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Partition: An Event to Celebrate or Regret

NIMMY MARIA BABU¹

ABSTRACT

The Partition of India was the process of dividing the subcontinent along sectarian lines, which took place in 1947 as India gained its independence from the British Raj. The northern, predominantly Muslim sections of India became the nation of Pakistan, while the southern and majority Hindu section became the Republic of India. In this paper I have researched upon the reasons that led to the partition of India and division of Punjab.

I. INTRODUCTION

A question that haunts every Indian is ‘Why India had to be partitioned?’ And there have been different answers to the same question. Some blame Jinnah for chasing his dream for a separate country while others blame the Indian National Congress for underrating Jinnah and Muslim League, at the same time there are others who blame the British who introduced the Divide and Rule policy to bolster their rule in India.

In the early 1940, elections were conducted to provisional assemblies. The Congress promised citizens of economic and social prosperity while Muslim League proposed the idea of a separate state. Jinnah pronounced ‘Elections are the beginning of the end. If the Muslims decide to stand for Pakistan in the coming elections half the battle would have been won. If we fail in the first phase of our war, we shall be finished.’

The Cripps mission headed by Sir Stratford Cripps was sent to India in 1942 to negotiate the terms of Indian independence. Though they wished to leave behind united India they knew it would involve force. The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League rejected the proposal and it was unacceptable to Winston Churchill. Consequently Cripps mission became utter failure and Congress moved towards the Quit India movement.

From late 1930s, Jinnah who was symbol of Hindu – Muslim unity, began to fuel religious passions. The process was at its peak on Direct Action Day. Though there have been riots in the past, the one that took place on August 1946 in Calcutta was distinctive in scale and

¹ Author is an Assistant Professor at Banasthali Vidyapeeth Rajasthan, India.

potency.

On the morning of August 16th, Muslims went around beating people and looting their property. Gigantic *portraits* of Jinnah waving a scimitar, riding a horse, were put up on various parts of the city. Hindu militias were well-prepared. A week prior to the riot, they began sharpening their daggers anticipating violence. The politicians by not deputing police or military, turned a blind eye towards the violence and this gave the rioters authenticity to fight for their ill-formed concepts of freedom.

The British's notion that Hindus and Muslims are incongruous with each other was fortified by the Calcutta killing. This brought an end to the dream of unified India.

II. PUNJAB ON FIRE

After few days of collapse of ministry, important cities of Punjab- Lahore, Jullundur, Amritsar, Multan, Rawalpindi and Sialkot were on fire. The violence went on for weeks. Barricades were raised and in worst affected areas religion of those entering 'mohallas' were checked. Even families started acquiring weapons for their safety. As an immediate reaction, those in the highest echelons in Congress started demanding for Partition as the cost for unified India would be really high. Nehru had mentioned in an interview, 'The truth is that we were tired men and we were getting on in years...The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it.' Jinnah vetoed the idea of one India and thus Pakistan became inevitable. K. M. Pannikar described it as, 'Hindustan is the elephant . . . and Pakistan the two ears. The elephant can live without the ears.'

At this time, a war of succession was going on between Jinnah and Kizar on the Punjab province. The Leaguers believed Kizar to be the only hurdle, underestimating the minorities of Punjab. On 2nd March, Kizar resigned from his office and the likelihood of Muslim League taking over through Mamdot led government infuriated the non-Muslims. Muslim domination of Punjab was resisted by the Hindus and Sikhs shouting, 'Pakistan Murdabad' (Death to Pakistan). They set fire to Muslim bazaars while they retorted by killing nearly two hundred Hindus and Sikhs. The violence was aimed at driving out Sikhs from Western Punjab.

Lord Mountbatten departed for London on May 18th, two months prior to being sworn in as Viceroy to persuade the Cabinet for partition. The plan did not take into account human safety nor built safeguards to alleviate the fears of domination. In the safety of the Lutyens' building, they divided India into two- India and Pakistan. Though it was a day of jubilation for Muslim League, it created confusion regarding the boundaries and migration of population.

The map of India reaching up to Afghanistan in the north and Sri Lanka in the south intertwined with the image of Mother India in red sari was advertised in various products ranging from lamps to watches. Dividing India thus created an abrasion in psyche of Indian nationalism.

On 3 June, Lord Mountbatten made the plan public on All India Radio. He was followed by Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh. Dr. Rajendra Prasad uttered, "I have not lost faith in an undivided India. I believe no man can divide what God has created as one". The day was marked as Anti-Partition day with the closure of shops and schools. The Hindu Mahasabha denounced the partition plan and decided to organise black flag day.

On 4 June, Viceroy Mountbatten called for a conference where it was decided that British would withdraw from India on August than extending it to the next year. The division of army into two was publically proclaimed on this day. This shattered the slightest hope of uniting India and Pakistan in the future. The need for migration had also escalated. An individual's birthplace had categorised them to majorities and minorities.

On 30 June, under the chairmanship of Sir Radcliff, Bengal boundary Commission and Punjab boundary commission were formed. They created maps behind closed doors without having much knowledge of the vast rivers and forest that crossed the two states.

As the days drew closer to the Independence Day, life of those in both sides of boundary became nightmare. Punjabis in Lahore and Amritsar started learning Vedic phrases to fake their religion if necessary, sent their kids to temples and mosques and even stocked cooking fuel as self-defence.

On the night of 14 August when India awoke to life and freedom, widespread, lethal violence was transpiring on the borders. The term nationalism had taken a new phase costing the lives of thousands.
