



## 1946 AND PARTITION OF INDIA

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Lord Muntbatton's formula was to divide India but retain maximum unity<sup>1</sup>. The country would be partitioned in such a way that the limited Pakistan that emerged would meet the goals of both the congress and the league to some extent. The League's goal of Pakistan would be conceded to the extent that it would be created and the congress goal of unity would be taken into account to make Pakistan as small as possible. The princely states would be free to be independent or join India or Pakistan. In such a situation in which Nehru and Patel accepted the proposal for partition, Gandhi came back to Delhi from the riot-hit areas of Bihar and in answer of Maulana Azad's question about the acceptance of the partition by the congress said:

"if the congress wishes to accepts partition, it will be over my dead body. So long as I am alive, I will never agree to the partition of India. Now will I, If I can help it, allow the congress to accept it."

Gandhi tried hard with the support of Maulana Azad to avoid the itended partition. He discussed the matter with the congress leaders and Lord Mountbatten a number of times without success. Gandhi was bitter and accused his followers of betraying him for the sake of power. he made a final attempt to avoid the partition by proposing to the viceroy that the Interim Government be dismissed and Jinnah be invited to form Government at the centre by choosing his ministers even if all of them were Muslims. Mountbatten wanted the approval of the CWC, but the CWC rejected the proposal. Gandhi's final attempt to avoid the partition failed. Sardar Patel was of the opinion that Gandhi must bear a part of the blame because it was he who had conceded the right of self-determination to the Muslims and had made a hero of Jinnah expressing his views on the Lahore Resolution, Gandhi had said :

"I know no non-violent method of compelling the obedience of eight crores of Muslims to the will of the rest of India, however powerful a majority the rest may represent. The Muslims must have the same right to self-determination that the rest of India has, we are at present a joint family. Any member may claim a division..... But I do not believe that Muslims, when it comes to a matter of actual decision, will ever want wivisection. Their good sense will precent them. Their self-interest will deter them. Their religion will forbid the obvious suicide which the partition would mean."

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<sup>1</sup> The Idea of India as a nation by Neera Chandhoke, p-51



The Gandhi-Jinnah meeting took place on 9 September at Jinnah's residence in Bombay<sup>2</sup> 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 by day, created new hopes among the public that perhaps, at last, a settlement was around the corner. On 24 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 to 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, Sindh, 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 favour 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."

As riots spread to other cities and the number of casualties escalated, the leaders of the Congress party<sup>3</sup>, who had initially opposed partition, began to see it as the only way to rid themselves of the troublesome Jinnah and his Muslim League. [Indian National Movement by D.C. Gupta, Vikas Publication Delhi, 1970, p-267] The opinion of the Congress leaders was changing fastly. Sardar Patel, who had, addressing a public meeting in Lucknow, once observed :

"The earth may split and the heavens may fall, but India will not be divided" had fallen in line with the partition group<sup>4</sup>. When Lord Mountbatten suggested that partition might offer a solution to the present difficulty, he found Sardar Patel receptive to this. In fact, Sardar Patel was half in favour of partition before Lord Mountbatten appeared on the scene. He was convinced that he could not work with the Muslim League. Again, Azad describes the role of Patel in "India Wins Freedom." : "It would not perhaps be unfair to say that Vallabh Bhai Patel was the founder of Indian Partition." Patel was very amenable to Lord Mountbatten's charm and the power of his personality.

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<sup>2</sup> [I.H. Quershi (1974), struggle for Pakistan, Karachi Press]

<sup>3</sup> [Transfer of power in India by V.P. Menon, 1957, Princeton University Press]

<sup>4</sup> [Crises in the Indian subcontinent partition can it be undone? by Lal Khan, Wellred Publication, 2007, p-69, 70]



Privately Mountbatten always referred to Patel as a walnut- a very hard crust outside but soft pulp once the crust was cracked. Azad continued :

“I was surprised when Patel said whether we liked it or not, there were two nations in India. He was now convinced that Muslims and Hindus could not be united into one nation. It was better to have one clean fight and then separate than have bickering everyday. I was surprised that Patel was now an even greater supporter of the two-nation theory than Jinnah. Jinnah may have raised the flag bearer was Patel.” When Patel was convinced, Lord Mountbatten turned his attention to Nehru. Again according to Azad :

“Jawaharlal was not first ready for the idea and reacted violently against the idea of Partition. Lord Mountbatten persisted till Jawaharlal’s opposition was worn down step by step. Within a month of Mountbatten’s arrival in India, Jawaharlal, the firm opponent of Partition had become, if not a supporter at least acquiescent to the idea. I have wondered how Jawaharlal was won over by Lord Mountbatten. He is a man of principle but he is also impulsive and amenable to personal influences. I think one factor responsible for the change was the personality of Lady [Edwina] Mountbatten. She is not only extremely intelligent but has a most attractive and friendly temperament. She admired her husband very greatly and in many cases tried to interpret his thoughts to those who could not at first agree with him<sup>5</sup>.” Maulana Azad felt,

“Instead of removing communal fears, partition would perpetuate them by creating two states based on communal hatred.” [Statement made by prime Minister Attlee in the house of commons, February 20, 1947, Clause 11] Why Azad favoured a united India reflects his far-sightedness. He visualised that the non-Muslim majority areas in Bengal and Punjab would never agree to be included in Pakistan and, if forcibly included, would revolt and, thus, in the circumstance, Pakistan would be a weak and small country. Therefore, he preferred to live in India along with the nationalist Muslims to tie the congress tongue to charge the Muslims disloyal to the congress Government.

Chiefs of staff on Defence of India and Pakistan

The Prime Minister on February 20, 1947, had also said :

“Although the final transfer of authority may not take place until June, 1948, preparatory measures must be put in hand in advance. It is important that the efficiency of the civil administration should be maintained and that the defence of India should be fully provided for<sup>6</sup>.” considering the defence implications of the partition scheme, the chiefs of staff (India) on April 1, 1947, resolved<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [A.K. Azad, India wins Freedom (Calcutta : orient Longmans, 1959,, p-185]

<sup>6</sup> [I.A. Sherwani (ed.), Pakistan Resolution to Pakistan, 1940-47 (Delhi : Daya publishing House, 1985) p – 220-21]

<sup>7</sup> Annex II to Mountbatten’s “Personal Report” No. 2, April 9, 1947, India office Library, London, L/P.O/433/32 (Mountbatten’s Personal Report)



- (a) We consider that if Pakistan and Hindustan are to have separate defence forces the combined total of these forces must inevitably be greater than that of defence forces designed to serve India as a whole, since the administrative overheads' must be duplicated and there is no flexibility.
- (b) Pakistan covers all the important land frontiers of India and the Army and Air forces required to defend Pakistan from external aggressors are virtually the same as those required to defend India as whole.
- (c) It will be impossible for Pakistan to maintain defence forces of the proper size.