

## Partition: Causes and Effects

### Background:

After the failure of Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the East India Company, the rule of the company was transferred to Queen Victoria. The British Queen took control of India in 1858. As a result, India became British India, till 1947; that is, till India won its independence. Although the British brought out reforms in the social life e.g. the abolition of sati tradition, the insensitivity of the British towards the Indians and their strict laws made the life of the Indians miserable. As a result, several nationalist movements like - Swadeshi Movement, Boycott Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, etc. led by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, etc. emerged in Indian subcontinent to win freedom for India from the British rule. These movements created strong feelings of nationalism among the Indians. On September 28, 1885, the Indian National Congress was founded. The INC initiated nationalist movements in British India. The party later became the most powerful political party in the Indian subcontinent.

In 1905, Lord Curzon, the then viceroy of India, partitioned Bengal into Muslim and Hindu provinces to weaken the Nationalist movements. This caused outrage in not only Bengal but in Bihar, Orissa, Assam and West Bengal. The Hindu protests against the partition of Bengal gave birth to All India Muslim League in 1906. The league which supported the Bengal partition because it gave them Muslim majority in Eastern part of India.

Due to communal violence, the British raj took back their decision to partition Bengal and shifted the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. In 1916, in the Lucknow session of the Congress, Muslim League joined hands with the Indian National Congress on a condition of separate electorates for Muslims in the provincial legislatures. Though many Muslims did not support the condition, it received strong support from young Muhammad Ali Jinnah who later became the leader of the All India Muslim League.

In 1915, Mahatma Gandhi entered the Indian freedom struggle, with the principles of non-violence (*Ahimsa*) and truth (*Satyagrah*). However, inhuman massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 by General Dyer became the urgent need for the end of British rule in India. Gandhiji vigorously continued his nonviolent movements .

In 1921, in the annual session of Lahore, the Indian National Congress under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru, demanded complete independence (*Poorn Swaraj*). In 1937, the party won the election with majority while the Muslim League won less seats.

These two major political parties - Indian National Congress and Muslim League demanded Independence but their agenda was different. While the Indian National Congress was calling for British to quit India, in 1943 the Muslim League passed a resolution which demanded separate nation for Muslims and the British to quit India.

There were several reasons for the birth of a separate Muslim homeland in the subcontinent, and all three parties — the British, the Congress, and the Muslim League — were responsible. The reasons are as follows:

## **Causes:**

### **1. The Divide and Rule Policy of the British:**

As colonisers, the British followed a divide and rule policy in India as well. In the census, they categorised people according to religion. They viewed and treated the Indians as separate from each other. Instead of seeing how people of different religions live together, the British differentiated the people of India on the basis of religion. The English wanted to create division among the people in India in order to strengthen their own position. Moreover, the British were fearful of the potential threat from the Muslims who were the former rulers of the subcontinent.

Even before the 1940s, the Indian National Congress had argued for a unitary state with a strong centre. Congress was apparently secular in its objectives, however, organisations which represented minority interests doubted this idea. The Muslims were the British India's largest minority and therefore the British took an opportunity to embrace the Muslims, the minority group (20% of the population) using their 'divide and rule' policy. In order to win them over to their side, the British helped the Muslims to establish the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh and supported the All – India Muslim Conference. These are the institutions from which emerged the leaders of Muslim League and the ideology of Pakistan. As soon as the league was formed, the British placed the Muslims on a separate electorate. M. A. Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League proposed two nation theory which demanded the formation of a separate nation for the Indian Muslims.

### **2. Demand for Separate Nation for the Indian Muslims**

There was an ideological divide between the Muslims and the Hindus of India. Though there was a strong feeling of nationalism in India, by the end of nineteenth century, there were communal conflicts between the Muslims and the Hindus. The reason was purely based on religious identities. The Hindu revivalists resented the Muslims for their former rule over India. They demanded ban on the slaughter of cows. They also demanded the change in the official script from Persian to Devnagari. Due to these reasons, the Muslim league

believed that after independence from the British raj, their interest would be completely suppressed. Hence, they strongly felt that they must have separate nation for themselves. The Indian National Congress and its leaders – Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Mahatma Gandhi, etc, strongly advocated nationalist activities. Even before 1940s the INC had demanded for a unitary state with a strong centre. However, the minority groups feared the dominance of Hindus (80%) in the Centre.

When Britain took India into the World War II without consultation in 1939, Congress opposed it. The Congress refused to support the British during the War because the British refused to grant independence to India immediately after the War. As a result, the Congress began the Quit India Movement (1942), a mass movement against British rule. For their part in it, Gandhi and Nehru and thousands of Congress workers were imprisoned until 1945. The British imprisoned almost all prominent Congress leaders and this situation benefitted the Muslim League to gain support of the Muslims. Meanwhile, the British's need for local allies gave the Muslim League an opening to offer its cooperation in exchange for future political safeguards. The Muslim League gave full support to the British as Jinnah wanted to exploit this situation to intensify his struggle with the National Congress and to achieve his goal. 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".

### **3. The Two Nation Theory:**

In 1940 Lahore Conference, Jinnah reiterated that the differences between Hindu and Muslim were so great that their union under one central government was full of risks. He meant that Hindi and Muslims belonged to two different religions, philosophies, social customs and literatures. Moreover, they belonged to two different civilizations. According to Jinnah, since the two communities had nothing in common, they must get separated as two nations. From 1940, the Muslim League strongly proposed this stand of 'two nation theory' till the British announced the partition. The violence erupted between these two major religions, further gave a reason to Jinnah for the demand of two nations – India and Pakistan.

### **4. Britain's Economic Problems to cope up with the Extended Empire:**

After the World War II, Attlee's Labour government in London realized that Britain's devastated economy could not cope with the cost of the over-extended empire. Hence, a Cabinet Mission was dispatched to India in early 1946 to talk about the transfer of power to the Indian leadership and maintain the unity in the Indian subcontinent. On arriving in India, the mission found that both the parties – the Indian National Congress and Muslim League were unwilling to reach a settlement because they had performed well in the elections and

emerged as the two main parties in the Indian subcontinent. Due to separate electorates the Muslim League had been victorious in around 90% of the seats for Muslims. After achieving victory in the elections Jinnah gained confidence to bargain with the British and Congress. The mission then proposed a loose federation for India with three tiers – the provinces, the provincial groupings and the centre. Both the parties rejected this proposal as the proposal was ineffective enough to bind the country as a whole. The intention of the proposal was to solve the minority issue' however, it ended up aggravating it instead. However, there was still hope for an undivided India.

### **5. Impact of “direct Action Day”:**

Realising the diminishing power of the British in India and considering the impact of communal tensions, the British appointed Jawaharlal Nehru as an Interim Prime Minister. Side-lined by the British, Jinnah appealed his supporters for nation-wide ‘Direct Action Day’ which is also called as ‘Calcutta Killings’ to demonstrate for separate Pakistan on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1946. But the demonstration triggered massive violence - rapes, abductions, riots, massacres between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. Thousands of people lost their lives and became homeless in Calcutta within 72 hours. This violence sparked further religious riots in Bihar, UP, and North-Western Frontier province (along Afganistan- Pakistan border). This event sowed the seeds of partition of Indian subcontinent into two nations on religious grounds. On seeing the worst situation, Viceroy Wavell drew a breakdown plan that suggested a gradual exit of the British.

In fact, an Act of Parliament had proposed June 1948 as the deadline for the transfer of power. However, after Calcutta Killings the situation went so out of control that a new viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten who arrived in Delhi in March 1947 ordered a speedy way for the end of British Raj. On June 3, Mountbatten announced that independence would be brought forward to August 1947. The declaration of moving forward the date left no alternative before the two parties but to agree to the creation of two separate states.

### **6. Congress's Policy of Appeasement:**

The policy of Appeasement of the Muslims, adopted by the congress was one of the reasons for India’s partition. In 1940 Jinnah proclaimed separate Pakistan. The Leagues increasing popularity forced the Congress to have a talk with Jinnah. It was an attempt to regain support from the Muslims. However, the congress did not try to understand aggressive policy of Jinnah when he demanded separate Pakistan. The congress continued to sustain a false hope that there might be some miracle by which the communal problem could be controlled forever.

Moreover, various leaders of India opined that from political, economic, geographical

and military points of view, Pakistan would prove to be a weak nation instead of being a stable one. Due to its own shortcomings, Pakistan could again be incorporated into India. In fact, the unwanted optimism of the Indian leaders also contributed to the making of Pakistan.

### **7. Formation of Hindu Mahasabha:**

After the formation of the Muslim League in 1906, the staunch Hindus formed an organisation- Hindu Mahasabha to protect the rights of the Hindus. As a result of the Hindu communalism, the Muslim communalism grew all the more powerful and they strongly raised the slogan of a separate nation.

### **Effects of Partition:**

The triumph of a long-awaited political transfer of power was accompanied by the tragedy of Partition. The division of the country which led to an unprecedented mass migration and barbaric violence has been a horrendous chapter in South Asian history.

#### **1. Birth of India and Pakistan As Separate Nations:**

The independence of India in August 1947 had some consequences. The British left India. They ended nearly 350 years of their British raj in India. However, while leaving they partitioned India as - Hindu dominated India and Muslim dominated Pakistan. August 14, 1947 saw the birth of the new Islamic Republic of Pakistan while August 15, 1947 witnessed the birth of India. The British secured agreement of both the Congress and Muslim League over how the independence would take place. At that time few people understood the demands of the partition or what its results would be. The migration that followed on the enormous scale surprised vast majority of people. The result of this division was disastrous. It created disharmony among the people by defining communities based on religious identities.

#### **2. Greatest Migration in the Human History:**

In the human history, the Partition caused one of the greatest migrations wherein Muslims moved to newly formulated Pakistan while the Hindus and Sikhs moved to India. According to records, more than 15 million people were uprooted and nearly 2 million were massacred in the massive communal violence. Thus, Partition was not only a division of political territory but a division of the people as they were separated from their homes, livelihood, family and friends. The harrowing and spine-chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the people in the innate human beings.

#### **3. Riots, Mass Casualties, and Absence of law and Order**

The partition of India left both India and Pakistan devastated as both the governments did not imagine the migration on large scale. Secondly the date of independence was declared prior to the actual date of the partition. Hence there was complete break down of law and

order on both sides. As a result, the process of partition claimed many lives in riots, rapes, murders, and looting. Women, especially, were used as instruments of power by the Hindus, Sikhs and the Muslims to dishonour one another. Millions of refugees moved across the borders to regions completely foreign to them because their religious identities did not allow them to live in their ancestral homes or with the hope that they would be in a safer territory. In addition, the Redcliff line weirdly divided Punjab and Bengal which caused disastrous riots and claimed the lives of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike.

Muslims headed towards Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs in the direction of India. As many as 14-16m people may have been eventually displaced, travelling on foot, in bullock carts and by train. The migration was not safe though. It is documented that nearly 200,000 to two million were killed while migrating. Many were killed by members of other communities and sometimes their own families, as well as by the contagious diseases which swept through refugee camps. Women were often targeted as symbols of community honour. According to official records up to 100,000 women were raped or abducted. Britain was reluctant to use its troops to maintain law and order. The situation was especially dangerous in Punjab, where weapons and demobilised soldiers were abundant.

#### **4. Problem of Accommodation and Rehabilitation:**

The League ostensibly created Pakistan as a “homeland” for India’s Muslim minority. However, not all Muslims even supported its formation. They did not migrate to Pakistan. Muslims remained the largest minority group in independent India, making up around 10% of the population in 1951. Both states subsequently faced huge problems accommodating and rehabilitating post-Partition refugees, whose numbers swelled when the two states argued over the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947-8. The influx of refugees was great in Delhi that a new city – Faridabad had to be built to rehabilitate the refugees who were living in an appalling condition in refugee camps.

#### **5. Partition of Punjab And Bengal:**

Mostly Western part of Punjab having Muslim became the part of Pakistan while the Eastern part of Punjab where the Hindus and Sikhs were in majority went to India. Punjab witnessed the worst communal violence for which both the newly formed governments were unprepared and unequipped.

As per Redcliff line, the Bengal province was divided into two separate entities. The West Bengal was awarded to India while the East Bengal was awarded to Pakistan. Two Muslim majority districts were given to India while two Hindu majority provinces were given to Pakistan. The Hindus of the East Bengal threatened by the attacks migrated to Calcutta and The Muslims from East Bengal fled to Pakistan.

## **7. Impact on Agriculture, Economy, Industry, etc.**

Both the nations suffered the shortage of food grain. India's agriculture suffered because the Sindh and West Punjab the richly irrigated area went to Pakistan.

The partition affected the industries in many ways. It disturbed the interdependent relationship between India and Pakistan as before partition the Indian part was the manufacturer of the goods and Pakistan was supplier of the raw material. Moreover the migration of Muslim artisans affected the glass or metal work in Punjab, UP, Rajasthan, etc.

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