

IN-DEPTH

Partition of India

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A few comments are given below on the article, titled 'Freedom with partition,' by Muhammad Nurul Huda in The Daily Star on August 3, 2013.

Genesis of Partition

Under the 1935 Act in the elections held in October 1936, Congress emerged as the majority party in five provinces and the largest single party in two others. Muslim League's showing was extremely poor, getting only 105 seats out of 498 reserved for Muslims.

The Lahore Resolution

There was nothing absolutely inevitable about the partition of India. Prior to 1939 the demand for partition of the country on a communal basis had never been seriously considered.

With the absence of the Congress from the management of the provinces there was a political vacuum. Viceroy Linlithgow set about strengthening the League so that it would be on an equal footing with the Congress.

The British government via Linlithgow began to urge Muslim League to put forward "concrete proposals" to counteract Congress's demand for independence.

It was to counter this situation that the Muslim League passed the Lahore Resolution on March 23, 1940, which became known as the Pakistan Resolution.

Cripps' Mission 1942

Why was Cripps chosen for the Indian Mission? The fact is, in March 1942, Cripps had emerged as Churchill's most serious rival. Talk of him as the next prime minister was common.

Quit India Movement

After the failure of the Cripps Mission the Congress, at the initiative of Gandhi, launched the Quit India Movement.

After the arrest of the Congress leaders the field was wide open for Jinnah to develop the Muslim League. Very strangely, the provinces where the Muslims were in severe minority became the strongest supporters of Jinnah.

Provincial Election, March 1946

On June 14, 1945, all the Congress leaders who were in detention from August 1942 were released. Provincial elections were held in March 1946.

Cabinet Mission, March 1946

Three British cabinet ministers, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Mr. A.V. Alexander, who were members of the Cabinet Mission, arrived in Karachi on March 23, 1946.

There was intense discussion with the Indian leaders for nearly two months. It may be mentioned that in the Transfer of Power documents an entire volume of over 1,000 pages was devoted to the proceedings of the Cabinet Mission.

Cabinet Mission's Final Proposal

On May 16, 1946, the Cabinet Mission conceded that "if there is to be internal peace in India it must be secured by measures that will assure to the Muslims a control in all matters vital to their culture, religion, and economic and other interests."

The Cabinet Mission solution, therefore, was to propose a union embracing British India and the Princely States, with central powers limited to foreign affairs, defence, communication and the powers necessary to raise the finances required.

All other subjects and residual powers were to be vested in provinces that would be free to form groups, to be called A, B

Bazar Police Headquarters and sat in the Control Room round the clock during the riot. He despatched truck loads of armed constables but they never reached their destination. He was helpless and the city remained unprotected for five days.

Suhrawardy's culpability is by now a well established tradition. But Hindu leaders were also deeply implicated, a fact which is less well known. More Muslims than Hindus died in the fighting.

The preparedness of the 'bhadralok' in 1946 for this ugly trial of strength is not surprising, if it is recalled that since the late thirties and the early forties Calcutta and the 'mofussil' towns had seen the establishment of many volunteer groups whose professed aim was to unite Hindus and who devoted much of their energy to encouraging physical fitness and military training among the 'bhadralok' youths.

December 1946.

The final nail

It is interesting to note that in December 1946 Mounbatten, not being in the picture at all, had offered to be Nehru's host in London, but Nehru decided it was best for him to stay at the Dorchester, where Edwina kept a suite for herself, overlooking Hyde Park.

Wavell's visit to London for this summit would be his last. He still had no intimation, however, that he was on his way out of high office. Wavell, Nehru and Jinnah held fruitless talks with Pethick-Lawrence, Cripps and Attlee in early December 1946.

It is to be noted that on March 8, 1947, the Congress Working Committee passed some resolutions with the full support of Nehru and Patel. The message in the long-winded resolution was that Congress was willing to accept the principle of Pakistan provided only a few small pieces in the north-west and the northeast were acceded to Pakistan and the rest of India could then be built up into a strong and consolidated India.

Krishna Menon gave an elaborate note to Mounbatten along with a detailed blue print of the partition of India as envisaged by the Congress. We do not know what transpired between the two in their secret meetings.

Mounbatten arrived in Delhi on March 22, 1947, and took up the viceroyalty from Wavell on the same day. From day one, Mounbatten got down to business with a great deal of vigour and energy.

On April 15, 1947, Mounbatten met the provincial governors and, as one of his policies, he pointed out that "a quick decision would also give Pakistan a greater chance to fail on its demerits. The great problem was to reveal the limits of Pakistan so that the Muslim League could revert to a unified India with honour.

As promised, Mounbatten brought the date of Transfer of Power forward from June 30, 1948 to August 15, 1947. This resulted in an estimated twelve million people being dislodged from their homes to cross the borders within a month, with over one million never getting to their destination alive.

The trauma of partition still haunts the sub-continent as the wounds have not healed even after nearly 70 years. What a legacy left by Jinnah, Nehru, Gandhi and the British government!

The writer, a scholar and researcher, specialises in the history of the Subcontinent.

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and C. Groups B and C were to embrace Muslim majority areas and Group A was the Hindu majority areas.

It was a remarkable scheme, the last rational hope for a non-violent transfer of power from British to Indian authority. After this declaration the Muslims were jubilant.

At this critical juncture, Azad was replaced by Nehru as Congress president on July 6, 1946. On July 10, 1946, Nehru held a press conference at which he was undiplomatically blunt in insisting that Congress remained "absolutely free and uncommitted" to any details of the plan.

Mission's proposal and its rejection by the Congress resulted in Jinnah withdrawing his approval of the Mission's plan and directed the Muslims for "direct action."

This was one of the darkest periods of the prelude to Pakistan. The horrors of "Direct Action" day on August 16, 1946 in Calcutta are well-known and resulted in complete break-down of Hindu-Muslim relationship India-wide.

Direct Action Day, August 16, 1946

The Indians put the blame for the catastrophe of August 16 squarely on Suhrawardy. For a glimpse of the truth let us look at two reliable sources of the incident. It is to be noted that immediately after Nehru's press conference on July 10, 1946, rejecting the grouping system embodied in a Cabinet Mission Plan, Jinnah convened a meeting of the All-India Muslim League in Bombay on July 19, 1946.

Abul Hashim, General Secretary of Bengal Provincial Muslim League, writes in his book In Retrospect: "The Muslim League had no knowledge, no apprehension and no anticipation as to the unprecedented violence that started in the morning and continued in the afternoon of August 16 when we were all in the midst of the meeting held at the foot of Ochterlony Monument. The Muslims were unarmed and unprepared to meet the situation. Men may lie but circumstances never lie. I brought from Burdwan with me my two sons, Badruddin Muhammad Umar, a boy of 15, and Shahabuddin Muhammad Ali, a boy of 8, to show them the great gathering that was expected on the occasion at Calcutta. I took my sons to the Maidan and Lal Miah of Faridpur took his grandson aged six or seven. If we apprehended any danger we would not have taken our sons and grandsons to the Maidan. Mr. Suhrawardy declared August 16 a public holiday. This was a great blunder. Peace-loving Hindus and Muslims had little or nothing to do with the riot. That the riot was organised by agent provocateurs of British Imperialism was fully corroborated by what followed the fateful Direct Action Day. The riot continued in full swing for five days -- from August 16 to 20. Mr. Suhrawardy requested the governor of the province to call out the army to help the police restore law and order. The army did not come out. The Calcutta police force was not strong enough to tackle the situation. The commissioner of Calcutta police was an Englishman. Mr. Suhrawardy shifted his headquarters to Lal

Sevashram Sangha, the volunteer wing of the Hindu Mahasabha, (Bengal Divided, Joya Chatterji.)

With the severe communal unrest going on, Suhrawardy, in the Legislative Assembly, demanded from the viceroy that a neutral committee be formed to investigate the riots. Viceroy Wavell formed the committee with Chief Justice William Patrick Spens as the chairman. When Wavell was transferred from the post of viceroy, Chief Justice Spens called on him on March 15, 1947. In his diary Wavell has recorded: "Spens, Chief Justice, came to say goodbye and we had a long talk. He says that the Calcutta Enquiry will show that there was Hindu incitement and a sudden and concerted attack without provocation on the Muslims in the north of Calcutta; that the ministry will come out of it all right; that there was delay in bringing in military owing to faulty information; and that Bucher and the military were magnificent when called in."

This quotation is irrefutable evidence as to who was guilty in the Calcutta Riots. Mounbatten, who was carrying the Congress brief, buried this report (Transfer of Power, April 1947).

During the Cabinet Mission negotiations Cripps had made up his mind to replace Wavell, who was neutral. Cripps wanted someone more pro-Congress. For the sake of appointing a new viceroy a sham meeting of the Indian leaders was summoned in London in the first week of

- ACROSS 1 Smeltery refuse 5 Toast topper 8 Swimmers' venue 12 Session with a shrink 13 Oklahoma city 14 Emanation 15 Tornado, to an insurer 17 Celeb 18 Grave robber 19 Glorifies 21 Ringlet 24 U.K. flyers 25 Turkish 28 Tittle 30 Martini ingredient 33 Ostrich's kin 34 Tale 35 'I'll take that as 36 Understand

- DOWN 1 Carpet 38 Requests 39 Discoverer's cry 41 Use a teaspoon 43 Weak 46 Baby bird? 50 Cry like a baby 51 Something one excels in 54 Elliptical 55 Med. care provider 56 Western state 57 Infamous fiddler 58 Feedbag tidbit 59 Forsaken health? 22 Ceremony 23 Crazy people 25 Foundation 26 Parisian pal 27 Rope contest 29 Jog 31 Squid squirt 32 Ph. bk. data 34 Coin aperture 38 Crafty 40 Greeting 42 Equal (Pref.) 43 Black, to a bard 44 Most-liked, for short 45 Reverbate 47 'Beetle Bailey' dog 48 Bring up 49 Song-writer 52 Ms. Thurman 53 Cauldron

CRYPTOQUIP grid with numbers 1-59. Below the grid is the solution: Q L W D K L N V W T Y N Q V H G Y V K H C W Q G D K N K L W V O C W D F G F A Y J D F T J D P N D, K L W P H N B D F G K Y B C P T J Q: S I D E M Y G G D A. Yesterdays Cryptoquip: GIVE MY PET DOG PREFERS USING CURRENT TECHNOLOGY, I FINALLY UPGRADED HIM TO A COLLAR ID. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals T

QUOTABLE Quotes "The problem with the world is that the intelligent people are full of doubts, while the stupid ones are full of confidence." Charles Bukowski

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