so long and in addition, the photographs of the two leaders smiling and cordially greeting each other, which the newspapers carried from day to day, created new hopes among the public that perhaps, at last, a settlement was around the corner.²¹¹ On 24

²⁰⁵ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 162.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 162-163.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 153.

²⁰⁹ Letter from Gandhi to Jinnah, July 17, 1944, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 77, 393.

²¹⁰ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 573.

²¹¹ Bimal Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3 (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2009), 332.

September Gandhi wrote a letter to Jinnah in which he said he could recommend to the Congress the acceptance of the claim of separation on the following basis:

I proceed on the assumption that India is not be regarded as two or more nations, but as one family consisting of members of whom the Muslims living in the north-west zones i.e. Baluchistan, Sind, NWFP, and that part of the Punjab where they are in absolute majority and in parts of Bengal and Assam where they are in absolute majority...The areas should be demarcated by a commission, approved by the Congress and the League. The wishes of the inhabitants of the area demarcated should be ascertained through the votes of the adult population...if the vote is in favor of separation, it shall be agreed that these areas shall form a separate State as soon as possible after India is free from foreign domination...There shall be a treaty of separation, which should also provide for the efficient and satisfactory administration of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Internal Communications, customs, commerce, and the like...²¹²

Jinnah replied the next day to the effect that Gandhi had already rejected the fundamental principle of the Lahore Resolution by not accepting the two-nation theory.²¹³ Gandhi wanted independence to come first and then the partition to follow and Jinnah wanted exactly the opposite. Jinnah wanted the two parties to come to a settlement on the partition issue first and then unite their efforts to secure freedom on the basis of Pakistan and Hindustan.²¹⁴ Gandhi's proposal included a treaty of separation to provide for the efficient and satisfactory administration of defense, foreign affairs, communications, customs and commerce, but Jinnah made clear that all these matters, which were the life-blood of any State, could not be delegated to any common central authority. The two leaders could not bridge their differences on the above mentioned points and thus the Gandhi-Jinnah talks ended in failure.

²¹² Letter from Gandhi to Jinnah, September 24, 1944, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 78, 126-127.

²¹³ Letter from Jinnah to Gandhi, September 25, 1944, in Gupta, ed., *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, vol. 3, 3260.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 3261-3262.

While the Cripps Mission, Quit India movement, and Gandhi-Jinnah talks were going on, the struggle for India's independence was being fought on another front. In January 1941, Subhas Chandra Bose²¹⁵ slipped out of his house in Calcutta eluding police surveillance.²¹⁶ After a perilous journey through Afghanistan and Russia, he reached Berlin in April, 1941. Bose was well-received by Ribbentrop, the right-hand man of Hitler. He was allowed to broadcast anti-British propaganda from Berlin and frequently exhorted his countrymen to rise in arms against the British.²¹⁷ Bose proposed that a 'Free India Government' be set up in Berlin, recognized by Germany. Germans were skeptical of Bose's plan. Bose waited for two years for a German declaration of free India, and realized that it would not be coming any time soon. He decided to go to Japan next. After a hazardous sea journey, he reached Tokyo on 13 June, 1943. He was received by Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan, who promised him full support for Indian independence.²¹⁸ In the beginning of July 1943, Bose went to Singapore and based himself there. He announced the formation of a Provisional Government of Free India on 21 October, 1943. He formed the Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) and succeeded in recruiting 20,000 soldiers from Indian prisoners of war taken by the Japanese.²¹⁹ Another 18,000 Indian civilians from the immigrant communities in South-East Asia volunteered to join Bose's army.

²¹⁵ Subhas Chandra Bose was a left-wing Congress leader from Bengal who became president of the Indian National Congress for two terms. He resigned from his position as president of the Congress party due to ideological differences with Gandhi. Bose believed that Gandhi's non-violence tactics were not sufficient to secure India's independence. He was in favor of violent resistance to British rule in India. He established his own party called the All India Forward Block. He was put in jail many times by the British authorities due to his radical views and his repeated calls for India's immediate independence from the British rule.

²¹⁶ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence*, 289.

²¹⁷ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 143.

²¹⁸ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence*, 290.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

The I.N.A. brigades, assisted by the Japanese army, advanced up to the Indian border. In March 1944, the Indian National Flag was hoisted in Kohima. But with the change of fortune in the war, the launching of a counter-offensive by the British in the winter of 1944, and the final defeat of Japan, the I.N.A. movement collapsed. In May 1945, the I.N.A. surrendered in Burma except for Bose and a few companions, who escaped capture. On August 17, 1945, three days after the Allied victory over Japan, Bose took a plane from Formosa to Manchuria, which crashed while taking off. Bose died shortly afterwards in a Japanese military hospital. The British Indian Army captured 23,000 I.N.A. soldiers out of which 6,000 were marked for trial. The first public trial of four officers - Shah Nawaz, Shegal, Dhillon, and Rashid Khan - was held at the Red Fort in Delhi. It did not take long for the British to realize that they had made a blunder. In September 1945, the All-India Congress Committee called for the release of these officers and declared that it would be a tragedy if they were punished for having labored for India's Freedom, no matter by what means. The Muslim League too joined hands with the Congress in protesting the trial of I.N.A. men. The Congress and the League lined up their best lawyers to defend the accused. The Indian Press lauded the accused as patriots. There were demonstrations all over the country demanding the immediate release of the I.N.A. soldiers. The Government was taken aback by the strength of Indian reactions to the trials. Eventually, the Government dropped the charges against the officers and they were released. The Congress and the Muslim League showed remarkable solidarity in opposing the trial of I.N.A. men. If they had displayed the same unity of purpose in opposing the British rule, the story of India's freedom struggle would have ended in a much happier note.

The Quit India movement of 1942 is a landmark in the history of India's freedom struggle. In the words of Lord Linlithgow it was 'by far the most serious rebellion since that of

1857'. The Indian revolution reached its climax in the Quit India movement. The people of India rose in defiance of the British Government and finding no leaders to guide them resorted to violence. Trains were derailed, police stations were set on fire, government buildings were attacked and destroyed, and telegraph and telephone lines were cut. The machinery of government was paralyzed for a brief period in certain parts of the country. The movement marked a new high in terms of popular participation in the national movement and sympathy with the national cause.²²⁰ It was this struggle which convinced Churchill that Britain would not be able to hold India indefinitely. Bipin Chandra writes 'The great significance of this historic movement was that it placed the demand for independence on the immediate agenda of the national movement. After 'Quit India' there could be no retreat. Any future negotiations with the British Government could only be in the manner of the transfer of power. Independence was no longer a matter of bargain. And this became amply clear after the war.'²²¹ In the opinion of Francis Hutchins, 'Gandhi's demand that the British should unilaterally Quit India was in fact the demand on which the British Government acted in 1947. And the basis for their withdrawal was, to a considerable extent, an acceptance of Gandhi's demand that India be left to anarchy.'²²²

While the Congress leaders were languishing in prison and the Congress organizations all over the country were outlawed, Jinnah was consolidating his position and that of the Muslim League. The reorganization of the Muslim League that had commenced in 1937 was expedited during the war. Imitating the Congress, the League inaugurated a two-anna membership and soon had considerable numbers in its roll.²²³ It began to build bases in the villages. Its

²²⁰ Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, 467.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 470.

²²² Francis G. Hutchins, *India's Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 287.

²²³ Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 212.

missionaries went out canvassing support for Pakistan. They promised not only an Islamic state but also an economic utopia where Muslims would be prosperous in a way not possible under a Hindu Raj.²²⁴ In the process of consolidating its position, the League also made the demand for Pakistan seem realistic. In 1940, this had not been the case, but, by 1944, Pakistan seemed attainable. Hence more and more Muslims flocked to the League's banner.

At the provincial level too, the League made considerable advances. The Muslim Premier of Sind, Allah Baksh, was dismissed in September 1942 for his anti-British and pro-Congress attitude.²²⁵ The Muslim League was allowed to form a Government in Sind. The League was likewise encouraged by the Governor of Assam to form a ministry there.²²⁶ The fall of Huq ministry in Bengal was brought about by a union of League members and the European members of the legislature.²²⁷ In May 1943, a League ministry was formed in NWFP. The Congress Party's stand on the war had greatly exasperated Lord Linlithgow.²²⁸ With Congress in opposition, Linlithgow looked to the League for its support and cooperation in the war. Consequently he did everything in his power to help and strengthen the League.²²⁹ So, the League gained power in all the Muslim provinces except the Punjab where the Unionist Party maintained its power until 1945. However, with the untimely death of Chief Minister of the province, Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, the League started to gain ground in Punjab. Sikander's successor, Khizar Hyat Khan Tiwana, lacked his political skills and was no match for Jinnah. It did not take long for Jinnah to undermine Khizar. Patrick French writes:

²²⁴ Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 213.

²²⁵ Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 166.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 259.

²²⁹ Ibid.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the untimely death of Sir Sikander Hyat Khan was one of the most important factors in the creation of Pakistan. He had been a highly influential political figure, and he might easily have swung against Jinnah and the league had he lived longer. His influence had kept the Punjab comparatively calm during the war, and his support for the British had been essential in the supply of troops. His death represented a crucial moment in Jinnah's career, for without it he would have had great trouble in tightening the League's grip on the Muslims of India.²³⁰

The Congress suffered severe setback because of its absence from the political scene during the crucial years of 1942 to 1945. Jinnah got the time and the vacant space he needed to dominate the political scene.²³¹ He was able to exploit the official exasperation with the Congress. The countrywide disturbances that followed the Quit India movement were interpreted by the British Government as a deliberate attempt by the Congress to interfere with the war efforts.²³² To maintain power in India, the British encouraged the League's separatism as a counter-balance against Congress's nationalism.

²³⁰ Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 168.

²³¹ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 258.

²³² *Ibid*, 259.

Chapter Four

Simla Conference

Wavell's main motive behind calling the Simla Conference was to enter into negotiations with the Indian political leaders to ease the communal deadlock and to advance India towards her goal of self-government. His aim was to replace the members of his present Executive Council by Indians chosen from lists put forward by leaders of major political parties as a result of negotiations at the conference.²³³ He hoped that the leaders of political parties would set aside their communal differences and learn to work together in his council to solve the difficult problems facing India.²³⁴ The new council would be entirely composed of Indians except the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief. The Home, the Finance, and the External Affairs portfolios would for the first time be held by Indians. Although his powers as Viceroy would remain unchanged, he would give firm assurance to the political parties that he would not use his veto powers unreasonably.

Wavell's proposal faced stiff opposition from the members of the British Cabinet and the India Committee. For example, Clement Attlee, who was the deputy PM in Churchill's cabinet, said that he was horrified at the thought of a brown oligarchy replacing the present government, which would be responsible to neither the parliament nor the electorate.²³⁵ Lord Wavell countered by saying that at least the new council would be more representative with a wider

²³³ 'India: The Constitutional Position', report by the India Committee, Paper I (45) 73 (Final), 27 April, 1945, in Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, 1 September 1944 – 28 July 1945, vol. 5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1974), 979.

²³⁴ India Committee 13th meeting minutes, 26 March, 1945, in *Ibid*, 736.

²³⁵ India Committee 14th meeting minutes, 27 March, 1945, in *Ibid*, 765.

backing of the electorate than the present council.²³⁶ John Anderson, the Chancellor of Exchequer, thought that Wavell's scheme would further weaken an already weak administration and undermine the position of the Viceroy, the Secretary of State, and the Parliament.²³⁷ The India Committee suggested a Grand Council elected by members of the provincial legislatures and the Viceroy would select the members of his council from that pool.²³⁸ Wavell countered by arguing that the committee's proposal would be very time consuming to implement and it could turn into a white elephant or a nuisance.²³⁹

Atlee warned the Viceroy that the members of his new council would be politicians representing their own party interests and the Viceroy would find himself pushed into a corner by those individuals and he could end up being a constitutional monarch with no real power.²⁴⁰ Lord Wavell acknowledged that the experiment of replacing the present council by leaders of the political parties was not without possible dangers but he strongly believed that it was the right step to take in order to break the communal deadlock and to make the parties more responsible and to get them working together. The Viceroy said he knew that the easiest course of action was to do nothing at the present until the end of the war, but he believed that it would be most fatal.²⁴¹ It would keep India quiet for the time being, but it would damage British-India relations in the long run, and there could be great danger of serious political unrest once the pressure of

²³⁶ Ibid, 766.

²³⁷ Note by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, India Committee, Paper I (45) 41, 31 March, 1945, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, 1 September 1944 – 28 July 1945, vol. 5, 794.

²³⁸ India Committee 17th meeting minutes, 5 April, 1945, in Ibid, 834.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ India Committee 18th meeting minutes 1 and 3, 10 April, 1945, in Ibid, 855.

²⁴¹ India Committee 22nd meeting, 23 April, 1945, in Ibid, 938.

the war was removed.²⁴² After weeks of meetings, Wavell finally obtained the go ahead from London to proceed with his Simla Scheme. On 14 June 1945 the viceroy announced his plan for the Simla Conference in New Delhi. Some extracts from his speech are given below.

I have been authorized by His Majesty's Government to place before the Indian political leaders proposals designed to ease the present political situation and to advance India towards her goal of full self-government... This is not an attempt to obtain or impose a constitutional settlement... I propose to invite Indian leaders both of Central and Provincial politics to take counsel with me with a view to the formation of new Executive Council more representative of organized political opinion. The proposed new council would represent the main communities and would include equal proportions of Caste Hindus and Muslims... It would be entirely an Indian Council, except for the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, who would retain his position as War Member... The Council will work within the framework of the present constitution; and there can be no question of the Governor-General agreeing not to exercise his constitutional power of control; but it will of course not be exercised unreasonably.²⁴³

Wavell sent out the invitation to the Premiers of the Provincial Governments including the ex-Premiers of the Provinces under section 93, to Gandhi and Jinnah as the two recognized leaders of the two main political parties, to the leader of the Congress Party and the Deputy Leader of the Muslim League in the Central Assembly, to the leader of the Congress Party and the Muslim League in the Council of State, to the leaders of the Nationalist Party and the European Group in the Assembly, to Rao Bahadur N. Siva Raj as the representative of Scheduled Classes, and to Master Tara Singh as the representative of Sikhs.²⁴⁴ Almost immediately after Wavell's broadcast speech many Indian leaders and national newspapers were sharply critical of various aspects of the plan. An editorial in the *Bombay Chronicle* said the following:

²⁴² 'India: The Constitutional Position', report by the India Committee, Paper I (45) 73 (Final), 27 April, 1945, in *Ibid*, 980.

²⁴³ Broadcast speech by Wavell at New Delhi, 14 June, 1945, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, vol. 5, 1122.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 1123.

Wavell's proposals are in fact, worse than the Cripps proposals which were rejected by almost all the responsible parties in the country...The new announcement doubtless refers to the full self-government as the goal. But there is neither a time limit nor an assurance of independence outside the Empire if Indians so desired...Under the Cripps scheme, an Indian representative member was to be added to the Viceroy's Executive who would take over those sections of the Department of Defense which can organizationally be separated from the Commander-in-Chief's War Department. Under the proposed scheme however there is to be no Indian Defense Member at all.²⁴⁵

In a similar note, the editorial of the *Hindustan Times* on 15 June, 1945 denounced the Wavell's proposal as follows:

The Indian demand for an interim solution has always been the establishment of a National Government in the center fully responsible to the Indian people in every way. The British reply has been that this was not possible under present constitution which cannot be changed during the war, and without an agreement of all the major elements of the Indian population. During the Cripps negotiations in 1942, an attempt was made to combine the two parties and evolve the structure of a de facto National Government without any major changes in the existing constitution. The negotiations broke down on the question of Defense and Governor General's veto. It must be confessed that the present scheme does not show any marked improvement in respect of either. The Commander-in-Chief will continue to be War Member and Lord Wavell has explicitly stated that 'there can be no question of the Governor-General agreeing not to exercise his constitutional power of control'. He has, however, been careful to add that 'it will, of course, not be exercised unreasonable'.²⁴⁶

The editorial of the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* described Wavell's plan as more retrograde than Cripps' Proposal because the Cripps offer at least had the merit of presenting a blue-print for the future constitution whereas the Wavell Plan left out the future altogether. It also pointed out that Wavell Plan's proposed parity between the Caste Hindus and the Muslims in the Executive Council. The newspaper questioned the soundness of such a proposal which would provide equality of proportion between Caste Hindus who numbered 250 million and the Muslims who

²⁴⁵ Editorial in the *Bombay Chronicle*, 15 June, 1945, in Bimal Prasad, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1945* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 339-340.

²⁴⁶ Editorial in the *Hindustan Times*, 15 June, 1945 in *Ibid*, 341.

numbered only 80 million.²⁴⁷ The Hindu Mahasabha leader Shyam Prasad Mookherjee took exception to the fact that the Viceroy had not invited any member of his organization to the Conference. He was sharply critical of the idea of parity between the two communities and wrote the following in the same newspaper.

There can be no doubt that the main purpose of the scheme is to further placate the Muslim League and to crush the legitimate political rights of Hinduism. The Hindu Mahasabha which is acknowledged to be the only organization that can rightfully represent the Hindu cause has been excluded even from consultation...The only object of excluding the Mahasabha at this stage is that the British Government and Lord Wavell know that it will ruthlessly oppose any scheme which is intended to sacrifice the Hindus and the national cause at the altar of intransigent communalism...By no standard of logic or fair play, equity of justice, can any honest government justify the allocation of equal seats to two communities in India, one numbering about 250 million and the other about 90. How, again, can 90 million of Muslims be given five seats and 60 million Scheduled Castes one seat? Indeed a cursory glance at the list of invitees and the general structure of the scheme goes to show that while it is a dishonest device to disrupt and disunite the Hindus and to ignore their legitimate rights...A sordid and unabashed Anglo-Muslim League conspiracy has been the real hindrance to India's freedom. Hindus have been penalized mainly for their ardent patriotism and their anxiety to throw off the foreign yoke.²⁴⁸

All of the above points raised by the various newspapers in India about Wavell's plan were valid in the sense that the proposal fell short of meeting India's aspirations for self-government on many fronts. Wavell's plan didn't recognize the state of India as a dominion. Defense was to continue being a reserved subject, the sole responsibility of the British Government. The Viceroy's veto was to remain. The parity between the Caste Hindus and the Muslims doomed a majority to parity with a minority, and so on. However, Wavell's plan had many positive features and it was a step in the right direction in fulfilling India's demand for self-government. For the first time it offered the Home, the Finance, and the External Affairs

²⁴⁷ Editorial in the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 16 June, 1945, in *Ibid*, 343.

²⁴⁸ Shyam Prasad Mukherjee on Viceroy's offer, Calcutta, 16 June, 1945, in Prasad, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1945*, 348-349.

portfolios to be held by Indians. Regarding the offer of parity to the Muslims, without such a gesture toward the Muslim community there was no hope of forming a coalition interim government at the center. It was the price that the nationalist India had to pay to secure Muslim cooperation. Wavell understood that very well and hence included parity in his proposal.

The Congress Party was willing to accept parity between the Caste Hindus and the Muslims in the Executive Council in the name of compromise but they were unwilling to compromise on the method of selection.²⁴⁹ They objected strongly to the Muslim League insisting on having a monopoly on the selection of Muslims to the Executive Council.²⁵⁰ The Congress Party didn't want to be maneuvered into a position in which it would be regarded as a purely Hindu body.²⁵¹ The Congress Party wanted a voice in the selection of non-Hindus and it was vital to the party as the interim arrangement would be precedent for the future composition of a new Council and would affect long term settlement.²⁵² Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy voicing his strong opposition to the restriction being put on the Congress to nominate only Caste Hindus. He said that for the Congress to justify its existence for winning the independence of India it must remain a nationalist party representing all communities and free to choose best men and women from all classes.²⁵³

Jinnah was unyielding in his demand that the Muslim League be given the exclusive right to nominate all the Muslim members to the Viceroy's Council. He told the Viceroy that the Muslims would always be a minority in the new Council because the other communities e.g. the

²⁴⁹ Telegram from Wavell to Amery, 25 June, 1945, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, vol. 5, 1152.

²⁵⁰ Letter from Wavell to Amery, 25 June, 1945, in *Ibid*, 1157.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 1157.

²⁵² Telegram from Wavell to Amery, 25 June, 1945, in *Ibid*, 1152.

²⁵³ Gandhi's interview to the Press at Panchgani, 18 June, 1945, in Prasad, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1945*, 350.

Sikhs and the Scheduled Castes would always vote with the Hindus and the Viceroy would be most reluctant to exercise his veto.²⁵⁴ Wavell tried to reassure Jinnah that in such cases he and the Commander-in-Chief would see fair play for the Muslims. But Jinnah's fear of a Hindu dominance over Muslims was such that he was not willing to listen to any reasonable suggestion. He asserted that the Muslim League had the backing of 99% of Muslims in India and the party had won all the by-elections in the last two years.²⁵⁵ It is true that the Muslim League had the support of the majority of Muslim India but it is also true that a significant proportion of the Muslim community in India was nationalist in outlook and backed the Congress Party. Moreover, the president of the Congress Party was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a highly respected Muslim scholar whom Jinnah described as a traitor to the Muslim community and a hired stooge of the Congress Party, and refused to talk to him during the Conference. Jinnah was not even willing to consider a Muslim nominated by Khizar Hyat Khan, the leader of the Unionist Party in Punjab and a fellow leader of the Muslim community. He stuck intransigently to his position that only the Muslim League had the sole right to nominate the Muslim Members of the Council and no one else. He was willing to wreck the Conference on that point only. He refused to submit a panel of names to the Viceroy unless his demand was conceded.

The Governors of many provinces advised the Viceroy to go ahead and form his Council without the Muslim League if Jinnah continued to be obstinate. For example, Sir A. Hope, the Governor of the Madras province, wrote that if the Viceroy didn't go ahead and form the Council then the Congress Party and the world would blame the British Government for succumbing to

²⁵⁴ Telegram from Wavell to Amery, 25 June, 1945, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, vol. 5, 1153.

²⁵⁵ Telegram from Wavell to Amery, 25 June, 1945, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, vol. 5, 1154.

Jinnah's blackmail.²⁵⁶ Sir G. Cunningham, the Governor of North-West Frontier Province, a predominantly Muslim area wrote the following:

My impression is that in this Province at least half educated opinion does not admit right of Jinnah or Muslim League to nominate all Muslims to Executive Council and would be satisfied with Muslims (provided they are well known public figures) nominated by Your Excellency even if they included no Muslim Leaguers...I am hardly in position to judge how complete Jinnah's discipline over Muslim League is, but I have been told here there are leading men in his party, even Liaquat Ali himself, who might desert him if he insisted on bringing to impasse at this stage, but conclusion therefore is that from Provincial point of view there is no great danger if Your Excellency challenges Jinnah on this point...²⁵⁷

The Governor of Punjab, Sir B. Glancy, wrote to the Viceroy that Jinnah's claim to nominate all Muslims appeared to him in the light of League's meager hold on Muslim majority provinces to be outrageously unreasonable.²⁵⁸ In a similar note, Sir J. Colville, the Governor of Bombay, wrote that Jinnah should be faced with the alternatives of either come in or the scheme to proceed without him.²⁵⁹ Sir H. Dow, the Governor of Sind, another Muslim majority province, also advised the Viceroy to proceed without the Muslim League. Here is an extract from the telegram he sent to the viceroy:

In my opinion if Jinnah is intransigent, attempts should be made to form Executive Council without Muslim League. Much of Jinnah's influence depends on feeling that he is going to be successful, and will disappear if you make it clear that he is not going to get away with it. Incidentally, his hold on Sind is very tenuous and I believe my Premier would require little persuasion to break away from League...Jinnah's reference to successes in by-elections does not apply to Sind, where in one recent election Muslim League candidate withdrew to avoid certain defeat and in another election could put up no candidate, while in both

²⁵⁶ Telegram from Sir A. Hope, the Governor of Madras, to Wavell, 2 July 1945, in *Ibid*, 1186.

²⁵⁷ Telegram from Sir S. Cunningham, the Governor of NWFP, to Wavell, 2 July, 1945, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, vol. 5, 1190.

²⁵⁸ Telegram from Sir J. Colville, Governor of Bombay, to Wavell, 3 July, 1945, in *Ibid*, 1195.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

elections candidate who had unofficial support of Muslim Leaguers was defeated.²⁶⁰

Wavell made many attempts at the Conference to get Jinnah to budge from his position a little by allowing one non-League Muslim member to be nominated by the Unionist Party. When all his efforts failed, and Jinnah continued to refuse to submit a list of names, Wavell made a provisional list for the Council which included four League Muslims and one non-League Muslim from Punjab. He met with Jinnah again and told him about his provisional selections for the Executive Council, which included five Muslims of whom four were members of Muslim League and one a non-League Muslim from Punjab and also revealed the names of the Muslims in his list.²⁶¹ Wavell also told Jinnah the communal and party composition of the Council and asked him if he would be ready to cooperate on that basis. Jinnah replied that it was impossible for him to co-operate unless all Muslim members were drawn from the Muslim League and the Governor-General's veto were reinforced by special safeguard that no decision opposed by the Muslims should be taken in the Council except by a clear two-third majority, or something of that nature. These conditions were fundamental and he could not cooperate without those being met.²⁶²

On 13 July 1945, Wavell made a speech at Simla announcing the failure of the plan. He took responsibility for the failure of the conference without placing the blame on Jinnah because he feared that it might exacerbate the already tense communal situation in the country. Here is an extract from that speech:

²⁶⁰ Telegram from Sir H. Dow, the Governor of the Sind province, to Wavell, 2 July, 1945, in *Ibid*, 1191.

²⁶¹ Telegram from Wavell to Amery, 11 July, 1945, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Simla Conference*, vol. 5, 1224-1225.

²⁶² *Ibid*, 1225.

The Conference has failed. Nobody can regret this more than I do myself. I wish to make it clear that the responsibility for the failure is mine. The main idea underlying the conference was mine. If it had succeeded, its success would have been attributed to me, and I cannot place the blame for its failure upon any of the parties.²⁶³

Jinnah stuck to his position that the League represented all Indian Muslims and hence should have the right to nominate all Muslim members to the proposed Council. On this issue, the Congress could not compromise.²⁶⁴ It claimed to be a secular body representing all sections of the society. To concede to Jinnah meant giving up this status and becoming a communal party representing the Hindus only.²⁶⁵ In addition, the President of the Congress, Maulana Azad, was a Muslim and not to be able to nominate him to the Executive Council was out of the question for the party.²⁶⁶ Wavell's compromise formula of '4 Plus 1', i.e. four Muslim League members and a non-Congress Muslim member from the Unionist Party, was a virtual refusal to regard the Congress as a secular party. It implicitly conceded Jinnah's assertion that the Congress was a Hindu party.

Wavell chose to ignore the advice of his Provincial Governors who overwhelmingly counseled him to proceed with his plan without the Muslim League, arguing that Jinnah would cave in eventually. At this time, the fortunes of the League in the provinces were at a low ebb.²⁶⁷ In the Punjab, the Muslim members of the Unionist Party had definitely broken away from the League. In NWFP, the Congress Party under Dr. Khan Sahib had taken control.²⁶⁸ In Bengal, the Muslim League leader Nazimuddin had been defeated and the province was under Section 93.²⁶⁹

²⁶³ Letter from Wavell to Amery, 15 July, 1945, in *Ibid*, 1260.

²⁶⁴ Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 215.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁶⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 205.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*.

Many Muslim leaders of India had publicly proclaimed that they didn't subscribe to Jinnah's two-nation theory and his claim to be the sole spokesperson for the entire Muslim community of India.

Lord Wavell's justification for not going ahead with the plan without the Muslim League might have been driven by the concern that the war with Japan was still to be won, and the Churchill's Cabinet in London might not support the formation of an Executive Council which didn't include the Muslim League. Britain was in the midst of parliamentary elections and results were expected on 25 July. Churchill, Amery, and the British Cabinet were reluctant to give definite instructions to Wavell and advised him to maintain the status quo. This might be the reason for the failure of the Conference, for the Viceroy could scarcely take major decisions with London just standing by.²⁷⁰ Whatever might have been his motive, the abrupt abandonment of the plan undoubtedly strengthened the position of Jinnah and the League at a time when their fortunes were not so good.²⁷¹ It weakened the position of those Muslims who had been opposing the League, particularly the Unionist Party in Punjab.²⁷² The moderate Muslim leaders began to gravitate towards the Muslim League from that point on. By allowing Jinnah to torpedo the Simla Conference, the British Government revealed that it was Jinnah who matter the most. The war was still going on when Wavell called the Conference and for the British the martial Muslims of India were more useful for the war purpose than the pacifist Hindus. Sucheta Mahajan's characterization of British attitude as a blatant display of patronage to the forces of communalism is not way off the mark.²⁷³ It was a pity that once again an attempt to reach an

²⁷⁰ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 297.

²⁷¹ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 205.

²⁷² Ibid, 215.

²⁷³ Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), 63.

agreement should have foundered upon the old rocks of prejudice. The net result of the Conference was to introduce the formula of 'caste-Hindus – Muslim parity' into body politics and to stereotype officially the principle of religious division.²⁷⁴ The two-nation theory constantly propounded by Jinnah had succeeded in almost totally polarizing the political situation in India, thus adding ballast to existing British stereotype. I believe that Wavell's sudden abandonment of his plan was one of the causes that made the partition of India inevitable.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 296.

²⁷⁵ Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain – India – Pakistan*, 127.

Chapter Five

Cabinet Mission

Fresh elections were held in India at the end of 1945. Congress sought a mandate for a united India and the Muslim League ran on the platform of Pakistan.²⁷⁶ Paradoxically, the election results confirmed the claims of both parties.²⁷⁷ The Congress won most of the general seats to the Central Legislative Assembly and secured 91.3% of votes cast. The Muslim League secured all the Muslim seats and won 86.6% of total votes cast in Muslim constituencies.²⁷⁸ The pattern was similar in the elections to the Provincial Assemblies. The League secured 90% of all Muslim seats and 75% of votes cast in the Muslim Constituencies in the provinces, a marked improvement from the meager 4.4% of votes it had won in the provincial elections of 1936-7.²⁷⁹ The Congress secured an overwhelming majority in six out of the eleven provinces, and enough majorities in Assam and NWFP to form governments in eight out of the eleven provinces. The election results proved beyond doubt that the Congress was the single-largest nationalist party in India. The results also supported Jinnah's claim to be the sole spokesman for the Indian Muslims.²⁸⁰

Britain and her allies inflicted a crushing defeat on Germany and Japan, but this victory came with a heavy price. The fight to finish exhausted Britain's man-power and economic resources to such an extent that she could never hope to recover her old power and prestige.²⁸¹ Britain lost her status as a first-rate power. That position was shifted to U.S.A and Russia.

²⁷⁶ Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 218.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 621.

²⁷⁹ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, 171.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 613.

Everyone thought that the party led by Churchill would sweep the polls in Britain because of his magnificent contributions to the Allied victory and his world-wide reputations earned by that. But this hope was dashed to the ground by the resounding victory of the Labor Party in the general election. For the first time in its history the Labor Party secured a clear majority over all other parties combined in the British House of Commons.²⁸² Accordingly Churchill's Government was replaced by the Labor Government with Clement Attlee as Prime Minister and Lord Pethick-Lawrence as Secretary of State for India. Meanwhile, the public opinion in Britain had changed in favor of granting India independence. The Labor Party had pledged itself to Indian independence more than once, and the task of the Labor Government was made easier by the solid support of public opinion behind it.²⁸³ Hence, the Labor Government decided to take steps to break the political stalemate in India which would facilitate the eventual transfer power to India. In March 1946, a Cabinet Delegation was sent to India by the Labor Government. The delegation included Lord Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade, and Sir A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of Admiralty. Its mission was to confer with the Viceroy and the Indian leaders to find ways to resolve the political deadlock and to help India set up a constitutional framework in which the Indians would have full control over their destiny.

Arriving in Delhi on 24 March, 1946 the Cabinet Mission held a series of discussions with the leaders of the Congress and the League and soon discovered the irreconcilable differences between the two parties. The Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy met Maulana Azad, the President of the Congress Party, on 3 April to find out the Congress position on how the transfer of power should come about. Azad told them that the picture Congress had of the future

²⁸² Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 614.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, 616.

of India was a federation with fully autonomous provinces.²⁸⁴ The center would be responsible for such essential subjects as Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Communications, and a few others absolutely necessary for the administration of India as a whole. The residuary powers would be vested in the provinces themselves.²⁸⁵ On the same day, the Cabinet Mission met with Gandhi and sought his opinion. Gandhi told them that the two-nation theory being propounded by Jinnah was most dangerous. The Muslim population, but for a small percentage, was a body of converts.²⁸⁶ They were all descendants of Indian born people. Gandhi said that Jinnah's Pakistan was a sin to which he would never consent. He even proposed that during the interim period when the Constitution-making Body would be deliberating let Jinnah form the first Government and choose his ministers from elected representatives in the country.²⁸⁷

Jinnah was interviewed by the Mission on 4 April. He said that from the ancient times, India was never a single country. The country was held by the British as one. Even under British rule, the country had been only partly united. The Indian States had been separate and sovereign.²⁸⁸ The differences in India were far greater than those between European countries; even Ireland was no parallel. Jinnah argued that those differences were fundamental in nature to Indian society. The Muslims had a different conception of life from the Hindus.²⁸⁹ The social customs were different. Hindu society and philosophy were the most exclusive in the world. Hindus and Muslims had lived together in India for a thousand years and yet they had never

²⁸⁴ Record of meeting between the Cabinet Delegation, Wavell, and Maulana Azad, 3 April, 1946, in Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1977), 111.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Note of interview between the Cabinet Delegation and Gandhi, 3 April, 1946, in Ibid, 117.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 118.

²⁸⁸ Record of interview between the Cabinet Delegation, Wavell and Jinnah, 4 April, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 119.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 119.

integrated. If one went to any Indian city, one would see separate Hindu and Muslim quarters, not mixed neighborhoods. It was not possible to make a nation unless there were essential uniting factors.²⁹⁰ He then asked the delegation how were they to put 100 million Muslims together with 250 million Hindus whose way of life was so different.²⁹¹ He said no government would work on such a basis and if forced upon it disaster would follow. He asserted that there was no solution but the division of India.

The Sikhs wanted a united India like the Congress. Master Tara Singh said that he stood for a united India and he thought that to divide India would be a very troublesome course and a risky game.²⁹² In his opinion, if division was forced upon them, then the Sikhs would want their separate homeland. Sardar Baldev Singh gave his view that a single India with safeguards for the minorities was the best solution.²⁹³ Dr. Ambedkar, the leader of the Scheduled Classes, said that he did not want a Constituent Assembly at all. It would be dominated by the Caste Hindus and the Scheduled Classes would be no more than a small minority.²⁹⁴ Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the leader of the Liberal Party, had the same position as the Congress Party i.e. a federation of strongly autonomous provinces. Shyam Prasad Mukherjee who represented the Hindu Mahasabha stressed that his Party would never agree to a division of India. He was against any parity between the Hindus and Muslims in the Central Government.

²⁹⁰ Record of interview between the Cabinet Delegation, Wavell and Jinnah, 4 April, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 120.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Record of interview between the Cabinet Delegation, Wavell and representatives of Sikh community, 5 April, 1946, in Ibid, 138.

²⁹³ Record of Interview between Cabinet Delegation, Wavell and Sardar Baldev Singh, 5 April, 1946, in Ibid, 142.

²⁹⁴ Note of a Meeting between Cabinet Delegation, Wavell and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, 5 April, 1946, in Ibid, 145.

On 9 April, Jinnah called a convention in Delhi of over four hundred members of various legislatures recently elected on the League ticket. The convention passed a resolution which demanded a sovereign and independent State of Pakistan, comprising of six provinces i.e. Bengal in the north-east, and the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind, and Baluchistan in the north-west of India.²⁹⁵ It demanded the setting up of two separate Constitution-making bodies, one for Pakistan and the other for Hindustan. The acceptance of the Muslim League demand for Pakistan and its immediate implementation were declared to be the sine qua non for the Muslim League cooperation and participation in the formation of an Interim Government at the center.²⁹⁶ The resolution emphasized that any attempt to impose a Constitution or a Government on them would be resisted by the League with all possible means at its disposal.²⁹⁷

On 11 April, the Cabinet Mission sent a telegram to London outlining two possible schemes. Scheme A envisioned a unitary India with a loose federation charged primarily with the control of Defense and Foreign Affairs.²⁹⁸ Scheme B would be based upon a divided India with only the Muslim-majority districts - Baluchistan, Sind, NWFP, Western Punjab, and Eastern Bengal without Calcutta, and Sylhet district of Assam - going to Pakistan. The Cabinet Mission pointed out that under Scheme B, the Defense would not be very effective as the small Pakistan would be very weak and it could only be strengthened by treaty with India. On 13 April, Attlee replied to the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy that London preferred Scheme A as Scheme B would destroy the homogeneity of the Indian Army, which was now strong and well-equipped and was charged with the defense of India. However, London would agree reluctantly to Scheme

²⁹⁵ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 246.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 247.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁹⁸ Telegram from the Cabinet Delegation and Wavell to Attlee, 11 April, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 221.

B if that was the only basis upon which a settlement could be agreed among the various players in the Indian scene.²⁹⁹

The Viceroy met Jinnah on 16 April and presented him the two alternatives i.e. a mutilated Pakistan with full sovereignty or a larger Pakistan federated with India in a union. He was told that he could not reasonably hope to receive both the whole of the territory which he claimed, and also the full measure of sovereignty.³⁰⁰ Wavell said that the full claim for Pakistan had no chance of being accepted by the Congress or the British Government. If the full territories were insisted upon then some element of sovereignty must be relinquished. If, however, full sovereignty was desired, then the claim to the non-Muslim territories could not be conceded.³⁰¹ The mission believed that progress might be possible in one of the two ways. One way would be the creation of a separate state of Pakistan which would include Sind, Baluchistan, NWFP, and the Muslim-majority districts of Bengal, Punjab, and Assam. The inclusion of Calcutta in this Pakistan could not be justified on any principle of self-determination.³⁰² Under this scheme the Indian States would be at liberty to join Hindustan or Pakistan or to remain outside. Alternatively, the Congress and the League could sit together and try to agree to an India Union. If the League agreed to such a union then it would be possible to include the six provinces that Jinnah was demanding in one of the federations.³⁰³

The Cabinet Delegation interviewed Jinnah on 16 April, and Pethick Lawrence emphasized that the essence of the Union Scheme was the equality of the two component parts.

²⁹⁹ Letter from Atlee to the Cabinet Delegation and Wavell, 13 April, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 260.

³⁰⁰ Brief prepared by Wavell, undated, in in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 250.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 248.

³⁰³ Ibid, 249.

Jinnah said that no amount of equality provided on paper was going to work.³⁰⁴ Equality could not exist between the majority and the minority within the same Governmental system. He did not think that domination of Muslims by Hindus could be prevented under any scheme that kept them together.³⁰⁵ Jinnah seemed to like the alternative scheme since it conceded the principle of Pakistan. He said that he could not accept in any event the exclusion of Calcutta.³⁰⁶ Jinnah argued that even if the whole of his claims were granted, the Congress would still get three-quarters of India. At the worst they would lose Calcutta, some part of Western Bengal, and the Ambala division in the Punjab. The Secretary of State said that the Congress would lose much more than that. They would lose the unity of India, which alone would make the country a strong entity in the outside world.³⁰⁷ Further, if Pakistan were conceded the difficulty of getting the States to join India would be greatly increased.³⁰⁸ Jinnah retorted that the unity of India was a myth.

The Cabinet Mission then examined the question of a fully sovereign State of Pakistan as demanded by Jinnah. The Mission found that the size of the non-Muslim minorities in the areas claimed by the League for Pakistan would be very considerable. For example, Punjab had a non-Muslim population of 12 million out of a total population of 28 million, and Bengal's non-Muslim population was 27 million out of a total population of 60 million.³⁰⁹ The Mission concluded that there was no justification for including within Pakistan large areas of Punjab,

³⁰⁴ Record of interview between the Cabinet Delegation and Jinnah, 16 April, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 282.

³⁰⁵ Record of interview between the Cabinet Delegation and Jinnah, 16 April, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 283.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ First revision of Draft Statement by the Cabinet Mission and Wavell, undated, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 363.

Bengal, and Assam in which the population was predominantly non-Muslim. The Mission realized that every argument that could be used in favor of Pakistan could equally be used in favor of the exclusion of the non-Muslim areas from Pakistan.³¹⁰

The Mission then considered the question of a smaller Pakistan by excluding non-Muslim areas. Apart from the fact that Jinnah regarded it as quite impracticable, the Mission was also aware that any radical partition of Punjab and Bengal would be contrary to the wishes of a very large portion of inhabitants of these provinces.³¹¹ Punjab was the homeland of the Sikhs and any partition of it would be bitterly resented by them. The Mission also argued that any partition of the country would disintegrate the whole transportation, postal and telegraph system and the irrigation network as they were built with a view to a united India.³¹² To break the Indian army into two would be a deadly blow to its long tradition and high degree of efficiency. The small Indian Navy and the newly formed Air Force would be rendered practically impotent. A further consideration was the geographic fact that the two halves of the proposed Pakistan would be separated by some seven hundred miles and the communication between them would be dependent on the goodwill of Hindustan. Another important consideration was the greater difficulty of securing adhesion of Indian States to a partitioned British India than to one having a common federal center.³¹³ Considering all these factors, the Mission arrived at the conclusion that it was inadvisable to recommend partition of India.

The Mission then considered the Congress Scheme of Federation of India under which the provinces would have full autonomy subject only to a minimum of central subjects such as

³¹⁰ Ibid, 364.

³¹¹ First revision of Draft Statement by the Cabinet Mission and Wavell, undated," in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 363.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid, 364.

Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Communications. The Mission saw the following difficulties in the Congress Scheme:

Such a scheme if it stood alone would present grave constitutional difficulties and anomalies. Certain Ministers of the Central Government whose portfolios were concerned with the compulsory subjects would be responsible to the whole of British India while other Ministers of the same Government whose portfolios related to the optional subjects would be responsible only to the Provinces which elected to federate for those subjects. This dichotomy would be reflected in the Central legislature where it would be necessary to exclude from speaking and voting certain members when subjects which their Provinces were not concerned with were under discussion.³¹⁴

In view of the wide divergence of views between the Congress and the League, the Cabinet Mission invited four leaders from each of the two parties to a conference to meet with the three members of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy to hammer out a settlement.³¹⁵ The conference met at Simla from 5 to 12 May and came to be known as the Second Simla Conference.³¹⁶ The basis for discussion was set out in identical letters of invitation sent on 27 April by Lord Pethick Lawrence to Azad and Jinnah, the presidents of the two organizations. The plan envisioned a three-tier structure for the future Constitution of India. At the center there would be a union Government dealing with only Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Communications. In the middle tier there would be two groupings of provinces; one group comprising of predominantly Hindu majority provinces and the other group consisting of predominantly Muslim majority provinces.³¹⁷ The group constitutions for these provinces would deal with subjects which the provinces in the respective group desired to be dealt with in common. At the

³¹⁴ Telegram from Wavell to Provincial Governors, 30 April, 1946, in in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 390.

³¹⁵ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 429.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

bottom tier, the provinces would have their own constitutions to deal with residuary subjects not dealt in the two upper tiers.

Discussions continued through seven sessions in all, but the Congress and the League remained poles apart. In the first session the Congress representatives and their League counterparts clashed over the power of the center to raise revenue. The Congress representatives wanted certain ancillary subjects such as Customs, Currency, and Tariff to be central subjects to make the center self-sufficient. Jinnah countered by saying that the center should not have the power to raise money through taxation. Instead, the power should be vested in group legislatures who should decide how much money to contribute to the center. Nehru said that such a center would be a vague and airy center with no effective power.³¹⁸ He argued that in case of war or other emergency when money would be needed quickly, it was inconceivable that the decision could be made in a timely manner by two or three forums. He asserted that there should be a legislative forum at the center and the necessary financial apparatus.

In the second session, Jinnah voiced his opposition to the union having a legislature and also to Nehru's proposal for establishing a Supreme Court at the center. In the third session, Nehru said that the grouping scheme seemed to him an unnecessary intermediate body, placed between the center and the provincial Governments, which would not be very efficient.³¹⁹ Wavell said that the scheme was designed to get over a psychological hurdle. It was not claimed to be ideal from the administrative point of view. The main reason for the formation of groups was to get over the communal difficulty and to make it possible to call together a constitution-making body. Basically, Jinnah was prepared to accept a union executive formed on the basis of

³¹⁸ Record of first meeting of the Second Simla Conference, 5 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 427.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 437.

parity between the Hindus and the Muslims, functioning without a legislature and without the power to raise taxes. The Congress, in contrast, wanted a union executive without parity, and with a full-fledged legislature having the power to raise taxes.³²⁰ In short, Jinnah wanted a weak center and the Congress desire was to have a strong center.

In the fourth session, Nehru objected to the provision that would allow compulsory grouping of provinces. He gave the example of Sikhs and Hindus, a large minority in Punjab, who would be averse to the idea of Punjab being forced into a group with North-West Frontier Province. Jinnah retorted that the only way to avoid partition was to allow the grouping of the provinces.³²¹ The Congress was deeply suspicious of Jinnah's real motives behind insisting on a weak center and the compulsory grouping of provinces. They thought that Jinnah was preparing the ground for the eventual creation of an expanded Pakistan after entrenching itself in the groups of Muslim provinces.³²² Sardar Patel remarked that Jinnah's suggestion about limiting the union to a period of only five years clearly exposed his real intentions.

The Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy realized that the parties would not be able to reach an agreement if left to their own devices. Consequently, on 8 May, the Secretary of State sent to the Presidents of the Congress and the Muslim League a list of suggested points of agreement between the two parties: "(1) There shall be an All-India Union Government and Legislature dealing with Foreign Affairs, Defense, Communications, fundamental rights and having the necessary powers to obtain for itself the finances it requires for these subjects. (2) All the remaining powers shall vest in the provinces. (3) Groups of provinces may be formed and

³²⁰ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 429.

³²¹ Record of fourth meeting of the Second Simla Conference, 5 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 441.

³²² Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 430.

such groups may determine the provincial subjects that they desire to take in common. (4) The groups may set up their own executives and legislatures. (5) The legislature of the union shall be composed of equal proportions from the Muslim-majority provinces and from the Hindu-majority provinces. (6) The constitutions of the Union and the groups (if any) shall contain a provision whereby any Province can by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly call for a reconsideration of the terms of the Constitution after an initial period of 10 years and at 10 years intervals thereafter.”³²³

Jinnah protested several provisions in the suggested points of agreement, particularly the addition of “fundamental rights” to the union subjects and union legislature having the power to raise revenues. He also said that the Muslim League would never agree to a single Constitution-making body. Gandhi wrote to Cripps voicing his opposition to the idea of parity between the five Muslim majority provinces with a population of nine crores and the six Hindu majority provinces with a population of nineteen crores.³²⁴ Azad, the president of the Congress Party, wrote to the Secretary of State voicing his party’s objection to the compulsory grouping of provinces and parity.³²⁵

The Conference met again on 9 May to take up the suggested points of agreement. Nehru suggested that in order to break the gridlock, one or more representative from each side should sit together and discuss the points again to reach an agreement, and an umpire should be

³²³ Letter from Mr. Turnbull to Maulana Azad and Jinnah enclosing the suggested points for agreement between the representatives of the Congress and the Muslim League, 8 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 462-463.

³²⁴ Letter from Jinnah to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 8 May, 1946, in *Ibid*, 466.

³²⁵ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 258.

appointed to give a decision if the two sides were not able to agree on one or more points.³²⁶ It seemed that Jinnah was initially open to the idea of meeting with Nehru and the appointment of an umpire. However, when the Conference next met on 11 May, Jinnah had changed his mind and ruled out any arbitration by an umpire.³²⁷ On the next day Jinnah submitted a memorandum that included the minimum conditions on which the Muslim League would be prepared to come to an agreement.³²⁸ The final position of the Congress was conveyed by Azad on the same day as a basis for an agreement.³²⁹

The lists submitted by the two parties contained a wide divergence of views. The starting point for the League was to set up first the two group Constitutions, one for Pakistan and the other for Hindustan, to be followed by the Constitution for the Center. The League wanted an extremely limited center without a legislature of its own and without the power to levy taxes. It also wanted parity at the center with an equal number of representatives from the Muslim majority provinces and the Hindu majority provinces. The starting point for the Congress, in contrast, was the framing of a constitution for India as a whole to set up a powerful Federal Government responsible not only for Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Communications but also the power to raise revenue through taxation, and responsible for matters such as Currency, Customs, and Tariff.³³⁰ The Mission realized that the gap between the two parties was so wide that there seemed no possible hope of reaching a settlement. It thus proceeded to announce its formula for bringing about an agreement between the two parties. Accordingly, the Mission issued a

³²⁶ Record of fifth meeting of the Second Simla Conference, 9 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 490.

³²⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 259.

³²⁸ Letter from Jinnah to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 12 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 516-517.

³²⁹ Letter from Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 12 May, 1946, in *Ibid*, 518-519.

³³⁰ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 433.

statement in New Delhi on 16 May. The Statement of May 16 was central to the whole Cabinet Mission and hence it is necessary to describe it in some detail.

The Statement of 16 May said that the Mission had examined closely and impartially the possibility of a partition of India.³³¹ They believed that internal peace in India could not be achieved unless the Muslims in India felt secure and given control in all matters vital to their culture, religion, and economic interests.³³² The Mission had considered the option of an independent Pakistan that would include the whole of the six Muslim majority provinces and had come to the conclusion that it would not solve the communal minority problem because it would force a very large population of unwilling non-Muslims into the new State of Pakistan. The Mission had also evaluated the alternate option of a truncated Pakistan and believed that it would be an unviable State which would be unable to sustain itself. Moreover, any division of Bengal and Punjab would be contrary to the wishes of the people in those two provinces. After considering all these factors, the Mission was unable to advise the British Government to transfer power in India to two entirely separate sovereign States. The decision did not, however, blind them to the very real apprehensions of the Muslims that their culture and political and social life might get submerged in a purely unitary India in which the Hindus would be a dominating element. The Mission also didn't consider the Congress proposal of having compulsory and optional subjects in the Center, in order for the provinces to pick and choose the optional subjects, as practical and adequate. It, therefore, proceeded to offer its own solution to the problem, which, in its view, would be fair and just to all parties involved. Keeping all those factors in mind, the Cabinet Mission recommended the following as the basis for a new constitution:

³³¹ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 263.

³³² Ibid.

1. There should be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States, which would deal with the following subjects: Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Communications; and should have the powers necessary to raise the finances required for the above subjects.
2. The Union should have an Executive and a Legislature constituted from British Indian and States representatives. Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as a majority of all the members present and voting.
3. All subjects other than the Union subjects and all residuary powers should vest in the Provinces.
4. The States will retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union.
5. Provinces should be free to form Groups with executives and legislatures, and each Group could determine the Provincial subjects to be taken in common.
6. The constitutions of the Union and of the Groups should contain a provision whereby any Province could, by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution after an initial period of 10 years and at 10 yearly intervals thereafter.³³³

After laying down the broad basis of the future Constitution, the Mission's statement proceeded to propose the Constitution-making machinery.³³⁴ The statement observed that although the most satisfactory and ideal solution to pick members of the Constitution-making body would be through elections based on adult franchise, it would be a time-consuming process which would cause unacceptable delay.³³⁵ The alternative was to utilize the recently elected Provincial Legislative Assemblies. The members of the Constitution-making body would come from the Provincial Assemblies and each member would represent roughly one million people in

³³³ Statement by the Cabinet Delegation and Wavell issued at New Delhi, 16 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 587.

³³⁴ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 436.

³³⁵ Statement by the Cabinet Delegation and Wavell issued at New Delhi, 16 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 587.

a province. That would allot to each province a total number of seats proportional to its population.

The Mission's statement also suggested the procedure to be followed by the Constitution-making body. The elected members would assemble in New Delhi as soon as possible for a preliminary meeting. At this meeting they would decide the general order of business and elect a Chairman and other officers. Thereafter the representatives would separate into three sections: Section A (consisting of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces, and Orissa), Section B (consisting of Punjab, NWFP, and Sind), and Section C (consisting of Bengal and Assam).³³⁶ The sections would decide the provincial Constitutions for the provinces included in their section and whether any group Constitution would be set up and if so, with what provincial subjects it would deal.³³⁷ Provinces would have the power to opt out of the groups after the first elections were held under the new constitution.³³⁸

After the group Constitutions had been settled, the three sections would reassemble for the purpose of writing the union Constitution.³³⁹ In the Union Constituent Assembly, any resolution varying the recommendations made by the Cabinet Mission as to the basic form of the Constitution or the raising of any major communal issue would require a majority of the representatives of the two major communities present and voting. The Chairman of the Assembly would decide which resolution raised a major communal issue. However, if so requested by a

³³⁶ Statement by the Cabinet Delegation and Wavell issued at New Delhi, 16 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 589.

³³⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 266.

³³⁸ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, 437.

³³⁹ Statement by the Cabinet Delegation and Wavell issued at New Delhi, 16 May, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 589.

majority of the members of either of the two major communities, he would consult the Federal Court before giving his decision.³⁴⁰

The Mission's statement emphasized the importance of setting up at once an Interim Government to carry on the administration of the country while the task of Constitution making proceeded. The Interim Government had to have the support of all major political parties in India and all the portfolios in the Interim Government, including that of the War Member, would be held by Indians. Finally, the statement expressed the Cabinet Mission's hope that the newly independent India would choose to be a member of British Commonwealth. Even if it did not do so, the Mission looked forward to close and friendly relations between the peoples of Great Britain and India.

Neither the Congress nor the League was fully satisfied with the Cabinet Mission's statement. There followed a series of correspondence and interviews between the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy on the one hand, and the leaders of the two parties on the other. The League attached the greatest importance to the early formation of groups of Provinces based on the basis of communal majorities. The Congress, in contrast, laid stress on the freedom of a province to decide whether to belong to a group right from the beginning. The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on 24 May objecting to a marked discrepancy in Mission's statement of 16 May. The resolution pointed out that the statement stressed the principle of provincial autonomy but did not give them the choice whether or not to belong to the group.³⁴¹ Azad also wrote a letter to Pethick-Lawrence pointing out the contradiction in the Mission's statement. He wrote: 'The basic provision gives full autonomy to a province to do

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 590.

³⁴¹ Resolution Passed by the Congress Working Committee, May 24, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 681.

what it likes and subsequently there appears to be certain compulsion in the matter which clearly infringes that autonomy.³⁴² In answer to the Congress resolution,³⁴³ the Cabinet Mission issued a statement on 25 May which clarified the intent of the May 16 statement as regards to grouping of the provinces. It pointed out that the formation of groups was an essential feature of the scheme and could only be altered through agreement between the parties. The right to opt out of a group could be exercised by a province only after the formation of the groups and the holding of the first elections under the new constitution.³⁴³

The Congress also raised objections to several provisions in the Mission's statement. It raised the question of the representation of the peoples of the States in the Constituent Assembly. It disagreed with the voting rights of European members in Provincial Assemblies, particularly in Assam and Bengal, given the very small European population in those areas which contradicted the 'one representative per million people' principle. The Congress pointed out that it would be improper for any representative from Baluchistan to be included in the constitution-making body since there was no elected assembly in that province. While the Congress was still not sure about accepting the 16 May statement, the all India Muslim League Council met on June 6 and passed a resolution accepting the 16 May statement with some reservations.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy were engaged in the task of formulating a plan, acceptable to both the Congress and the League for the formation of an Interim Government. This task became more and more difficult as the days passed by. The Congress was firmly opposed to any kind of parity between the Hindus and Muslims or between the Congress and the League in the Interim Government. It also insisted on including a

³⁴² Letter from Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 20 May, 1946, in *Ibid*, 640.

³⁴³ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 439.

nationalist Muslim within the quota of seats allocated to it. The League, in contrast, was equally determined about getting parity between itself and the Congress, and also stubbornly insisted that it would not agree to the inclusion of a non-League Muslim in the Interim Government. After all the efforts to bring the two parties to an agreement failed, the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy came out with their own plan for the formation of an Interim Government.³⁴⁴ The plan was announced on June 16 and it proposed to set up an Interim Government comprising of fourteen people³⁴⁵ - six from the Congress, five from the Muslim League, one Sikh, one Indian Christian, and one Parsi.

The Congress and the League were both disappointed by the list proposed in the 16 June scheme. After prolonged discussions, the Congress Working Committee on 25 June rejected the 16 June plan for the formation of the Interim Government. The Congress was not prepared to give up its claim to being a nationalist organization representing all sections of the Indian people. However, largely for tactical reasons, it decided to accept the long-term plan i.e. the Statement of May 16, of course with reservations and its own interpretations.³⁴⁶ After learning about the Congress's decision to reject the short-term plan on 25 June from the Viceroy, the Muslim League immediately let the Viceroy know that it had accepted the 16 June statement.

The mission then proposed to set up a coalition Government since both the Congress and the League had accepted the 16 May plan.³⁴⁷ Jinnah had obtained an assurance from the Viceroy that if one Party accepted the plan and the other didn't, the Party which had accepted the plan

³⁴⁴ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 440.

³⁴⁵ Statement by the Cabinet Delegation and Viceroy, 16 June, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 954.

³⁴⁶ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, 440.

³⁴⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 278.

would be invited to form the Interim Government. This was affirmed by paragraph 8 of the 16 June statement, which stated that:

In the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join the setting up of a coalition Government on the above lines, it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an Interim Government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the statement of 16 May.³⁴⁸

The interpretation of paragraph 8 of 16 June statement became a bone of contention between the League on the one hand, and the Viceroy and the Cabinet Mission, on the other.³⁴⁹ Jinnah contended that since the Congress had rejected the Mission's scheme for Interim Government, which was integral to the overall plan, it should be taken that the Congress had rejected the plan as a whole. Jinnah argued that since the League had accepted the plan in its entirety i.e. both the Statements of 16 May and 16 June, it should be invited to form the Interim Government. Contrary to this view, the Mission and the Viceroy held that since the Congress and the League had both accepted the 16 May plan, they both should be invited to participate in a coalition Government.³⁵⁰ Unable to reach an agreement, the Cabinet Mission left India on 29 June, after a stay of more than three months. There was still a chance of an agreement between the parties. But an event took place that according to many brought about the League's rejection of the Cabinet Mission Plan.³⁵¹

On July 10, Nehru held a press conference in Bombay in which he made the most injudicious statement, which Azad describes in his book *India Wins Freedom* as one of the most unfortunate events that changed the course of Indian history. In replying to a question from the

³⁴⁸ Statement by the Cabinet Delegation and Viceroy, 16 June, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 954.

³⁴⁹ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, 441.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

press, Nehru stated that ‘the Congress would enter the Constituent Assembly completely unfettered by agreements and free to meet all situations as they might arise.’³⁵² On being further pressed to clarify his answer, Nehru replied emphatically that ‘the Congress had agreed only to participate in the Constituent Assembly and regarded itself free to change or modify the Cabinet Mission Plan as it thought best’.³⁵³ Nehru’s statement came as a shock to Jinnah. Azad sums up Jinnah’s reaction as follows:

Mr. Jinnah was thus not at all happy about the outcome of the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission. Jawaharlal’s statement came to him as a bombshell. He immediately issued a statement that this declaration by the Congress President demanded a review of the whole situation. The Muslim League Council had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan in Delhi as it was assured that the Congress also had accepted the scheme and the Plan would be the basis of future constitution of India. Now that the Congress President had declared that the Congress could change the scheme through its majority in the constituent Assembly, this would mean that the minority would be placed at the mercy of the majority. His view was that Jawaharlal’s declaration meant that the Congress had rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan and as such the Viceroy should call upon the Muslim League, which had accepted the Plan, to form the Government.³⁵⁴

The Muslim League Council met in Bombay on 27 July and passed a resolution rejecting the Cabinet Mission Plan. It also decided to resort to Direct Action for the achievement of Pakistan. To recover from Nehru’s blunder the All India Congress Committee issued a statement reaffirming its decision to accept the Mission’s Plan in its entirety. Jinnah, however, was not prepared to accept the Congress’s position and held that Nehru’s statement revealed the real intentions of the Congress.³⁵⁵ He said that if the Congress could change its mind frequently while

³⁵² Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 164.

³⁵³ *Ibid*, 165.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 167.

the British were still there, what guarantee was there that they would not do so again when the British left India?³⁵⁶

Thus the last attempt at bringing about a united free India collapsed. Out of the three major players (the British, the Congress, and the Muslim League) in the game, the side that was the least responsible for the failure of the Mission was the British. Churchill's War Cabinet had been replaced by a Labor Government. The new Labor Government was ideologically more inclined to grant independence to India and was increasingly anxious to get out of India as soon as possible.³⁵⁷ The British economy was in dire straits and India represented a drain on scarce and precious resources.³⁵⁸ Public opinion in Britain was against retaining India, and last but not the least, the international public opinion, particularly from the United States, was urging Britain to give up India.³⁵⁹

The British had a long record of encouraging the separatist stance of Jinnah and the Muslim League as an effective way to counter the forces of growing nationalism in India, in order to prolong their rule over the country. But once they decided to leave India, they were not particularly interested in partitioning India. They favored a transfer of power to a united India that would keep the army undivided. After a close examination of the subject, they came to the conclusion that a united India would be more helpful to the Commonwealth defense than a divided one.³⁶⁰ A divided India would destroy the homogeneity and effectiveness of Indian army. Pakistan was expected to be a weak State militarily which would likely to remain continuously

³⁵⁶ Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 167.

³⁵⁷ Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 215-216.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 216.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁶⁰ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 418.

embroiled in conflicts with India.³⁶¹ Lacking depth in defense, Pakistan would not be an effective buffer to Russian advance to the Middle East. Hence the Cabinet Mission's first choice was to keep India undivided through a suitable constitutional arrangement devised through agreements between the two major parties in India. The Cabinet Mission did not want to transfer power to the Congress and abandon the Muslims in India, who had been staunchly loyal to them over the years. They also did not just want to quit India abruptly leaving her in chaos and confusion. That would have damaged Britain's prestige and reputation in the world. Hence they did their utmost to bring the two parties to an agreement to break the political deadlock. They came up with one of the most ingenious and brilliant scheme (the three-tier structure) ever devised in the annals of constitutional history of the world and worked diligently to get it accepted by the two warring parties but failed despite their best efforts.

The failure of the Cabinet Mission was due to many causes. The most important reason perhaps was the deep suspicion between the Congress and the League.³⁶² At every stage and at every level the distrust between the two parties stood in the way of compromise. Even at the personal level, there was deep animosity between the leaders of the two parties. For example, Jinnah even refused to shake hands with Azad at the conference in Simla. It was a failure of leadership, statesmanship, and unwillingness by the leaders to compromise for the greater good of the country. As a result, India lost a golden opportunity to avoid the partition that was soon to follow.

The Congress gave much emphasize on inessential points such as insisting on the right to nominate a Muslim to the Interim Government, instead of focusing on the crux of the matter

³⁶¹ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 418.

³⁶² Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 221.

which was a united India.³⁶³ The Congress was the bigger and stronger party of the two and hence had a greater responsibility to make concessions for the sake of keeping the country united. Instead it acted in the most irresponsible fashion by bickering over insignificant issues. Even when it was offered six seats in the Interim Government, a virtual denial of parity to Jinnah, it still went ahead and rejected the 16 June statement, thus derailing the whole process. In the opinion of the Cabinet Delegation, the Congress was playing hardball despite getting several concessions from Jinnah. Jinnah had supported the Cabinet Mission Scheme, virtually abandoning his demand for a sovereign Pakistan, instead settling for the grouping of provinces with residuary powers.³⁶⁴ Nehru's assertions at the 10 July press conference killed any glimmer of hope of an agreement that might have been still alive at that point. Jinnah became even more suspicious of Congress's real intentions and became more obstinate in his opposition to any efforts for cooperation with the Congress.³⁶⁵

The Congress goal was to establish a strong and organic center with its own Executive and Legislature.³⁶⁶ The Congress, at a minimum, wanted the Center to have the power to raise taxes apart from the responsibility of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Communications. It wanted to rapidly industrialize India in the Soviet model. Industrialists like Birla (the major backers of the Congress Party) were hopeful for a powerful Central Government in free India, footing the bill for capital-intensive projects like building roads, bridges, power plants and other infrastructures that India desperately lacked.³⁶⁷ The Cabinet Mission Plan seemed a cruel

³⁶³ Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 321.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 324.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁶⁶ E. W. R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India, 1945-7* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1954), 82.

³⁶⁷ Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 59.

watering down of all that expectation.³⁶⁸ The grouping scheme and the compulsion for the provinces to join their respective groups seemed to Congress a virtual invitation to Pakistan. When Congress rejected the June 16 Statement, Jinnah took it as a clear indication that he would be invited to form the Interim Government. However, the Congress decided on 24 June to have their cake and eat it by issuing a retroactive and heavily qualified acceptance of the 16 May statement, which allowed them to be brought back into the proceedings.³⁶⁹ Wavell acknowledged in a secret memorandum that the Congress move was a 'dishonest one' and questioned whether it should be accepted.³⁷⁰ Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence, who were sympathetic to the Congress position, intervened in favor of the Congress.

Although the Muslim League had accepted the grouping of provinces under a weak federation, a reading of its June 6 resolution makes it clear that it had not at all jettisoned its cherished objective of establishing a sovereign Pakistan.³⁷¹ The June 6 resolution of the Muslim League declared:

In order that there may be no manner of doubt in any quarter, the Council of the All India Muslim League reiterates that the attainment of the goal of a complete sovereign Pakistan still remains the unalterable objective of the Muslims in India, for the achievement of which they will, if necessary, employ every means in their power, and consider no sacrifice or suffering too great.³⁷²

In his Presidential remarks on 6 June, Jinnah declared amidst loud cheers: 'Let me tell you that Muslim India would not rest content until we have established a full, complete, and

³⁶⁸ Khan, *The Great Partition*, 59.

³⁶⁹ French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*, 242.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 443.

³⁷² Letter from Jinnah to Wavell, enclosed with a copy of Resolution Passed by the Council of Muslim League on June 6th 1946, 7 June, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Cabinet Mission, 23 March – 29 June, 1946*, vol. 7, 837

sovereign Pakistan.’³⁷³ Jinnah’s observation and the Muslim League resolution of 6 June make it clear that the League decided to participate in the Cabinet Mission Plan considering it as a stepping stone for achieving its ultimate goal of Pakistan. Despite Jinnah’s real intentions, the fact remains that the Cabinet Mission presented the last best chance for keeping India united and the blame must be placed on the Congress for its failure to utilize the opportunity.

³⁷³ Prasad, *Pathway to India’s Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 445.

Chapter Six

Direct Action, Interim Government, and Constituent Assembly

At the meeting of the Council of the All India Muslim League in Bombay on 27 July, 1946 Jinnah accused the Cabinet Mission of breach of faith with the Muslims of India and having ‘played into the hands of the Congress’.³⁷⁴ He said that the League had given many concessions but the Congress had shown no appreciation of the sacrifices it had made.³⁷⁵ Instead, the Congress was bent upon setting up a Caste Hindu Raj in India with the connivance of the British. Therefore, the League had no alternative but to adhere once more to the national goal of Pakistan. On 29 July, the Muslim League Council passed the following resolution authorizing the Working Committee to draw up a plan of ‘Direct Action’ to achieve Pakistan:

...the Council of the All India Muslim League is convinced that now the time has come for the Muslim nation to resort to direct action to achieve Pakistan and assert their just rights and to vindicate their honor and to get rid of the present slavery under the British and contemplated future caste-Hindu domination. This Council calls upon the Muslim nation to stand to a man behind their sole representative organization, the All India Muslim League, and be ready for any sacrifice. This Council directs the Working Committee to prepare forthwith a programme of direct action to carry out the policy initiated above and to organize the Muslims for the coming struggle to be launched as and when necessary.³⁷⁶

The Muslim League Working Committee soon followed up the Council’s resolution by calling upon the Muslims throughout India to observe 16 August as ‘Direct Action Day’, when meetings would be held over the country to explain the resolution. On that day, Jinnah thundered ‘We bid goodbye to constitutional methods.’³⁷⁷ While the celebrations of ‘Direct Action day’

³⁷⁴ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 283.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Muslim League Resolution on Direct Action Day, 29 July, 1946, in Sumit Sarkar, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1946*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 408.

³⁷⁷ Masselos, *Indian nationalism: A History*, 221.

passed off peacefully in most parts of India, Calcutta witnessed the most horrific events. Hindu-Muslim clashes began on that day and carnage of an unprecedented scale continued for the next four or five days. It came to be known as the ‘Great Calcutta Killings’ that left over 4,000 dead, 10,000 injured, and 100,000 homeless. It started when Members of Muslim League in processions on the streets of Calcutta celebrating ‘Direct Action Day’ started attacking and looting Hindu shops. Soon the acts of vandalism spread throughout the city and Calcutta burst into flames. Many Hindus were butchered, their women were raped, and their houses and shops were looted and in some cases burnt.³⁷⁸ The Hindus were taken completely unawares.³⁷⁹ But, they soon organized and retaliated. Calcutta was soon in the grip of a communal orgy of violence and the situation descended into an open civil war between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslims started the provocations but, in the end, they were the ones who suffered more casualties. The *Hindustan Times* on August 18 and 19 described the events:

The whole city of Calcutta is in the grip of terror. Rioting and looting which started yesterday continued throughout the night and the situation grew worse in the morning...Reports of stabbing, assaults on women, burning of houses and looting of shops on a big scale are being received from different parts of the city...Two leading hospitals of Calcutta are so full with riot victims that they are unable to take any more...Bus and tram services in the city are paralyzed...Most pitiful sights were women and children and injured men being evacuated from the north side of the city, which is predominantly Muslim, to Hindu areas in the south. In babbling teardrained phrases, they told of women being attacked, children being hacked and their menfolk killed before their eyes...³⁸⁰

Anita Inder Singh writes in her book *The Origins of Partition of India*: ‘there is no doubt of the complicity of Suhrawardy and the Provincial League in the incidents in Calcutta’. Azad, in an interview with the Viceroy, severely criticized the Bengal Ministry and its Premier

³⁷⁸ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 643.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Extract for a news report titled ‘Calcutta riots death-toll mounts’ in *Hindustan Times*, 18 August, 1946, in Sarkar, ed., *Towards Freedom, 1946*, vol. 1, 673-674.

Suhrawardy for not taking sufficient precautions even if they had apprehended trouble.³⁸¹ He wrote that throughout Calcutta the military and the police were standing by but remained inactive while innocent men and women were being killed.³⁸² Indecisive action by the British Governor of Bengal province, Sir Fredrick Burrows, was also blamed for the situation getting out of hand. Under 1935 Act, it was the responsibility of the Governor to maintain law and order in his province. It has been alleged that Burrows sat inactive during the initial hours of the riots allowing the situation to deteriorate. A prompt action in bringing in the army to contain the situation would have averted the unprecedented holocaust in Calcutta. However, it was a no-win situation for the British. If the Governor had called the military and used excessive force to stamp out the disturbances, the British would have been accused of heavy-handed imperialism and militarism.

Considering the worsening communal situation in the country, the Viceroy decided to make another attempt to form a coalition Government. A letter containing a proposal for an Interim Government which would include six members from the Congress, five members from the League, and three representatives from minorities chosen by the Viceroy, was sent to Nehru and Jinnah. As expected, Jinnah rejected the proposal. In the face of Jinnah's intransigent attitude, the Secretary of State and the Viceroy felt that the Congress should be given a chance to form the Interim Government and they hoped that ultimately Jinnah would relent and the League would join the Interim Government. On 6 August, Wavell wrote a letter to Nehru informing him the decision to invite the Congress to make proposals for the immediate formation of an Interim

³⁸¹ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 644.

³⁸² Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 109.

Government. The Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha on 8 August authorized Nehru to accept the invitation to form an Interim Government.³⁸³

Nehru met Jinnah in order to persuade him to join the proposed Interim Government. Nehru's proposals were along the same lines as the Viceroy's and Jinnah was less disposed to accept them from the Congress than the British.³⁸⁴ Jinnah remained as distrustful and uncompromising as ever. In a published statement he spoke bitterly of the Congress as a Caste Hindu Fascist organization who along with their few individual henchmen of other communities wanted to be installed in power and rule over the Muslims, with the aid of British bayonets.³⁸⁵

Nehru and the Viceroy settled on the composition of the Interim Government after few discussions. On 24 August, the names of 12 out of 14 members were announced. The list included five Caste Hindus from the Congress (Nehru, Patel, Prasad, Rajagopalachari, and Sarat Bose), one Scheduled Caste member from the Congress (Jagjivan Ram), three non-League Muslims (Sir Shafaat Ahmed Khan, M. Asaf Ali, and Syed Ali Zaheer), one Sikh (Sardar Baldev Singh), one Indian Christian (John Matthai), and one Parsee (C. H. Bhabha).³⁸⁶

Shortly after making the announcement on the formation of the Interim Government, Lord Wavell flew to Calcutta to see firsthand the tragic events that had taken place there as a result of the 'Direct Action Day' call by the Muslim League.³⁸⁷ What he saw there convinced him that if some sort of agreement was not brought about between the two major communities soon, other parts of the country could experience the horrors of Calcutta. Nazimuddin, one of the

³⁸³ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 642.

³⁸⁴ Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India, 1945-7*, 115.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 645.

³⁸⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 301.

prominent League leaders in Bengal, told the Viceroy that if the Congress would make an unequivocal statement that the provinces could not opt out of groups except as laid out in the Statement of 16 May, there was a fair chance that the Muslim League might join the Interim Government and the Constituent Assembly.³⁸⁸ Wavell met Gandhi and Nehru on 27 August and told them what had happened in Calcutta. He gave them the following draft of a formula which he thought might satisfy Jinnah:

The Congress are prepared in the interest of communal harmony to accept the intention of the Statement of May 16th that provinces cannot exercise any option affecting their membership of the sections or of the groups if formed, until the decision contemplated in paragraph 19 (viii) of the Statement of 16th May is taken by the new Legislature after the new constitutional arrangements have come into operation and the first general elections have been held.³⁸⁹

Neither Gandhi nor Nehru was prepared to accept the formula, but at the request of the Viceroy, Nehru placed the formula before the Working Committee of the Congress. The Working Committee stuck to its old view and added that any dispute as to the interpretation of the clauses pertaining to grouping in 16 May statement might be referred to the Federal Court and that they would abide by it. Nehru wrote a letter to the Viceroy on 20 August informing him of the decision of the Working Committee. The Secretary of State sent a cable to the Viceroy advising him to on no account do or say anything that might occasion a break with the Congress.³⁹⁰ Wavell continued to urge Nehru to make attempts to bring the Muslim League into the Government. Wavell thought that the Congress was out to grab all powers for itself. He wrote in his journal:

³⁸⁸ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 646.

³⁸⁹ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 302.

³⁹⁰ Penderel Moon, ed., *Wavell: Viceroy's Journal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 343.

I saw Nehru from 3.0 to 4.0 p.m., and Gandhi from 4.0 to 5.0 p.m. No progress, quite obviously they do not want Jinnah and the League in, and Gandhi at the end exposed Congress policy of domination more nakedly than ever before. The more I see of that old man, the more I regard him as an unscrupulous old hypocrite; he would shrink from no violence and blood-letting to achieve his ends, though he would naturally prefer to do so by chicanery and false show of mildness and friendship.³⁹¹

The question of the League's participation in the Interim Government continued to be on the top of Wavell's agenda.³⁹² He held a series of talks with Nehru, Jinnah and other leaders of both parties to get the Muslim League in the Government. Wavell tried to impress upon Jinnah that in its own interests the League would be well-advised to join the Interim Government. Wavell's persistence finally paid off. On 13 October, the Muslim League decided to come in. In his typical fashion Jinnah wrote the following letter to the Viceroy, first rejecting the basis and scheme of setting up the Interim Government, and then agreeing to participate in the Interim Government:

The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League have considered the whole matter fully and I am now authorized to state that they do not approve of the basis and scheme of setting up the Interim Government...We consider and maintain that the imposition of this decision is contrary to the Declaration of August 8, 1940, but since, according to your decision we have a right to nominate five members of the Executive Council on behalf of the Muslim League, my committee have, for various reasons, come to the conclusion that in the interests of Mussulmans and other communities it would be fatal to leave the entire field of administration of the Central Government in the hands of the Congress. Besides, you may be forced to have in your Interim Government Muslims who do not command the respect and confidence of Muslim India which would lead to very serious consequences; and lastly, for other very weighty grounds and reasons, which are obvious and need not be mentioned, we have decided to nominate five on behalf of the Muslim League...³⁹³

On 14 October, Jinnah sent the names of 5 nominees of the Muslim League. They were Liaquat Ali Khan, I. I. Chundrigar, Abdur Rab Nishtar, Ghazanfar Ali Khan, and Jogendra Nath

³⁹¹ Moon, ed., *Wavell: Viceroy's Journal*, 352-353.

³⁹² Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, 477.

³⁹³ Moon, ed., *Wavell: Viceroy's Journal*, 358.

Mandal.³⁹⁴ Two of the people (Chundrigar, and Khan) were complete unknowns. Azad wrote ‘They were dark horses about whom even members of the League had little information’.³⁹⁵ Jinnah deliberately bypassed moderate leaders like Nazimuddin and Ismail Khan who were well-known nationally and widely expected to be nominated.³⁹⁶ They were discarded in favor of Jinnah’s henchmen. Wavell wrote in his journal:

When I studied it in detail, it was rather a disappointing list. Liaquat Ali Khan and Nishtar were certainties, but Chundrigar from Bombay and Ghazanfar Ali Khan from Punjab are poor substitutes for Ismail Khan and Nazimuddin.³⁹⁷

The inclusion of a Scheduled Caste member was an obvious reply to the right claimed by the Congress to nominate a Muslim.³⁹⁸ In order to make place for the nominees of the League, the Congress decided that Sarat Bose, Sir Shafaat Ahmed Khan, and Syed Ali Zaheer would resign from the Interim Government. There followed a tussle between the Congress and the League regarding the distribution of portfolios. Finally, it was decided to allot to the Muslim League representatives the five portfolios of Finance, Commerce, Communications, Health and Law.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁴ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 648

³⁹⁵ Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 176.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Moon, ed., *Wavell: Viceroy’s Journal*, 359.

³⁹⁸ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 648.

³⁹⁹ The fourteen members in the Interim Government were Jawaharlal Nehru (Vice-President of the Executive Council – External Affairs), Vallabhbhai Patel (Home, Information and Broadcasting), Baldev Singh (Defense), John Matthai (Industries and Supplies), C. Rajagopalachari (Education), C. H. Bhabha (Works, Mines, and Power), Rajendra Prasad (Food and Agriculture), Asaf Ali (Railways), Jagjivan Ram (Labor), Liaquat Ali Khan (Finance), I. I. Chundrigar (Commerce), Abdur Rab Nishtar (Communications), Ghazanfar Ali Khan (Health), and Jogendra Nath Mandal (Law).

There was, however, no Coalition Government in the real sense of the word.⁴⁰⁰ Instead of the Congress and the League working together, the Interim Government became a sad spectacle of bitter wrangling between the members of two parties.⁴⁰¹ The real intention of the League members was to obstruct the Government from within. Before joining the Government, Ghazanfar Ali Khan had made clear the intention of the League members in the following way:

In the Interim Government all our activities shall be guided by two considerations: that is, to convince the Congress that no Government in India can function smoothly without the cooperation of the Muslim League, and that the League is the sole representative organization of the Indian Muslims. The Interim Government is one of the fronts of the direct action campaign and we shall most scrupulously carry out the orders of Mr. Jinnah on any front that we are called upon to serve.⁴⁰²

Liaquat Ali as Finance Minister had the right to scrutinize every proposal put forward by all departments of the Government. He fully utilized his power to make it difficult for any Congress member to function effectively. Azad said that the League members were in the Government yet against it. Liaquat Ali framed a budget that proposed heavy taxation on the rich businessmen and the industrialists. This did not sit well with the Congress as the businessmen and the industrialists were mostly Hindus who funded the Congress machinery. Patel and Rajagopalachari were vehemently opposed to Liaquat's budget, which they said was designed to destroy the business community and could do permanent damage to commerce and industry.

The League's entry into the Interim Government did not bring about the expected lull in communal violence.⁴⁰³ The 'Great Calcutta Killings' which began on 16 August as a result of the

⁴⁰⁰ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 648.

⁴⁰¹ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 156.

⁴⁰² Newspaper cuttings enclosed in the File No. G-53 of All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers (1946) at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 20 October, 1946, in Sarkar, ed., *Towards Freedom, 1946*, vol. 1, 409.

⁴⁰³ Singh, *The Origins of Partition of India, 1936-1947*, 195.

League's call to 'direct action' had spread like prairie fire to other parts of the country. East Bengal followed by Bihar witnessed the worst communal violence ever seen in India. A well-organized programme of ethnic-cleansing had been set in motion in the Noakhali and Tippera districts in East Bengal.⁴⁰⁴ There were forced conversions of Hindus to Islam in public ceremonies where they were made to parade wearing caps inscribed 'Pakistan' and Muslim-style *lungis*.⁴⁰⁵ Hindus were forced to eat beef, their shops and properties were looted and destroyed, and their temples and idols were desecrated. Other atrocities included raping of women and forcible marriage of Hindu women to Muslim men. A news report in the *Hindustan Times* on 15 October, 1946 described the situation as:

Riotous mobs with deadly weapons are raiding villages, and looting, murder and arson are continuing since Thursday, October 10, on a very large scale. Forcible mass conversion, abduction of women and desecration of places of worship are also reported...Approaches to the affected areas are being guarded by armed hooligans...⁴⁰⁶

Gandhi was in Delhi when the news from East Bengal came through. He was particularly hurt by the crimes committed against women.⁴⁰⁷ He cancelled all his plans and decided to leave for Bengal immediately.⁴⁰⁸ Friends tried to dissuade him as he was in poor health and the ongoing political events unfolding in Delhi required his presence there. 'All I know is that I won't be at peace with myself unless I go there', he replied.⁴⁰⁹ There were mammoth crowds at

⁴⁰⁴ Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, 68.

⁴⁰⁵ French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*, 269.

⁴⁰⁶ Extracts from a news report, 'Many persons burnt alive: Governor's intervention urged', *Hindustan Times*, 15 October, 1946, in Sarkar, ed., *Towards Freedom, 1946*, vol. 1, 706.

⁴⁰⁷ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence*, 250.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Louis Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (New York: Penguin Group, 1954), 177.

all big stations on the way to get a glimpse of Mahatma.⁴¹⁰ At Calcutta he saw the ravages of August riots and confessed to a 'sinking feeling at the mass madness that can turn a man less than a brute.'⁴¹¹ At a prayer meeting in Calcutta he said that he would not leave Bengal until the last embers of the trouble were stamped out.⁴¹² In the succeeding days, Gandhi, Suhrawardy and other prominent leaders of Bengal hammered out a peace formula for bringing back communal harmony in Bengal, which became the corner-stone of Gandhi's peace mission in Noakhali.⁴¹³ The signatories to the peace formula constituted themselves into a peace committee, composed of an equal number of Hindus and the Muslims for the whole of Bengal with the Chief-Minister as the chairman, to bring about communal peace in the province.

While preparing to go to Noakhali, news came to Gandhi of tragic events that were taking place in Bihar. As news of Noakhali spilled over into Bihar, the Hindu-majority province witnessed the worst communal violence since the beginning of British rule in India. Hindu refugees who fled from East Bengal into Bihar carried tales of atrocities committed by the Muslims against the Hindu men, women and children. Their tales of woes excited the Hindus of Bihar to murderous attacks on their Muslim neighbours, the scale and savagery of which quite eclipsed that in East Bengal. Sensational newspaper headlines whipped the Hindus into hysteria and the propaganda by Hindu Mahasabha added fuel to the desire of revenge.⁴¹⁴ The carnage started in Patna and quickly spread to other parts of Bihar. Thousands poured into the streets chanting 'Blood for Blood'. The killings of Muslims seem to have been committed by gangs

⁴¹⁰ Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, vol. 1* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1956), 3.

⁴¹¹ Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 177.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, vol. 1*, 8.

⁴¹⁴ Singh, *The Origins of Partition of India, 1936-1947*, 198.

organized by local Hindu landlords and financed by the Marwari businessmen of Calcutta.⁴¹⁵ The official estimate put the death toll at 4,580 (some estimates put the figure at 10,000 or more), and most of dead were Muslims. Nehru was outraged at this mindless killing of Muslims and threatened to use aerial bombing unless the mayhem stopped immediately. Filled with grief, Gandhi said that the Bihari Hindus had disgraced India. As penance for the Bihar madness Gandhi announced that he would keep himself 'on the lowest diet possible' and that would become a 'fast unto death if the erring Biharis have not turned over a new leaf'.⁴¹⁶

From Calcutta, Gandhi proceeded to Noakhali where frightened Hindus were fleeing before the violence of the Hindu majority.⁴¹⁷ Despite his old age and frailty, he plunged into a punishing regime of travel and speeches, trying to confront the bitterness and terror, calming and comforting those he met.⁴¹⁸ For months, Gandhi worked 16 to 18 hours a day, going from one village to another on foot spreading his message of non-violence to induce the two communities to live in peace and harmony again. He urged the Hindus to return home, and to fear none but God. In a prayer meeting at Srirampur on 26 November, Gandhi said even if a solitary refugee had to return to his village populated by Muslims, he would unhesitatingly advise his return. He further added that if they were to become a self-respecting nation and a brave people, this courage was indispensable.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*, 269.

⁴¹⁶ Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, 178.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, 179.

⁴¹⁸ Brown, *Gandhi: The Prisoner of Hope*, 376.

⁴¹⁹ Gandhi's speech at a prayer meeting in Srirampur, November 26, 1946, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 86, 164-165.

Gandhi called for a Hindu and a Muslim in each village to accompany the returning refugees and stand surety for their safety.⁴²⁰ He instructed each member of his entourage, including the ladies, to settle down in one affected village and make himself or herself hostage for the safety and security of the Hindu minority of that village.⁴²¹ His idea was that every Hindu worker thus sent should be accompanied by a Mussalman worker and both of them together should mix with the local people and gradually create an atmosphere in which the refugees would shed their fears and be able to come back and live in peace and friendship once more.⁴²² He himself decided to stay with Muslim families during his tours of villages. He said if the Hindus saw him living alone with Muslim families, it would probably induce them to return to their homes with confidence.⁴²³ The Muslims, too, would be able to examine his life closely and they would find out for themselves whether he was their friend or enemy.⁴²⁴

The restoration of confidence between the two communities was, however, a slow and gradual process.⁴²⁵ Nevertheless, Gandhi's presence acted as a soothing balm on the riot affected villages of East Bengal. It assuaged anger, softened tempers, and eased tensions.⁴²⁶ Yet, Muslim hostility to his continuing presence was rife and there were sustained propaganda in the Muslim press against his stay in East Bengal, suspecting it as a 'deep political game'.⁴²⁷ Gandhi was not dismayed by the opposition; he was determined to stay in Bengal until calm returned to the area and it was a 'do or die' proposition for him. As the situation in East Bengal improved, Gandhi

⁴²⁰ Brown, *Gandhi: The Prisoner of Hope*, 376.

⁴²¹ Gandhi's discussions with co-workers at Dattapara, November 13, 1946, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 86, 114.

⁴²² Gandhi's speech at a prayer meeting in Srirampur, November 20, 1946," in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 86, 140.

⁴²³ Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. 1, 35.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Nanda, *The Making of a Nation: India's Road to Independence*, 250.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Brown, *Gandhi: The Prisoner of Hope*, 377.

left Bengal and headed to Bihar in March. Basing himself in Patna, he began the same work of reconciliation and restoration of courage.⁴²⁸ While parts of India were in turmoil, arrangements for setting up a Constituent Assembly began in New Delhi.

Differences between the Congress and the League came to a head over the summoning of the Constituent Assembly.⁴²⁹ The annual session of the Congress, which met at Meerut during the third week of November, demanded that either the League join the Constituent Assembly or quit the Interim Government as the League's entry into the Government was conditional upon its acceptance of the long-term plan of the Cabinet Mission Scheme. Jinnah retorted by saying that since the Congress had never accepted the compulsory grouping scheme of the Cabinet Mission Plan, the Constituent Assembly should not proceed. Meanwhile, Wavell was urging London to issue a clear statement to clarify the real intent of the Cabinet Mission Plan as regards to the grouping scheme. He admitted that it might anger the Congress and lead to resignation of the Congress Governments at the center and the provinces and further escalate violence in the country. In that case, he suggested that the British Government should follow his suggestion of setting a firm date to quit India and transfer power on a province by province basis in the interim period.⁴³⁰ However, London was not yet prepared to scuttle from India without making further efforts to bring the two parties together.

The British Government, realizing that the situation could no longer be allowed to drift further, decided to summon two representatives from the Congress and two from the Muslim

⁴²⁸ Brown, *Gandhi: The Prisoner of Hope*, 377.

⁴²⁹ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 650.

⁴³⁰ Telegram from Wavell to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 24 November, 1946, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Fixing of Time Limit, 4 November 1947 – 22 March 1947*, vol. 9 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1980), 163.

League, and one from the Sikh Community.⁴³¹ Nehru rejected the invitation initially, but later agreed to come to London at the urging of the Prime Minister Attlee. On 2 December, Nehru, Baldev Singh, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali, and the Viceroy arrived in London. The discussions that followed failed to bring out an agreement.⁴³² On 6 December, the British Government issued a statement that gave a verdict in favor of the League's interpretation of the grouping scheme of the Cabinet Mission Plan.⁴³³ The statement also included the right of each party to refer all questions of interpretations in dispute to a Federal Court whose decision would be final.⁴³⁴ However, the statement was accompanied by an assurance to Jinnah that if the Federal Court's decision was contrary to the British Government's interpretation then they would have to consider the position afresh.⁴³⁵ This was unacceptable to the Congress, which was ready to abide by the decision of the Federal Court even if it went against its position.⁴³⁶

The Constituent Assembly met on 9 December. The Muslim League members decided to boycott it. The most important and politically significant resolution, known as the 'Objective Resolution', was moved by Nehru.⁴³⁷ It envisaged the Indian Union as 'an Independent Sovereign Republic' comprising of autonomous units with residuary powers, wherein the economic, political and social freedom of everyone would be guaranteed with adequate safeguards for minorities and backward communities.⁴³⁸ The Constituent Assembly met again on 20 January and had a six-day session. Nehru's 'Objective Resolution' was passed and some

⁴³¹ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 501.

⁴³² Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 329.

⁴³³ Record of a meeting at 10 Downing Street, 6 December, 1946," in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Fixing of Time Limit, 4 November 1947 – 22 March 1947*, vol. 9, 296.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, 651.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power*, 330.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

important committees were appointed. The Working Committee of the Muslim League met at Karachi on 31 January and passed a lengthy resolution denouncing the composition and procedure of the Constituent Assembly.

When Jinnah called for 'Direct Action', he had no idea what was coming. It was for him a bargaining move to get more out of the British and the Congress, rather than a call to violence.⁴³⁹ He had called for the day of 'Direct Action' to be a day of 'peaceful reflection', not a day of violence. But the call for 'Direct Action' unleashed pent-up forces of disorder of such magnitude that they brought parts of India close to anarchy. It started with the 'Great Calcutta Killings' which claimed five thousand lives and left thousands more injured and homeless. The violence did not stop there. In a chain reaction it spread to East Bengal where the Muslims butchered the Hindus in great numbers and, in retaliation, the Hindus in Bihar slaughtered their Muslim neighbors in even greater numbers. The violence then spread to other parts of India such as the United Provinces, and Bombay.

Convinced that a Coalition Government was the only way out of preventing a civil war, Wavell made a last-ditch effort to get assurance from the Congress on the grouping scheme so that the Muslim League could be induced to participate in the Interim Government. Gandhi and Nehru stubbornly stuck to their position of 'no compromise' with Jinnah. On 2 September, 1946 Congress took office in the Interim Government. The Congress was ready to get the Constituent Assembly going and it was in no mood to accommodate Jinnah who had been tarred by the spate of violence that had engulfed India.⁴⁴⁰ The Congress's aim was to consolidate its position in the

⁴³⁹ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, 216.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 218.

Government, get rid of the British as soon as possible, and then it could deal with the Muslims and the Princes in its own terms.

By the autumn of 1946, Jinnah had been pushed into a corner. Moreover, there was the danger of the British quitting India, leaving the Muslims at the mercy of a Hindu Raj. At this point, the only course open to Jinnah was to join the Interim Government and try to prevent the Congress from consolidating its position.⁴⁴¹ Jinnah made abundantly clear that there could be no question of the League members in the Interim Government cooperating with their Congress counterparts. As we have seen, the League members, selected by Jinnah, did their master's bidding to obstruct the functioning of the Government in every possible mean at their disposal. Thus a great opportunity to work together was again lost by the two warring parties. Wavell tried his best to build a truly coalition Government so that the British could transfer power to a responsible entity. However, the mistrust and the ill-feeling between Jinnah and the Congress had reached such a level that it was impossible to get them to agree on anything. Hence the tug-of-war between them continued unabated and as a result India had to pay a heavy price in terms of a bloody partition.

⁴⁴¹ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, 223.

Chapter Seven

Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Independence, and Partition

On 20 February, 1947 Prime Minister Attlee announced in the British Parliament the new Statement of British Policy for India. It came to be known as the Attlee Declaration. Paragraph 7 of the declaration said ‘the present state of uncertainty in India is fraught with danger and cannot be indefinitely prolonged. Hence His Majesty’s Government wished to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect the transfer of power into effective Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948’.⁴⁴² The declaration further added that if the Indians had not reached an agreement and formed a constitution by the stated date, then the British would transfer power to parties that would seem most expedient at that time, keeping in mind the best interests of Indian people.⁴⁴³ Along with this statement it was also announced that Rear Admiral Viscount Mountbatten, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in SE Asia, would soon replace Wavell as the Viceroy of India. Mountbatten was given extraordinary plenipotentiary power to carry out his mission in India. His mission was clear cut.⁴⁴⁴ First try to unite the warring parties and leave a united India. If unsuccessful, then consider the option of division.⁴⁴⁵ He was also directed to keep India in the Commonwealth.⁴⁴⁶

Nehru welcomed the decision of the British Government to transfer power by June 1948. Jinnah’s response was, come what may, the Muslim league would not yield an inch in its demand

⁴⁴² India Policy Statement of 20 February, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Fixing of Time Limit, 4 November 1947 – 22 March 1947*, vol. 9, 774.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, 177.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

for Pakistan.⁴⁴⁷ Meanwhile the communal situation in Punjab rapidly deteriorated. From 1920 till 1942, Punjab operated under coalition governments, mostly under the leadership of Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, in which Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had participated.⁴⁴⁸ After the death of Sikander Hyat Khan, the Unionist Party had weakened, and the Muslim League, with its demand for Pakistan, had gained ascendancy in Punjab.⁴⁴⁹ When the League emerged as the single largest party in the elections of 1946 and yet failed to put together a coalition government, it became very bitter and resentful. The Muslim League concentrated all its energies on overthrowing the coalition government headed by Khizr Hyat Khan, the son of Sikander Hyat Khan.⁴⁵⁰ Under pressure from the League, Khizr resigned. Governor Evan Jenkins called Khan of Mamdot, the leader of the Provincial Muslim League, to form a government. Both the Hindus and Sikhs refused to cooperate and as a result the Governor was obliged to impose section 93⁴⁵¹ in Punjab on 5 March.⁴⁵² Communal rioting broke out on a large scale in Lahore, and from there it spread into Multan, Rawalpindi, and Amritsar.

A new crisis developed in the Interim Government. Liaquat Ali proposed a 25% tax on all businesses on profits more than one hundred thousand rupees. The Congress interpreted it as a clever attempt by the League to punish the Hindu capitalists, the major financiers of the Congress Party. It was also seen as a maneuver by the League to split the right wing of the Congress from its socialist left wing.⁴⁵³ By the time Lord Wavell left the country, the situation was pretty bleak. Riots were widespread in Punjab and elsewhere. The prospect of a Congress

⁴⁴⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 344.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 340.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 344.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵¹ Section 93 of India Act of 1935 authorized provincial Governors to take over all powers if they judged that the constitutional machinery in their respective provinces had broken down.

⁴⁵² Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 345.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*, 348.

and League rapprochement looked virtually non-existent. Putting it mildly, the task that faced the new Viceroy was an unenviable one.

The new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, arrived in India on 22 March, 1947, and two days later assumed office. He held a series of interviews with the leaders from both parties. In his first meeting with Gandhi on 1 April, he was staggered by the Mahatma's suggestion that Jinnah should be called upon to head the Interim Government as Prime Minister.⁴⁵⁴ In the next meeting with the Viceroy, Gandhi elaborated his proposal and added that Jinnah should be given a free hand to choose his ministers, if necessary entirely from the Muslim League, and if Jinnah wanted he could always build a coalition with Nehru and the Congress.⁴⁵⁵ Gandhi pointed out that if Jinnah refused the offer, then the offer would have to be made to the Congress, and he hoped that the Congress would include all shades of opinion including the Muslim League.⁴⁵⁶ Mountbatten records his conversation with Gandhi as:

I twitted him that he really desired me to form a Central Government run by the Congress, to whom I would turn over power, and that the preliminary offer to Jinnah was merely a maneuver. He assured me with burning sincerity that this was so far being the case that he then and there volunteered to place the whole services at my disposal in trying to get the Jinnah Government through first by exercising his influence with the Congress to accept it, and secondly touring the length and breadth of the country getting all the peoples of India to accept the decision. He convinced me of his sincerity, and I told him so.⁴⁵⁷

When Mountbatten met Azad and told him about Gandhi's proposal, the latter endorsed the idea. However, Nehru and Sardar Patel were very much opposed to Gandhi's proposal as being impractical and ultimately the Congress Working Committee rejected the idea. Gandhi

⁴⁵⁴ Record of Interview between Mountbatten and Gandhi, 1 April, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1981), 69.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

wrote a letter to Mountbatten expressing his failure to persuade the Working Committee to accept his plan.⁴⁵⁸

In his meetings with the League leaders, Mountbatten came to know the deep resentment they held towards the Congress. For example, on 3 April, Liaquat Ali Khan met the Viceroy and said: 'Since my dealings with the Congress Members of the Interim Government, I have come to realize that they are utterly impossible people to work with, since there is no spirit of compromise and fair play in them, and the majority are thinking only of ways and means by which they can do down the Muslim League and improve their own position.'⁴⁵⁹ Jinnah, in his discussions with Mountbatten, stood firm as a rock on the demand for partition.⁴⁶⁰ In his third personal report to London, filed on 17 April, Mountbatten wrote:

I have had six meetings during the past week with Jinnah, averaging between two to three hours each...He has made abundantly clear that the Muslim League will not under any circumstance reconsider the Cabinet Mission Plan, and he is intent on having Pakistan...he said 'you must carry out a surgical operation; cut India and its army firmly in half and give me the half that belongs to the Muslim League'. I told him if I accepted his argument on the need for partition of India, then I could not resist the arguments that Congress were putting forward for the partition of the Punjab and Bengal. He was quite horrified and argued at great length to preserve the unity of Punjab and Bengal...⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁸ Gandhi's letter to Mountbatten: I had several talks with Pandit Nehru, and then with several members of the Congress Working Committee last night. I am sorry to say that I failed to carry any of them with me except Badshah Khan...I felt sorry that I could not convince them of the correctness of my plan from every point of view. Nor could they dislodge me from my position...Thus, I have to ask you to omit me from your consideration.

⁴⁵⁹ Record of Interview between Mountbatten and Liaquat Ali Khan, 3 April, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 102.

⁴⁶⁰ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol.3, 528.

⁴⁶¹ Viceroy's Personal Report No. 3, undated, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 298-299.

Mountbatten's impression of Jinnah in his own words: 'I regard Jinnah as a psychopathic case; in fact until I had met him I would not have thought it possible that a man with such a complete lack of administrative knowledge or sense of responsibility could achieve or hold down so powerful a position.'⁴⁶² On another occasion, when Mountbatten persisted with his argument that if India was divided, by the same logic Punjab and Bengal, too, would have to be divided, Jinnah told him: 'if you persist in chasing me with your ruthless logic we shall get nowhere'.⁴⁶³ Finally, Mountbatten gave him two choices: (1) the Cabinet Mission Plan which gave him all five provinces of Pakistan with complete autonomy within India and only a weak center; and (2) a very moth-eaten Pakistan.⁴⁶⁴ Jinnah replied: 'I do not care how little you give me as long as you give it to me completely'.⁴⁶⁵ These preliminary decisions with the Indian leaders convinced the Viceroy that the deep chasm between the two parties was unbridgeable.⁴⁶⁶ It became quickly apparent to him that there was no alternative to the partition of India. He realized that in the present circumstances the Cabinet Mission Plan was unworkable and the partition of India was inevitable.

Meanwhile, the communal tension in the country was going from bad to worse. Some of the extremists among the Sikhs were demanding their own separate state, to be called Khalistan. The Sikhs made it clear that if Pakistan was forced upon them, then they would fight against it to the last man.⁴⁶⁷ In NWFP, an idea of a separate Pathan state was being mooted.⁴⁶⁸ Taking their

⁴⁶² Viceroy's Personal Report No. 3, undated, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 300.

⁴⁶³ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol.3, 529.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Viceroy's Personal Report No. 3, undated, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 300.

⁴⁶⁶ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 159.

⁴⁶⁷ Viceroy's Personal Report No. 4, undated, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 405.

cue from Jinnah, the local bodies of Muslim League in the United Province and Bombay began to demand the right of self-determination for Muslims in certain pockets of those provinces.⁴⁶⁹ Serious communal outbreaks and incidents of stabbing, arson, and looting were occurring at various parts of the country. In the face of progressively deteriorating situation in the country, Lord Mountbatten felt that if the procedure for the transfer of power was not finalized quickly, then there was a possibility that at least in some parts of the country there would be no authority to which power could be transferred.⁴⁷⁰

By the end of April 1947, Nehru and Patel had become reconciled to the idea of partition.

Nehru wrote a letter to Mountbatten on 1 May in which he said:

In regard to the proposals which, I presume, Lord Ismay is carrying with him to London, our committee are prepared to accept the principle of partition based on self-determination as applied to definitely ascertained areas. This involves the partition of Bengal and Punjab. As you know, we are passionately attached to the idea of a United India, but we have accepted the partition of India in order to avoid conflict and compulsion. In order to give effect to this partition every effort should be made to meet the wishes and the interests of the people affected by it.⁴⁷¹

However, Gandhi had not yet accepted the idea of partition by then. During his meeting with Mountbatten on 4 May, he forcefully opposed the partition of India. He was of the view that if partition must take place, then it should happen only after the British left India. He did not agree with Mountbatten that the idea of partition was according to the wishes of the people of India.⁴⁷² He said that the British were practically imposing partition on the people of India.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁸ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 356.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 357.

⁴⁷¹ Letter from Nehru to Mountbatten, 1 May, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 519.

⁴⁷² Record of interview between Mountbatten and Gandhi, 4 May, 1947, in Ibid, 611.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

When Mountbatten asked for an alternative, Gandhi again mentioned his original plan, which was to invite Jinnah to form a government and let him choose his cabinet and if he refused, then extend the same offer to the Congress. He also suggested that India should be given Dominion Status immediately and Mountbatten should continue as the Governor General until June 1948.⁴⁷⁴ Gandhi followed up by writing a letter to the Viceroy on 8 May reiterating what he had said on 4 May. Some of the important points from his letter are as follows:

Whatever may be said to the contrary, it would be a blunder of first magnitude for the British to be party in any way whatsoever to the division of India. If it has to come, let it come after the British withdrawal, as a result of understanding between the parties or an armed conflict which according to Qaid-e-Azam is taboo. Protection of minorities can be guaranteed by establishing a court of arbitration in the event of difference of opinion among the contending parties...I feel sure that partition of Punjab and Bengal is wrong in every case and a needless irritant for the League. This as well as all innovations can come after the British withdrawal not before...⁴⁷⁵

In that letter, Gandhi argued that the British Paramountcy as regards to the Princes of the States should pass to the Central Government when the British left India. He said the following:

The intransmissibility of Paramountcy is a vicious doctrine, if it means that they can become sovereign and a menace for independent India. All the power wherever exercised by the British in India must automatically descend to the successor. Thus the people of the States become as much part of independent India as the people of British India. The present Princes are puppets created or tolerated for the upkeep and prestige of the British power. The unchecked powers exercised by them over their people are probably the worst blot on the British Crown...⁴⁷⁶

However, Gandhi's efforts were in vain. The decision regarding partition had been taken and approved in principle by the Congress Working Committee on 1 May. In that meeting, Gandhi was present and found to his utter disappointment that no one except Khan Abdul

⁴⁷⁴ Record of interview between Mountbatten and Gandhi, 4 May, 1947, in *Ibid*, 611.

⁴⁷⁵ Letter from Gandhi to Mountbatten, 8 May, 1947 in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 667.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 668.

Ghaffar Khan supported his point of view. Gandhi's influence in the Congress had declined substantially. It was no longer what it had been in the 1920s and the 1930s. While he continued to be revered by the Indian masses, his influence within the Congress Working Committee had dwindled in the last few years.⁴⁷⁷ The leadership inside the Working Committee had slipped from his hands into his political disciples, Nehru and Patel.⁴⁷⁸

Although Mountbatten's mandate from London was to first try his best to preserve the unity of India, within a few days of his arrival in India, during which he met with several Indian leaders, he came to realize the impossibility of the task. As early as 31 March, he was ready with a tentative partition plan, which became ready by the end of April. The main features of the Partition Plan which Mountbatten presented at his sixth staff meeting on 31 March are:

1. The essence of the plan would be a form of partition with a Central authority for reserved subjects; this to be an experimental arrangement and to come into being in the near future.
2. The three units which would be the result of this Partition would be:
 - a) Hindustan, to include predominantly Hindu provinces.
 - b) Pakistan, to include predominantly Muslim provinces.
 - c) The States.
3. Each of these units would be offered a form of Dominion status. In the case of the States, the larger would be offered this status by themselves; the smaller would have to combine into units of suitable size.
4. In view of the grant of Pakistan, and on the same principles which justified that grant, there would be partition of the Punjab and Bengal.
5. The plan would be brought into force in about May 1947, and would run experimentally until June 1948.

⁴⁷⁷ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, 535.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

6. The Central authority, which might be called 'Central Government', would deal only with the reserved subjects of Defense, foreign Affairs, Communications, Food, and Finance to cover these.
7. The Central Authority, as well as the Hindustan Government, would be situated in Delhi.
8. Each of the reserved subjects would be dealt with by a Council or Board, containing representatives from Hindustan, Pakistan, and the States.
9. The Viceroy would continue to have the right of veto on these reserved subjects.
10. About three months before June 1948, a decision would be made as to whether or not the Central authority would remain in being after that date.⁴⁷⁹

In a report sent to London on 17 April, Mountbatten underlined the gravity of the political situation in India and the urgent need for the British to make a decision soon one way or the other. Mountbatten applied himself to the finalization of the Partition Plan and it was ready by the end of April. Nehru and Jinnah were shown the Partition Plan and they did not have any major objections to the general tenor of the plan except the usual noise typical of Indian politicians. Lord Ismay, Viceroy's Chief of Staff carried the plan to London on 2 May. Meanwhile, Lord Listowel had succeeded Lord Pethick-Lawrence as Secretary of State.

The Viceroy took a short vacation at Simla and Nehru also went there as a guest of Mountbatten. On 10 May, Mountbatten received a telegram from London which included the text of the revised plan for transfer of power. The India Committee and the British Cabinet had made several modifications to Mountbatten's original plan for partition. The very same night, Mountbatten gave Nehru a copy of the revised draft and asked him to read it and give his honest opinion 'as a friend' regarding the likelihood of its acceptance by the two parties. Nehru was very upset after reading the revised plan and wasted no time in communicating to the Viceroy his

⁴⁷⁹ Minutes of Viceroy's sixth staff meeting, 31 March, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 49-50.

strong objections to the plan being proposed. Nehru saw in the document a blueprint for the balkanization of India into endless units. He put the following in his letter to Mountbatten:

I read the draft proposals you gave me with the care they deserved and with every desire to absorb them and accept them in so far as I could. But with all the goodwill in the world I reacted to them very strongly. Indeed they produced a devastating effect upon me. The relatively simple proposals that we had discussed now appeared, in the grab that H.M.G. had provided for them, in an entirely new context which gave them an ominous meaning. The whole approach was completely different from what ours had been and the picture of India that emerged frightened me. In fact much that we had done so far was undermined and the Cabinet Mission's scheme and subsequent developments were set aside, and an entirely new picture presented – a picture of fragmentation and conflict and disorder, and, unhappily also, of a worsening of relations between India and Britain...⁴⁸⁰

The most worrisome part of the revised plan for Nehru was the provision that each of the successor States could conclude independent treaties with His Majesty's Government. Nehru thought that it would create many "Ulsters" in India and they would be looked upon as British bases on Indian soil possibly having British garrisons.⁴⁸¹ It looked like a direct invitation, at least to the major States, to remain as independent kingdoms, presumably as allies or feudatories of Britain.⁴⁸² Nehru said that the Congress had agreed to the partition of the country, with Muslim majority provinces going into Pakistan, but not to a balkanization of rest of the country. Nehru's bombshell had a significant effect on Mountbatten. The whole plan was now revised in consultation with Nehru and V.P. Menon, the Constitutional Advisor to the Viceroy.

Menon played a key role in the formulation of the new Plan. In fact, he had outlined the Plan even before the arrival of Mountbatten in India, with close consultation with Sardar Patel.

⁴⁸⁰ Letter from Nehru to Mountbatten, 11 May, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 756.

⁴⁸¹ Note by Pandit Nehru, 11 May, 1947, in *Ibid*, 768.

⁴⁸² *Ibid*.

The new Plan was not radically different from the Mountbatten Plan. The most important difference was the provision for immediate transfer of power to the Governments of both India and Pakistan on the basis of Dominion Status.⁴⁸³ In Mountbatten's Plan, power was to be transferred to two or three or even more sovereign independent states.⁴⁸⁴ This would have delayed the transfer of power until the Constituent Assembly of each state framed a constitution. Under his Plan, Menon argued, power could be immediately transferred to the two central Governments once they accepted the Dominion Status.⁴⁸⁵ Menon added that by staying within the Commonwealth as Dominions, the two states would enjoy all the perks that came with that status.

Mountbatten communicated the new Plan to London. Prime Minister Attlee invited him to London for personal consultations. Before he left for London, Mountbatten met with Nehru, Jinnah, and Baldev Singh to secure their written acceptance of the Plan. Baldev Singh accepted the Plan on behalf of the Sikhs and Nehru on behalf of the Congress, on condition that the League accepted the Plan as a final settlement. Jinnah was prepared to accept the general principles inherent in the plan, but refused to give his acceptance in writing. He continued to voice his opposition to the partition of Bengal and Punjab envisioned in the Plan.⁴⁸⁶ If Bengal was indeed partitioned, he wanted Calcutta to be made a free port.⁴⁸⁷ Similarly, if Punjab had to be partitioned, he demanded that the matter be decided by a referendum.⁴⁸⁸ He also demanded a

⁴⁸³ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, vol. 3, 552.

⁴⁸⁴ Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 199.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 200.

⁴⁸⁶ Remarks by Mr. Jinnah on Pakistan made in an interview with Reuters, 21 May, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 929.

⁴⁸⁷ Prasad, *Pathway to India's Partition: The March to Pakistan, 1937-1947*, 554.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

corridor through Hindustan to connect the two parts of Pakistan in the North-West and the North-East.⁴⁸⁹ These demands were vehemently opposed by the Congress.

The Viceroy left for London on 18 May. The Plan was finally approved by the British Cabinet by the end of May. The Menon-Mountbatten Plan was presented by the Viceroy to the Indian leaders at the historic conference held on 2 June in Delhi.⁴⁹⁰ Nehru, Patel, and J. B. Kripalani accepted the Plan on behalf of the Congress and Baldev Singh accepted the Plan for the Sikhs. On 3 June, Jinnah conveyed his approval of the Plan by just a nod of his head. Attlee announced the Plan in the House of Commons on 3 June, and hence the Plan came to be known as ‘the June 3rd Plan’. During a Press Conference on 4 June, Mountbatten gave the first informal indication that 15 August would be the likely date for the actual transfer of power to the two new Dominions.⁴⁹¹ According to Hodson, the 15 August date suddenly appeared as if by accident.⁴⁹² Once mentioned that date seemed to take root and was never questioned.⁴⁹³ Mountbatten believed that the greatest possible speed was needed in order to avoid risk of further riots and bloodshed. Menon writes in *The Transfer of Power in India* that the problem of holding together the Interim Government ‘was one of the considerations that prompted Lord Mountbatten to press for the transfer of power earlier than the stipulated period.’⁴⁹⁴

The June 3rd Plan, outlined province by province, how the question of the partition would be settled. For Bengal and Punjab, the Plan suggested the following procedure:

⁴⁸⁹ Remarks by Mr. Jinnah on Pakistan made in an interview with Reuters, 21 May, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Formulation of a Plan, 22 March – 30 May 1947*, vol. 10, 929.

⁴⁹⁰ Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 202.

⁴⁹¹ Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 109.

⁴⁹² Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain – India – Pakistan*, 319.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, 319-320.

⁴⁹⁴ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 396.

The Provincial Legislative Assemblies of Bengal and the Punjab will each be asked to meet in two parts, one representing the Muslim majority districts and the other the rest of the Province. The members of the two parts of each Legislative Assembly sitting separately will be empowered to vote whether or not the Province should be partitioned. If a simple majority of either part decides in favor of partition, division will take place and arrangements will be made accordingly. As soon as a decision involving partition has been taken by either Province, a Boundary Commission will be set up by the Governor General...It will be instructed to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of the Punjab on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. Similar instructions will be given to the Bengal Boundary Commission.⁴⁹⁵

For the North West Frontier Province, the Plan stipulated that a referendum would be held there to decide whether the province would join India or Pakistan.⁴⁹⁶ The procedure pertaining to Sind said: 'The Legislative assembly of Sind will at a special meeting take its own decision as to whether its constitution should be framed by the existing or, a new and separate Constituent Assembly.'⁴⁹⁷ The procedure for Assam was little bit different. Though Assam was predominantly a non-Muslim Province, the district of Sylhet, contiguous to Bengal, was predominantly Muslim. So the Plan outlined that if Bengal decided in favor of partition, then a referendum would be held in Sylhet to decide whether the district wanted to remain in Assam or be part of East Bengal.⁴⁹⁸

The verdict of the border provinces was secured in less than a month, from 20 June to 17 July.⁴⁹⁹ In Bengal, the Provincial Legislative Assembly met on 20 June and decided by a 126 votes to 90 in favor of joining Pakistan.⁵⁰⁰ However, the members from the non-Muslim majority areas of West Bengal met and decided by 58 votes to 21 that the province should be partitioned

⁴⁹⁵ Statement of 3 June 1947, in Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Announcement and Reception of the 3 June Plan, 31 May – 7 July 1947*, vol. 11 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1982), 90-91.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 204.

⁵⁰⁰ Menon, *The Transfer of Power*, 386.

and that West Bengal should join India.⁵⁰¹ The Punjab Legislative Assembly decided by 91 votes to 77 to join Pakistan. However, the non-Muslim majority of the East Punjab decided by 50 votes to 22 that the province should be partitioned and East Punjab should join India.⁵⁰² The Sind Legislative Assembly met on 26 June and decided by 30 votes to 20 to join Pakistan.⁵⁰³ A referendum was held in Sylhet in which majority of voters, 239,619 to 184,041, were in favor of separation and joining East Pakistan.⁵⁰⁴ In the North-West Frontier Province only 50 percent of the electorate voted, of which 289,244 were for Pakistan and 2,874 for India.⁵⁰⁵ In the absence of a legislative assembly in Baluchistan the decision was made by members of Quetta municipality.⁵⁰⁶ Thus in effect East Bengal, West Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province all voted for Pakistan.⁵⁰⁷

Attlee, on 4 July, introduced the India Independence Bill in the House of Commons.⁵⁰⁸

On 1 July, Churchill had raised objections to it being called 'Independence Bill'. He said: 'The

⁵⁰¹ Menon, *The Transfer of Power*, 386.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 204.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 389.

⁵⁰⁸ The main provisions of the India Independence Bill of 1947 may be summarized as follows:

1. Two independent Dominions, known respectively as India and Pakistan shall be set up from 15th August, 1947.
2. The territories of the two Dominions are defined in such terms that Pakistan is to comprise Sindh, Baluchistan, NWFP, West Punjab, and East Bengal (The exact boundaries of the last two would be determined by two Boundary Commissions).
3. For each of the new Dominions, there shall be a Governor-General who shall be appointed by His Majesty.
4. The jurisdiction of the British Parliament over India will cease from August 15th, 1947, and the Legislatures of the two Dominions will be free to pass any laws for their respective Dominions.
5. With effect from 15 August, 1947, H. M. G. will cease to have any responsibility for the government of British India; and all treaties and agreements between H. M. G. and the rulers of Indian States or any authority in tribal areas shall lapse.

essence of the Mountbatten proposals and the only reason why I gave support to them is because they establish the phase of Dominion status. Dominion status is not the same as independence, although it may be freely used to establish independence.⁵⁰⁹ Churchill, to the very end, remained an ardent imperialist at heart. The India Committee decided to retain the title of the Bill as they thought that it would be most acceptable to both Dominions and Indian opinion.⁵¹⁰ The bill was passed within a fortnight on 18 July.

The question as to who should be the first Governor-General of Pakistan was an interesting one. The India Independence Bill advised a common Governor-General for both Dominions. Nehru had already requested Mountbatten to continue as the Governor-General of India until June 1948. However, Jinnah, on 2 July, told Mountbatten that he wanted to become the first Governor-General of Pakistan. Mountbatten pointed out to Jinnah the advantage of having a common Governor-General. He told Jinnah that it was the only practicable means of safeguarding the division of assets, because as the common Governor-General, he would make sure that an equitable distribution of assets took place between the two Dominions. Jinnah refused to budge from his position. In his Personal Report No. 11, Mountbatten wrote about Jinnah, 'He is suffering from megalomania in its worst form for when I pointed out to him that if he went as a Constitutional Governor General his powers would be restricted but as Prime

⁵⁰⁹ Letter from Churchill to Attlee, 1 July, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Announcement and Reception of the 3 June Plan, 31 May – 7 July 1947*, vol. 11, 812.

⁵¹⁰ India and Burma Committee 39th meeting minutes, 2 July, 1947, in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Announcement and Reception of the 3 June Plan, 31 May – 7 July 1947*, vol. 11, 836.

Minister he really could run Pakistan, he made no bones about the fact that the Prime Minister would do what he said.’⁵¹¹

The Boundary Commissions were set up in accordance with the 3 June Plan; one to deal with the partition of Bengal and other to deal with the partition of Punjab. Sir Cyril Radcliffe was appointed the Chairman of both commissions. The two commissions, each consisting of two Hindu and two Muslim judges, failed to arrive at an agreed solution.⁵¹² Hence the Chairman Radcliffe took it upon himself to make the final award. He had very limited time to decide on the boundaries and could only complete his assignment on 9 August, just a few days before the creation of the two Dominions. The whole process was rushed through in the shortest possible time.

For West Bengal, the Congress had claimed fifty-nine percent of total area of Bengal and forty-six percent of the population of the province.⁵¹³ The Radcliffe award gave only thirty-six percent of the area and thirty-five percent of the population to West Bengal.⁵¹⁴ For East Punjab, the Muslim League had demanded not only the three complete divisions of Rawalpindi, Multan, and Lahore, but also a number of tehsils in the Jullundur and Ambala divisions.⁵¹⁵ The Radcliffe award, however, allocated the whole of Jullundur and Ambala divisions, Amritsar district of the Lahore division, and certain tehsils of Gurdaspur and Lahore districts to East Punjab. About thirty-eight percent of the area and forty-five percent of the population were assigned to East Punjab. The Muslim League bitterly resented the loss of those areas from West Punjab. The non-Muslims of the Punjab, especially the Sikhs, were sorely disappointed at the loss of Lahore and

⁵¹¹ Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 11, 4 July, 1947, in *Ibid*, 898-899.

⁵¹² Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 205.

⁵¹³ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 402.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid*, 403.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid*.

the canal colonies of Sheikhpura, Lyallpur and Montgomery.⁵¹⁶ As expected, the Radcliffe award satisfied none of the parties. The Hindus and Muslims both claimed that the award was unjust, arbitrary, and each side claimed that it had been cheated in an act of shameful partiality. Mountbatten rightly assumed that the award would not be satisfactory to either party, so he didn't make the award public until 17 August in order to avoid any last minute troubles getting in the way of Independence Day celebrations in the two countries.

One of the consequences of partition was the division of the Indian Armed Forces. It was decided that the heads of the armed services of the two Dominions should at once be chosen and start setting up their headquarters, so as to be ready to take over command by 15 August.⁵¹⁷ A Joint Defense Council was set up to divide the armed forces. Lord Mountbatten served as its Chairman with Defense Ministers of India and Pakistan, and Commander-in-Chief Auchinleck as its members.⁵¹⁸ Of all the institutions in India, the army was the least communal. The great majority of battalions and regiments were mixed units, containing Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.⁵¹⁹ Of the twenty-three regiments in pre-partition India, only seven consisted exclusively of Hindus, or Muslims, or Sikhs.⁵²⁰ The division of the army along religious lines, which Auchinleck (Commander-in-Chief) had predicted would take between 5 to 10 years, had to be completed in a matter of months.⁵²¹ In the midst of the most appalling killings, which were ripping through North India, and just when a united and neutral army was needed to contain the situation, the regiments of the Indian army were dismembered.⁵²² Soldiers were divided according to religious

⁵¹⁶ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 403.

⁵¹⁷ Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India, 1945-47*, 169.

⁵¹⁸ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 399.

⁵¹⁹ Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India, 1945-47*, 168.

⁵²⁰ Khan, *The Great Partition*, 114.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid.

hue; Muslim soldiers were sent packing from India to Pakistan and non-Muslim soldiers were dispatched in the opposite direction.⁵²³ After 15 August, Auchinleck served as the Supreme Commander in the Joint Defense Council until December 1947, when his post was abolished. The Joint Defense Council continued to serve until 1 April 1948.⁵²⁴

Another big question that remained to be settled before 15 August was the future of the Indian States. Under the India Independence Bill of 1947, Paramountcy was to lapse on 15 August. The States were allowed to either remain independent or join either India or Pakistan. There were roughly 600 States which constituted two-fifths of the land of the country. Approximately, one hundred million people lived in those States. Most of these States were inhabited by Hindus and situated within or adjoining Indian territory.⁵²⁵ The Congress naturally expected most of them to accede to India Union. The matter was complicated by Sir Conrad Corfield, the political advisor to the Viceroy, who began advising the Princes to declare them independent.⁵²⁶ With this encouragement, the rulers of Travancore, Hyderabad, Bhopal and few others signaled their intention to become sovereign States after 15 August.⁵²⁷

The Congress was alarmed at the prospect of the balkanization of India. On 25 June, Nehru's Interim Government created a State Department to deal with the situation.⁵²⁸ Two days later, Sardar Patel was put in charge of the department. Patel appointed V. P. Menon as secretary of the department. Menon evolved a scheme for the integration of the States into the India Union.

⁵²³ Khan, *The Great Partition*, 114.

⁵²⁴ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 399.

⁵²⁵ Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 206.

⁵²⁶ Sen, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, 164.

⁵²⁷ Pandey, *The Break-up of British India*, 206.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

According to that scheme, the rulers were to be asked to accede to India only on three subjects – External Affairs, Defense, and Communications.

On 25 July, Mountbatten called a Conference of rulers and representatives of the States. He exhorted them to accede to India Union because of geographical compulsions and common economic and administrative concerns. He said that under the British rule, the sub-continent had come under one administration.⁵²⁹ Once the British left, that link would be broken.⁵³⁰ If nothing could be put in its place, then chaos would follow and the States would be the first to suffer. He urged the rulers to accede on those three subjects only, which would leave them practically independent.⁵³¹ Lord Mountbatten brought his considerable powers of persuasion to bear upon the Princes.⁵³² Sardar Patel likewise directed his energies to that end. The combined efforts of Mountbatten, Patel, and Menon paid off handsomely. One by one the Princes signed on the dotted line, and the only States that had not acceded to either of the Dominions by Independence Day were Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Kashmir.⁵³³

⁵²⁹ Press Communiqué of an address by Mountbatten to a Conference of Rulers and representatives of Indian States, 25 July, 1947, in Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7: The Mountbatten Viceroyalty, Princes, Partition and Independence, 8 July – 15 August 1947*, vol. 12 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1983), 348.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India, 1945-7*, 236.

⁵³³ Hyderabad's population was predominantly Hindu but the ruler was Nizam, a Muslim. Nizam struggled to maintain the independence of his State. When Mountbatten left in June 1948, Indian forces marched on Hyderabad and Nizam's forces surrendered and the State was brought into India Union. The case in Kashmir was exactly the opposite. It had a Hindu ruler but its population was predominantly Muslim. The Maharaja of Kashmir evaded accession to either Dominion until October 1947, when tribal levies from Pakistan invaded the State. The Maharaja acceded to India and the Indian army recaptured major parts of the State. Junagadh's population was mostly Hindus. The Muslim ruler of the State acceded to Pakistan. The people of the State protested the ruler's decision. The ruler fled to Pakistan and Indian army captured the State in October 1947.

Communal frenzy gripped the people on both sides of the border immediately in the aftermath of partition. The migration of people from east to west and vice versa across the border was unprecedented, the likes of which had never been known before in history.⁵³⁴ There were millions uprooted from their homes under conditions of indescribable horror and misery.⁵³⁵ Many had to flee their homes in fear of their lives. They had witnessed their near and dear ones hacked to pieces in front of their own eyes and their homes looted and destroyed. They had no choice but to seek safety in flight.⁵³⁶ For most of them the future was bleak and uncertain. Durga Das describes, 'Both in India and Pakistan, power-hungry politicians were hatching diabolical plots in their self-interest which involved the disruption of the lives of millions of people on the greatest and most tragic movement of refugees in history'.⁵³⁷ The fact that Mountbatten chose not to make the boundary award public until 17 August, two days after the independence and the partition of India made the situation worse by creating confusion among the people (those in the border regions) as they still did not know which state they belonged to

When the British decided that India should remain united, they didn't rule out other options. British policy towards communalism was ambivalent; it had no clarity.⁵³⁸ Positive intervention was needed to preserve the unity of India, including putting down firmly the forces bent upon dividing the country, which the British chose not to do. They took the easy way out.⁵³⁹ They did not believe that unity could be preserved through force. So, they concentrated most of their efforts in trying to bring the two parties together, a hopeless endeavor as long as Jinnah stood firm on his demand for Pakistan. The British were much more concerned about their

⁵³⁴ Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 418.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Durga Das, *India: From Curzon to Nehru and after* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 1981), 249.

⁵³⁸ Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, 188.

⁵³⁹ Ibid, 191.

appearance of impartiality than trying to keep India united. It was more important for them to look good in the eyes of the world than do the right thing. A serious attempt at keeping India united would have involved identifying with the forces that wanted unity and countering those who opposed it.⁵⁴⁰

In an effort to find the quickest and surest way to transfer power and get out of India, the British were willing to divide the country whether the demand for Pakistan was just or not. Mountbatten defended his decision to advance the date of transfer of power on the grounds that unless he did so, the country would descend into chaos. From the British point of view, a hasty retreat was perhaps the most suitable action, but it proved catastrophic for India. The speed with which power was transferred has been criticized by many historians. Jalal described it as an ignominious scuttle. The 72-day timetable, from 3-June to 15-August, for both transfer of power and division of the country, was to prove disastrous.⁵⁴¹ The abdication of responsibility with such haste was sheer callousness on the part of the British Government. There was a lack of concern as to what would happen if they left precipitously. The massacre that happened in Punjab was the final indictment of Mountbatten.⁵⁴² By delaying to make public the decision of the Boundary Commission, Mountbatten exacerbated an already tense situation. People in both sides of the partition were under the illusion that they were in the right side. When truth was known, pandemonium broke out.

The appointment of Cyril Radcliffe as Chairman of the Boundary Commission was not a wise choice. He was a total stranger to India.⁵⁴³ He was a man of integrity, legal reputation, and

⁵⁴⁰ Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, 191.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid*, 200.

⁵⁴² *Ibid*, 201.

⁵⁴³ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 375.

wide experience. But for him India was an alien land.⁵⁴⁴ He had never visited India before and had no knowledge of its complex sociology, geography of the land, and any of its many languages. He did not have a rudimentary understanding of the social spread, intermix, and the realities of the vast land.⁵⁴⁵ Yet, he was assigned the very complex task of partitioning the land and that within the shortest possible time imaginable. Nehru and Mountbatten were in a hurry to get the transfer of power done as soon as possible. Jaswant Singh writes ‘To them, people did not matter, only speed and power’.⁵⁴⁶

The main failure of the Congress was its inability to devise a successful plan to integrate its strategy of anti-imperialism with a strategy to combat communalism.⁵⁴⁷ Such a combined strategy would have brought complete success i.e. freedom of India with unity. But the Congress devoted little attention to this task in the belief that the communal question could wait or would get resolved in the course of its anti-imperialism struggle.⁵⁴⁸ There was little intellectual effort to combat communalism in order to combat it. The policy of the Congress was that of Gandhi’s i.e. once the British got out of the way, the communal differences would disappear and the Muslim League would cooperate with the Congress in the governance of the country. When the Congress finally realized the seriousness of the problem in 1946 it was too late. The overwhelming success of the Muslim League in the elections and the subsequent disturbances in Calcutta, Noakhali, and Bihar convinced the Congress of the destructive powers of communalism. They started to have doubts about keeping India united in the face of this strident communalism. They realized that no amount of concessions would satisfy Jinnah short of agreeing to his demand for Pakistan. As

⁵⁴⁴ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 375.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 379.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 378.

⁵⁴⁷ Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, 388.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

Sucheta Mahajan writes ‘Assertive communalism marching towards nationhood was hardly likely to be satisfied by concessions such as provincial autonomy and constitutional procedures like grouping’.⁵⁴⁹

The first leader in the Congress camp to jump in the bandwagon of partition was Sardar Patel. He was extremely annoyed and irritated by Jinnah’s constant demand for Pakistan. The confrontationist posture of the League Members in the Interim Government further convinced him that it was impossible for the two parties to work together. He found himself frustrated at every step by the veto put on his proposals by the Finance Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan.⁵⁵⁰ In sheer anger he decided that there was no other alternative but partition.⁵⁵¹ Once Mountbatten realized that Patel was ready to accept partition, he turned his attention to Nehru.⁵⁵² Azad writes ‘within a month of Lord Mountbatten’s arrival in India, Jawaharlal, the firm opponent of partition, had become, if not a supporter, at least acquiescent to the idea.’⁵⁵³ Azad suggests that perhaps Jawaharlal was greatly impressed by Lord Mountbatten, and even greater by the attractive and friendly temperament of Lady Mountbatten.⁵⁵⁴ Leonard Mosley held the similar view that the Viceroy in persuading Nehru had performed the confidence trick of the century.

Nehru and Patel firmly believed that India needed a strong central government in order to modernize the country, and it would be only possible when the Muslim League was out of the way. They were willing to give a few small pieces in the north-west and the north-east to Pakistan in order to have an India with a strong center. So they used the two-nation theory

⁵⁴⁹ Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, 253.

⁵⁵⁰ Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 225.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Ibid, 198.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

propounded by Jinnah against him to cut his dream down to size. Jaswant Singh in his book suggests that Nehru and Patel picked a day to pass the Partition Resolution in the Congress Working Committee when two principal opponents of partition, Gandhi and Azad, were absent. Gandhi was in Bihar in his great healing mission and Azad was away.⁵⁵⁵

In his first meeting with Mountbatten on 1 April, 1947, Gandhi made his startling proposal of letting Jinnah be the Prime Minister and form a Government of United India. Gandhi assumed that his two chief lieutenants in the Congress, Nehru and Patel, would go along with his proposal. But they rejected Gandhi's proposal saying that it was impracticable and would never work. Gandhi thought that by offering the post of Prime Minister to Jinnah, he would forgo his demand for Pakistan. However, Nehru and Patel had different take on the matter. They feared that Jinnah would use his new powers to carve out a Pakistan of his liking. So, they disagreed with their mentor and India lost perhaps the last opportunity to avoid partition. Nehru and Patel hoped that their strategy to push for the partition of Punjab and Bengal would scare Jinnah into giving up his demand for Pakistan when he realized that how moth-eaten and unviable the resulting Pakistan would be. They thought that the new Pakistan would collapse soon and the provinces which seceded from India would be forced to return to India. However, Jinnah remained as relentless as ever in his demand for Pakistan, even if it meant a truncated one.

⁵⁵⁵ Singh, *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, 357.

Conclusion

The case by case study of major events of the decades preceding the partition of India presented in this thesis demonstrates that the causes of partition were varied and complex. It shows that there is no one theory or argument that can fully explain the root cause of India's partition. The discussions presented in preceding chapters make it amply clear that the blame for the partition of India cannot be assigned to any one of the players among the three (the British, the Congress, and the Muslim League) that participated in the drama of India's partition. The study proves that the blame for the division of India has to be shared jointly by the three parties involved. Perhaps, by picking and choosing select events, one could promote a theory or an argument to assign blame for the partition exclusively to one party or the other. This is exactly what most historians writing on the subject have done in the past several decades. The current study takes an objective and non-partisan approach at looking at the issue afresh by examining all the major events in the ten year period prior to the partition to reach its conclusion.

The 1937 elections raised expectations that the Congress and the Muslim League would form coalition governments in the provinces. It presented an excellent opportunity for both the parties to come together and govern the provinces jointly and thereby promote communal amity. Instead, the Congress decided to go it alone and spurned the League's proposal to form coalition governments at the provinces. Success at the elections blinded the Congress leaders to the dangers of pushing aside the League. The Congress overestimated its own strength and underestimated the League's capacity to create trouble. The decision to form single party cabinets was a serious error in judgment on the part of the Congress which directly contributed to alienation of the Muslim leaders, even the moderate leaders who were sympathetic to the nationalist cause.

In Bihar and Bombay, the behavior of the Congress in the selection of leaders belied its claim of being a secular organization. The Congress also blundered in its Muslim Mass Contact Programme in 1937-8. By trying to reach the rank and file Muslim voters over the heads of Muslim politicians, it alarmed the Muslim League into action. The Congress Mass Contact Programme was seen as an attempt to deprive the Muslim politicians of their constituents. Hence, the League and the village ulema joined hands to repulse it. The pro-Hindu policies of the Congress governments jarred on Muslim sensibilities. The Wardha Scheme of education, which glorified Hindu heroes, emphasized Hindi learning, and obliged Muslim students to worship the portrait of Gandhi, and other such measures, was perceived by the Muslims as an attempt by the Congress to convert the Muslim children to Hinduism. The hoisting of the Congress flag over office buildings and the singing of the 'Bande Mataram' song in the legislatures deepened the Muslim suspicion of Congress's real motives.

The period of the Congress ministries saw intense factional strife and bickering within the Congress ranks. There was a scramble for jobs and positions of personal advantage.⁵⁵⁶ Opportunists and self-seekers began to join the Congress drawn by the lure of association with the party in power.⁵⁵⁷ Gandhi repeatedly lashed out in the columns of *Harijan* against the growing misuse of office and creeping corruption in Congress ranks.⁵⁵⁸ Jinnah saw an excellent opportunity in the misrule of the Congress ministries. He set out to create an atmosphere of hatred against the Congress by carrying out intense propaganda. The Muslim League tried its best to fan the flames of Muslim discontent by publicizing the alleged insolent behavior of the Congress ministries. The Pirpur and Sharif Reports, published by the League, charged the

⁵⁵⁶ Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, 339.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

Congress ministries of forcing cow-protection upon Muslims, pushing the use of Hindi over Urdu, interfering with Muslim worship, and efforts to prevent the Muslims from being elected to local bodies. Whether or not these allegations were justified, they played into the Muslim fears of Hindu domination in a Congress raj. Every incident of communal violence was used by the League as a propaganda weapon against the Congress. Perhaps a coalition government would not have eliminated communal riots, but at least it would have saddled the Muslim League with responsibility and prevented it from playing the communal card.

Instead of assuaging the Muslim fears of Hindu domination, Nehru, Prasad and other Congress leaders acted in a completely nonchalant manner. Rajendra Prasad wrote in *India Divided*: 'The so called atrocities have remained mere allegations which have never been tested and put to the proof. They have, nevertheless, been a principal plank of the League's program and utilized for propaganda purposes.'⁵⁵⁹ Nehru dismissed the Muslim League as a small upper class organization with no hold over the Muslim masses. He said he had greater touch with the Muslim masses than the members of the Muslim League. Nehru failed to grasp the strength of Muslim unity when provoked by an outside threat.⁵⁶⁰ The cry of 'Islam in danger' was a uniquely potent force.

Jinnah realized that he had to strengthen the League in order to avoid political extinction. During 1937-39 he set out to follow the lead of Gandhi and create a mass party. His efforts at reorganizing and revitalizing the party paid off handsomely. Within a few months of the Lucknow Session in 1937, 100,000 new members were recruited in the United Provinces alone. Powerful provincial leaders like Fazlul Huq and Sikander Hyat Khan agreed to follow the

⁵⁵⁹ Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1946), 183.

⁵⁶⁰ French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*, 113.

League's policy on all-India questions.⁵⁶¹ This was a significant step towards establishing the League as a 'third force'.⁵⁶²

The outbreak of war in September 1939 rapidly raised the status of Jinnah and the Muslim League. Linlithgow saw the growing rift between the two parties as an effective weapon that the British could use for their advantage. The British wanted India's cooperation in the war without conceding too much in return. They viewed the martial Muslim race as more worthwhile for the war purpose than the party workers and politicians of the Congress. So, Linlithgow encouraged the League as a useful counterweight to the Congress. When Linlithgow declared India's entry into the war without consulting the Indian leaders, the Congress ministries in the provinces resigned en masse in protest. By resigning from power, the Congress committed a serious blunder. Linlithgow could now ignore the Congress as it was no more in power. The Congress lost the power to bargain. The Viceroy now turned to Jinnah for support and encouraged the League to become a rival to the Congress at all-India level. Jinnah thus emboldened passed the Pakistan Resolution at the League's Lahore session in 1940. At this session, Jinnah propounded the two-nation theory and demanded separate homeland for the Muslims of India. Interestingly, Linlithgow did not rush to condemn the Lahore Resolution.⁵⁶³

Looking at the three year period from 1937 to 1940, it is obvious that none of the three players acted in a way that was conducive to promoting cooperation and unity among the Hindus and Muslims. The Congress as the senior partner had greater responsibility towards building a coalition with the League. It should have been more accommodating and sensitive towards the Muslim fears of Hindu domination. Instead it decided to go it alone and followed policies that

⁵⁶¹ Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* 229.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 232.

were perceived by the Muslims as detrimental to their interests. Jinnah, for his part, played the communal card to fan the flames of Muslim discontent. The Pakistan resolution of 1940 was the most explicit demand for Pakistan by the League. The revisionist historians like Ayesha Jalal have tried to discount it by asserting that it was just a mere slogan by Jinnah and the Muslim League to get more power for the Muslims. But it is hard to dismiss a major resolution by the second most important party in India as a mere slogan. The British, for their part, played the game of divide and rule as they had done since their arrival in India. Linlithgow saw advantage in encouraging the separatist tendencies of the Muslim League as a counterpoise to the nationalism of the Congress. He saw the martial Muslims as more valuable to war efforts than the Gandhian pacifists.

The British response to Gandhi's call of 'Quit India' was one of severest repression. All the major leaders of the Congress were arrested and put in jail for a period of three years. By confining the leaders of the Congress for such a long period, the British Government left the field wide open for the League to consolidate its position. The reorganization of the League which had started in 1937 now went ahead with full pace. League's missionaries went from village to village canvassing support for the League and promoting the idea of Pakistan. They promised an economic utopia for the Muslims in the new State. In 1940, the idea of Pakistan was mere rhetoric, but by 1944, it seemed achievable. The death of Sikander Hyat Khan made it possible for the League to consolidate its position in Punjab.

The Cripps Mission was another opportunity that the Congress blew up by its all-or-nothing attitude. Cripps Proposal was a significant step towards granting India its freedom. It promised an expanded executive in which all the members would be Indians except the Viceroy and the War Member. This was almost like a National Government which the Congress had

demanded. It presented another excellent opportunity for the two parties to come together and govern the country jointly. The Congress stuck to its demand that the War Member must be an Indian and rejected the proposal when its demand was not met. The British, in order to appease the Muslim League, put the opt-out provision for the provinces in the Cripps proposal. By allowing the provinces to opt-out of Indian union after a certain number of years, the British conceded the partition of India for the first time. And, this was another reason why the Congress rejected the Cripps formula. Cripps tried sincerely to accommodate the Congress's demand, but his efforts were hindered at every step by hardcore conservatives like Churchill, Amery, and Linlithgow, who really did not want a labor leader to succeed. For them, the Cripps Mission was just a propaganda effort to demonstrate to the world that Britain was sincere in her desire to give India self-governance. The Congress did not believe that Britain and her allies could win the war against Hitler. It wanted to take advantage of Britain's weakening position. So, the failure of the Cripps Mission was due to Congress's intransigence and Churchill government's non-committal approach to it.

As to the failure of Wavell's Simla Conference, the conclusion is clear cut. Jinnah insisted that the League was the sole organization representing all the Muslims of India, and hence, it should have the exclusive right to nominate the Muslim members to the Viceroy's Council. This was anathema to the Congress as it would have meant that the Congress had to forfeit its claim of being a secular party representing all sections of the Indian life. It would have reduced the stature of the Congress to a purely Hindu body. Moreover, the president of the Congress Party, Maulana Azad, was himself a highly reputable Muslim scholar. It was unacceptable to the Congress that it would not be allowed to nominate its president to the Viceroy's Council. However, Jinnah did not budge an inch from his demand. Wavell abruptly

ended the Conference despite the advice he received from his Governors to proceed with his plan without the League because Jinnah would eventually cave in. The failure of Simla Conference enhanced Jinnah's position. By ending the Conference abruptly, Wavell conceded that Jinnah could dictate his own terms and get away with it too. It gave the League an equal status to the Congress.

The end of the war saw a change in Britain's attitude towards India. Britain was no longer interested in retaining India. World opinion had turned decisively against empire building and colonialism. Moreover, India had become a burden on the British Empire. The Labor Government of Clement Attlee was pro-Congress in its outlook. It wanted to transfer power to a united India as soon as possible. Thus the Cabinet Mission came to India in March 1946 and stayed there for three months trying to find an agreement on the basis of which power could be transferred to a united India. The main reason for the failure of the Cabinet Mission was due to the lack of trust between the Congress and the League. Deep suspicion and mutual hatred of each other stood in the way of compromise at every stage of the Cabinet Mission negotiations. It was a clear case of failure of leadership and statesmanship by the leaders of both parties.

The Congress gave too much emphasis on inessential points such as the right to nominate a Muslim to the Interim Government instead of the larger issue of unity of the country. Even when it was offered six seats in the Interim Government as opposed to five for the Muslim League, it rejected the June 16 Statement. The elections held in the winter of 1945-46 had proved beyond doubt that the Muslim League now commanded the support of overwhelming majority of Muslims of India. The Congress's demand to nominate a Muslim member to the Interim Government was unjustifiable at this point. During the Simla Conference of 1945, the Congress had put forward a similar demand and it was legitimate at that time. The success of the League

among the Muslim electorate in 1946 changed the equation. It could now legitimately claim being the sole representative of the Muslims of India.

Jinnah had compromised on his Pakistan demand by accepting the grouping scheme in the Cabinet Mission Plan. However, the Congress rejected it objecting to the compulsion clause in it which forced the provinces to remain within their respective groups. The Congress feared that if the two groups, one in the north-west and the other in the north-east, decided to secede from India into a new State of Pakistan, then the entire Punjab in the north-west and whole of Assam and Bengal in the north-east would be forced into Pakistan. So the Congress never accepted the May 16 Statement unequivocally. Nehru's press statement on 10 July, 1946 exacerbated the whole situation. It made Jinnah more suspicious of Congress's real intentions i.e. the Congress could do whatever it wanted once the British left India.

The Congress's real objective was to establish a strong center with its own legislature and power to raise revenues. In contrast, Jinnah wanted a very weak center with no power to impose taxes and most powers devolved to the provinces. Basically, Jinnah wanted a center with no teeth. In his presidential address to the League on 6 June, 1946 Jinnah said that Muslim India would not rest content until it had established a full, complete and sovereign Pakistan. Jinnah saw the Cabinet Mission Plan as a stepping stone for achieving his dream of Pakistan. The Congress was deeply suspicious of Jinnah's real motives in insisting the compulsion in the grouping scheme. Jinnah too never trusted the Congress that it would fair play once the British quit India. In the end, the Cabinet Mission failed because of the deep distrust and mutual suspicion that existed between the two parties. The leaders of the two parties failed to rise to the occasion and take the last opportunity to keep India united.

Jinnah had expected that since the League had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan in its entirety and the Congress had not done so, the Viceroy would invite him to form the Interim Government. However, the Labor Government decided that since the Congress had not rejected the plan totally, both the parties should jointly form the Interim Government. Jinnah rejected the offer and Wavell invited Nehru to form the Government. Jinnah was very upset over the whole affair. When he called for 'Direct Action' in retaliation, he had no idea that it would lead to so much violence resulting in so many deaths and destructions. The Congress took office in September of 1946 and soon after the League decided to come in. The League joined the Interim Government with the sole purpose of obstructing it in every possible way from functioning. Instead of working together to govern the country, the members from the two parties started wrangling with each other. Thus yet another opportunity was lost at preserving the unity of the country.

Within a few weeks of his arrival in India, Mountbatten realized that there was little chance of bringing the two parties together. The ill-feeling and distrust between them had reached its fever pitch. The communal situation in Punjab and elsewhere in the country was rapidly deteriorating and was reaching a point where an outbreak of civil war looked like a real possibility. The British did not want to transfer power to the Congress in order to keep their appearance of impartiality. In order to transfer power the quickest and surest way, they were willing to divide the country. Mountbatten justified his decision to partition the country in the shortest possible time imaginable by saying that unless he did that, the country was likely to descend into chaos. The 72-day timetable from 3 June to 15 August for carrying out the transfer of power and partition of a country of India's size and with a population of 400 million proved disastrous. Wolpert has argued that Mountbatten was in a hurry to get back to his naval career in

London and hence rushed the partition through without adequate planning and preparation. Wolpert's argument is questionable given the fact that Mountbatten stayed in India as Governor-General for one more year after the partition. If he was in such a hurry to get back to London to resume his naval career, he would not have continued as the Governor-General for another year. The reason why Mountbatten rushed the partition was because he believed that unless he did so the situation in the country would soon develop into a full-scale civil war between the two warring communities.

The failure of the Congress to prevent partition stemmed from its inability to understand the threat and danger of communal forces. It devoted little attention to develop a strategy to combat the communal forces. The Congress leaders, including Gandhi, believed that the communal rift between the Hindus and the Muslims was a direct result of British presence in India. Once the British quit India, the communal differences would disappear on its own accord. When they finally realized the destructive power of communalism in 1946, it was too late. By that time, Jinnah was in no mood for compromise. The Congress slowly came to realization that no amount of concessions would satisfy Jinnah except the partition of the country. The first Congress leader to jump in the bandwagon of partition was Sardar Patel. Nehru was reluctant to the idea of partition. But Mountbatten was able to change his mind. Leonard Mosley said that by persuading Nehru to accept partition, Mountbatten had performed the confidence trick of the century. Mosley has also argued that a little more patience and a refusal to rush into partition could have prevented partition as Pakistan was one-man achievement of Jinnah, and Jinnah was dead within a year of Pakistan's foundation.⁵⁶⁴ Moseley is mostly right. However, I disagree with such assessments that hold Jinnah or Mountbatten or the Congress solely responsible for the

⁵⁶⁴ Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj*, 247.

partition of India. As I have argued in this thesis, the partition of India was the product-mix of actions taken by the three parties involved – the British, the Congress, and Jinnah - over a long period of time.

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