

Lecture-39



Partition of India

The end of the Raj

When Britain took India into the war without consultation in 1939, Congress opposed it; large nationalist protests ensued, culminating in the 1942 Quit India movement, a mass movement against British rule. For their part in it, Gandhi and Nehru and thousands of Congress workers were imprisoned until 1945.

Meanwhile, the British wartime need for local allies gave the Muslim League an opening to offer its cooperation in exchange for future political safeguards. In March 1940, the Muslim League's "Pakistan" resolution called for the creation of "separate states" – plural, not singular – to accommodate Indian Muslims, whom it argued were a separate "nation".

Historians are still divided on whether this rather vague demand was purely a bargaining counter or a firm objective. But while it may have been intended to solve the minority issue, it ended up aggravating it instead.

After the war, Attlee's Labour government in London recognised that Britain's devastated economy could not cope with the cost of the over-extended empire. A Cabinet Mission was dispatched to India in early 1946, and Attlee described its mission in ambitious terms:

An act of parliament proposed June 1948 as the deadline for the transfer of power. But the Mission failed to secure agreement over its proposed constitutional scheme, which recommended a loose federation; the idea was rejected by both Congress and the Muslim League, which vowed to agitate for "Pakistan" by any means possible.

All the while, communal violence was escalating. In August 1946, the Great Calcutta Killing left some 4,000 people dead and a further 100,000 homeless.

By March 1947, a new viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, arrived in Delhi with a mandate to find a speedy way of bringing the British Raj to an end. On June 3, he announced that independence would be brought forward to August that year, presenting politicians with an ultimatum that gave them little alternative but to agree to the creation of two separate states.

Pakistan – its eastern and western wings separated by around 1,700 kilometres of Indian territory – celebrated independence on August 14 that year; India did so the following day. The new borders, which split the key provinces of the Punjab and Bengal in two, were officially approved on August 17. They had been drawn up by a Boundary Commission, led by British lawyer Cyril Radcliffe, who later admitted that he had relied on out-of-date maps and census materials.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTION:

1. Who presented the two-nation theory?

Muhammad Ali Jinnah
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan
Mahatma Gandhi
Jawaharlal Nehru

2. Who was the main spokesman of the partition?

Muhammad Ali Jinnah
Jawaharlal Nehru
Lord Mountbatten

3. When was the Lucknow Pact?

A.D.1914
A.D.1915
A.D.1913
A.D.1916

4. Which government played a significant role in the formation of Muslim League?

Dutch govt.
Indian govt.
English govt.

5. Who was the second cousin of Lord Mountbatten?

George VI
George V
George IV