

## 1.5. TRANSFER OF POWER (1945-1947)

### Brief Summary...

After end of the war, the political situation greatly changed • Britain lost her previous political position in European politics • Wavell called the leaders of Congress and the Muslim League for discussion on the formation of the new council • This was known as the Simla Conference • Except the Governor • General and the Commander-in-Chief, all members would come from Indian political parties • Jinnah demanded the right to nominate all Muslim members from the League-Congress opposed the claim • After the end of the Second World War, Labour Government came to power in Britain • Cabinet Mission was then sent to India to solve the political deadlock • The Commission proposed a Federal Union • Three groups of states were formed • The Centre would control Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communication • During the period of constitution making, an Interim Govt. would be formed • The demand for Pakistan was not considered for different reasons • Congress decided to join the interim Govt. • Jinnah saw in this grouping the seeds of Pakistan—for various reasons Muslim League refused to join the Interim Govt. • An Interim Govt. was formed with Nehru.

❑ **Direct Action Day**—The Muslim League declared 16 August as the Direct action Day for realization of Pakistan • Calcutta people witnessed dreadful activities • Communal riots spread to different parts of India • The situation suddenly changed when the British Prime Minister Attlee declared that the power would be handed over to the Indian people by 30 June, 1948 • Lord Mountbatten would replace Lord Wavell as the new Viceroy.

❑ **Mountbatten Plan and Partition**—Mountbatten started discussion with the Indian leaders • It was finally decided that India would be divided along with the partition of Bengal and Punjab • Sind Assembly would take its own decision • Opinion poll would be organized in NWFP and Sylhet in Assam • The Naïve States would join either India or Pakistan or may remain independent —A Boundary Commission under Radcliffe to be set up to demarcate the boundary of Bengal and Punjab • The Indian Independence Bill was passed in the British Parliament-15 August, 1947 was fixed as the date for the transfer of power.

### Changed Attitude of the British Government

After the end of the Second World War, the world political situation had completely changed. America and Russia now emerged as the Big Powers in the European politics. The war marked the end of imperialism and the rise of neo-colonialism. Britain lost her former power and position in world politics. The British soldiers were not willing to stay any more in India to suppress the Indian movements. They were very eager to go back to their home land. The trial of the INA members created troubles all over country. The members of the Royal Indian Navy revolted against the British government. Large scale labour unrest crippled the economy of the country.

### Wavell Plan, 1945

In this changed situation, Viceroy Wavell released from jail all the Congress Working Committee members. Wavell now invited all the political leaders at Simla on 24 June, 1945 for the formation of the Viceroy's New Council. He now proposed that all the members would be selected from the Indian political parties except the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief. **This is known as the Wavell Plan of 1945.**

**M.A. Jinnah** demanded the exclusive rights to nominate all the Muslim Members from the Muslim League in the proposed Council. He also insisted on his demand for Pakistan. But this claim was not acceptable to Congress for its national character. So the Conference failed and nothing came out from the Simla Conference. However, Wavell unilaterally declared that the British government would resume talks with the political parties regarding the setting up of a Constitution-making body.

### CABINET MISSION PLAN AND PROPOSALS

In July, 1945, the Labour Party came to power in Britain. Prime Minister Clement Atlee decided to send one mission known as the **Cabinet Mission**. The purpose of the Mission was to solve the Indian political deadlock. **The members were Pethick Lawrence, Stafford Cripps and A.V. Alexander.** Their object was to find out peaceful means for the transfer of powers to the Indian people. The Mission members held extensive discussions with Congress, the Muslim League and all the political parties. But they failed to reach on any agreed settlement on the constitutional issue. In the absence of any agreed solution, the Cabinet Mission announced its own recommendations on 16 May, 1946.

### PROPOSALS OF THE CABINET MISSION

- (1) An Indian Federation comprising British India and Native States would be formed.
- (2) The Centre would control only the Defence, the Foreign Affairs and the Communications. All other subjects were left to the Provincial Legislatures. The Indian Native States would accede later. The provinces would enjoy complete autonomy and form three groups.
- (3) Group "A" would comprise the Hindu majority provinces of Madras, C.P., U.P., Bihar and Orissa. The three Chief Commissioners' Provinces—Delhi, Ajmer, Merwara and Coorg would join Group-A. Group "B" would comprise the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Baluchistan and Sind. Group "C" would comprise Bengal and Assam. Evidently Groups B and C would be under the full control of the Muslims. This grouping was intended to give Muslim League "the substance of Pakistan."
- (4) Each Group had the right to opt out of the Federal Union after election of its Legislative Council under the new constitution. Each Group was to settle its own constitution.

- (5) For the election of the constitution-making body, three main communities, namely, General (all persons who were not Muslims or Sikhs), Muslims and Sikhs were recognized. Each Group would elect its own representative by the method of proportional representation with the single transferable vote.
- (6) The constitution-making body would conclude a treaty with Great Britain to provide for certain matters arising out of transfer of power. India would be free to decide whether it would remain within British Common Wealth or secede from it.
- (7) During the constitution making, the Cabinet Mission proposed the formation of an Interim Government at the Centre with the support of the major political parties of India.

### REJECTION OF PAKISTAN DEMAND

M.A. Jinnah stood firm on the Pakistan demand on the basis of the 'Two Nation' theory. But the Congress opposed the 'Two Nation' theory of Muslim League.

Cabinet Mission rejected the Pakistan Demand on the following grounds:

- (1) Cabinet Mission pointed out that a full-fledged Pakistan was impossible since it would include a very large number of non-Muslims of Bengal and Assam.
- (2) Muslim League demanded Pakistan on the principle of communal self-determination. On the basis of same principle, the Hindus of West Bengal would demand Hindu-majority West Bengal including Calcutta. The Sikhs would also demand Ambala and Jalandhar Divisions.
- (3) Partition of Bengal and Punjab would go against deep-seated regional ties and would create a number of economic and administrative problems.
- (4) The two-halves of the proposed Pakistan would be separated by almost 700 miles and this would create problems. Geographically, this would not be viable.

### INTENTION OF THE CABINET MISSION

The Plan of the Cabinet Mission was intended to be a compromise in two ways.

- (1) The Plan placated the Congress through the rejection of the Pakistan scheme.
- (2) It tried to pacify Muslim League through the creation of autonomous Muslim-majority areas in some proximity. The Centre was to have narrow power and this would also be a safeguard to the Muslim community.

### REACTION AGAINST THE CABINET MISSION PLAN

- (A) **Controversy over the grouping of provinces.** Congress rejected the proposal for an Interim Government because the principle of Congress—League parity was not acceptable to Congress. Congress also interpreted the grouping as optional. Congress also opposed League's claim that it had the only right to nominate all the Muslim

Members to the Executive Council. But Congress agreed to participate in the Constituent Assembly for framing the constitution of India.

- (B) **Leagues acceptance of the Mission plan.** Muslim League accepted the Cabinet Mission proposals because M.A. Jinnah interpreted the grouping of states as a tactical recognition of his Pakistan demand.
- (C) **Opposition of Punjab.** The Sikh community strongly opposed the proposal because Punjab was placed in Group "B" with other Muslim majority states. They apprehended that the Muslim League would dominate here.
- (D) **Different views of the Depressed class.** The Depressed class was also divided into two groups. One led by Babu Jagjivan Ram and the other group led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar strongly opposed the proposal because only one seat had been given to Depressed class in the proposed Interim Government. Babu Jagjivan Ram group supported the Congress stand.

### Direct Action by the Muslim League

There developed a crisis when election to the Constituent Assembly held in July, 1946. Congress won in an overwhelming majority. Jinnah became alarmed and called this a "brute majority" of the Congress. He apprehended that the transfer of power would be made only with the Congress or the Hindus who enjoyed the confidence of the majority of the people. When the Viceroy Wavell started discussion with Jawaharlal Nehru for the formation of the Interim Government, Jinnah refused to join the Interim Government. Muslim League then passed a resolution to withdraw its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Muslim League then incited the Muslims to 'Direct Action' to secure their rights. The direct action of the Muslim League was not directed against the British government but against the possible Hindu domination. Muslim League decided to observe 16 August, 1946, as the '**Direct Action Day**' for the realization of their desired goal of Pakistan.

Liaquat Ali Khan, the then General Secretary of the All India Muslim League, explained the meaning of Direct Action and said, "**Direct Action means resorting to non-constitutional methods and then can take any form and whatever form may suit the conditions under which we live.**"\_ In an interview with the United Press, Nazimuddin, the League leader, was asked to clarify the implication of 'Direct Action Day'. He explained, "**The Muslim population of Bengal know very well what 'Direct Action' would mean and so we need not bother to give them any lead.**"\_ The real spirit of the 'Direct Action' was expressed by Jinnah himself after the resolution was passed by the League Council. Jinnah said "...but now we are obliged and forced into this position. This day we bid goodbye to constitutional methods."

### COMMUNAL RIOTS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY

The Direct Action Day was followed by the slogan 'Ladke Lange Pakistan' (We shall have Pakistan by force). The day passed off without much untoward incident in most part of the country except in Calcutta where trouble started. The Muslim League government of Bengal

under Suhrawardy moved in a sluggish way and in the mean time huge population of both Hindu and Muslim were killed. Starting from Calcutta, communal riots touched Bombay, spread to Noakhali in East Bengal, Bihar and Garmukteshwar in U.P., and finally reached Punjab in March, 1947 onwards.

### FORMATION OF THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

After the refusal of Muslim League to join the Interim, Government, Viceroy Wavell invited Jawaharlal Nehru and his other members to swear as member of the Viceroy's Executive Council on 2 September, 1946. Jawaharlal Nehru then offered Muslim League five seats out of fourteen in the Interim Government. This negotiation ultimately broke down. Jinnah did not agree to the appointment of a Non-League Muslim in the Interim Government even out of the Congress quota. Muslim League then observed 2 September as the 'Day of Mourning'. The Muslims were directed to display black flags all over the country.

Though Jinnah refused to join the Executive Council, Viceroy Wavell was ultimately successful in persuading Muslim League to join the Interim Government. But this entry did not end the conflict. Muslim League members followed a policy of non-cooperation both inside and outside the government. Frustrated Jawaharlal once remarked that the Interim Government had become an arena of struggle. In the AICC meeting on 14 June, 1947, Sardar Patel also remarked that Pakistan was actually functioning not only in Punjab and Bengal but also in the Interim Government. Congress then sent a letter to the Viceroy Wavell and demanded that the League members should be asked to resign.

### ATTLEE'S DECLARATION OF 20th FEBRUARY

The Interim Government was not functioning well due to non-cooperation of the Muslim League. The country was passing through communal riots at different places. The situation suddenly changed when the **British Prime Minister Attlee announced in the British Parliament on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1947 that the government would transfer power to the Indians not later than June, 1948.** Lord Mountbatten now came to India to take charge as Viceroy and Governor-General from Lord Wavell.

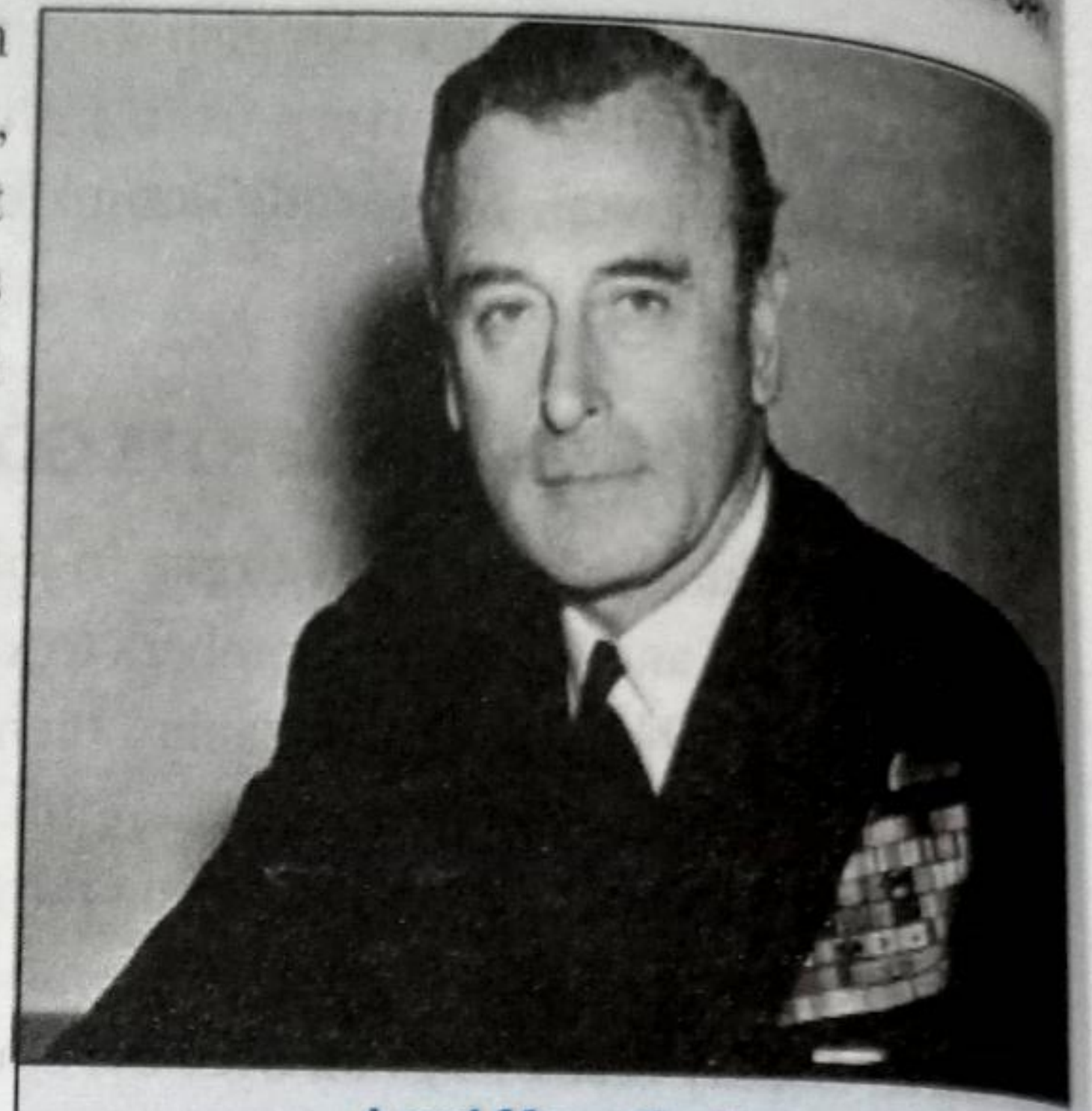
### MOUNTBATTEN PLAN

Lord Mountbatten took charge in March, 1947. He now started discussion with the leaders of Congress and Muslim League for transfer of power. Finally it was decided that India would be partitioned. A new state of Pakistan would be created along with free India. The main provisions of the Plan were as follows:

### FEATURES OF MOUNTBATTEN PLAN

- (1) India would be partitioned and a new state of Pakistan would be created along with free India.

- (2) Pakistan would be formed with the Muslim majority provinces of Sind, Baluchistan, North-West Frontier, West Punjab and East Bengal provided the Legislative Assemblies of Bengal and Punjab would decide in favour of Pakistan.
- (3) Indian Dominion would be formed with the rest of British India, East Punjab and West Bengal.
- (4) In case of partition of Punjab and Bengal, a Boundary Commission would be formed to demarcate the exact boundary line between India and Pakistan.
- (5) Opinion poll would be conducted in North-West Frontier Province and Sylhet district of Assam to decide whether the people would join India or Pakistan.
- (6) The Native States were given the option of joining either the new state of Pakistan or the old state of India or would remain Independent.
- (7) The Legislative Assembly of Sind would take its own decision whether it would join India or Pakistan.
- (8) The Plan also declared that transfer of power would take place much earlier than June, 1948. The British Parliament would pass an act for transfer of power in India before 15 August, 1947.



Lord Mountbatten

## THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE ACT, 1947

The Nationalist leaders refused to agree to handover one-third of the country to Muslim League for Pakistan. The Mountbatten Plan gave concessions to the Congress and the Muslim League alike. India was divided but maximum unity was retained. The demand of Muslim League for Pakistan was accepted but it would be made as small as possible to uphold the Congress stand on unity. Both Congress and the Muslim League ultimately accepted the Mountbatten Plan. **The Indian Independence Bill was passed in the British Parliament on 1 July, 1947. It received the royal assent on 18 July, 1947.** It was now decided that India would be partitioned and two independent dominions-India and Pakistan would be created on and from 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947.

## EXECUTION OF THE MOUNTBATTEN PLAN

The British authority now decided to work out the details of the Mountbatten Plan. The minority members of Bengal and Punjab Assemblies had been given the right to meet separately

and take decision. As expected, they voted for partition of Bengal and Punjab. After the plebiscite, the district of **Sylhet (Assam)** chose to join East Pakistan. **The boundary Commission under British lawyer Radcliffe** started marking the boundary lines of the two states of India and Pakistan. Now the Muslims strongly resented the loss of Gurudaspur in Punjab, Murshidabad and Nadia (as well as Calcutta) in Bengal. Similarly, the Hindus and the Sikhs resented the loss of Lahore, the Canal Colonies, Khulna and Chittagong Hill Tracts. In this way, partition of Punjab and Bengal along with India was complete.

### Reasons why the Congress Accepted Partition

There were a number of reasons for the acceptance of this plan. One popular thesis was that the Congress leaders failed to check the temptation of power. They accepted the Mountbatten Plan to get power quickly at the cost of Pakistan. Both this thesis is not correct. Actually there was a basic failure of the entire Congress organization over the years to bring the Muslim masses into nationalist main stream. By 1946, it became clear that the Muslim masses stood behind the Muslim League for their demand of Pakistan. This situation became more alarming when this cry was not restricted within the Parliamentary system. They even fought on the streets through 'Direct Action' call. The Congress leaders felt that the partition was a lesser evil than a civil war.



Nehru was taking oath at midnight, 1947

The breakdown of the Interim Government due to non-cooperation of the League ministers made the situation more critical. The Interim Government failed to control the organized mob violence of the Muslim League. Only immediate transfer of power could have saved the situation. The constant interference of Liaquat Ali Khan, the Finance Minister from the Muslim League, created an unhealthy situation. The Congress leaders thought it wise to accept partition than an open war.

Another alternative to Pakistan was a Federation with a weak Centre. A smaller India with a strong central authority was better than a bigger state with a weak centre. The Congress leaders strongly opposed the 'Balkanization' of the country. The bitter experience of working with the League Ministers, the total break down of the administration, wide spread communal riots, Jinnah's uncompromising attitude on the issue of Pakistan, the decision of the British government to transfer power—all these compelled the Congress leaders to agree to the partition of India.

### **Role of the British Government**

The partition was a highly controversial arrangement and remains a cause of much tension on the Indian Subcontinent even today. The British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten, had also been accused of rushing the process through, and had influenced the Radcliff Line in India's favour. The commission took longer to decide on a final boundary plan than on the partition itself. Thus the two nations were granted their independence even before there was a defined boundary between the two countries.

Some critics alleged that British haste led to the cruelties of the Partition, because independence was declared prior to the actual partition. It was up to the new governments of India and Pakistan to maintain law and order situation. Such a large movement of population was not contemplated by the governments of both sides of the new borders. It was a task at which both the states failed. There was a complete breakdown of law and order. Many died in riots, massacre or just from the hardships of their flight to safety. There were the largest population movements in recorded history. A number of people argue that the British were forced to expedite the partition by events of the time. Once in office, Lord Mountbatten very soon realized that if Britain was to avoid involvement in a civil war, there was no alternative to partition and a hasty exit from India. Law and order had broken down many times before actual Partition with much bloodshed on both sides. A massive civil war was looming by the time when Lord Mountbatten became the Viceroy. After the Second World War, Britain had no sufficient resources to the task of keeping order. Another view point is that while Lord Mountbatten may have been too hasty he had no real option left and achieved the best he could do under the difficult circumstances. The historian Lawrence James thinks that in 1947 Mountbatten was left with no option but to cut and run. The alternative was to involve in a bloody civil war from which it would be difficult to get out.

The Conservative elements in England consider the partition of India to be the moment that the British Empire ceased to be a world power and the loss of India would mean that Britain would drop straight away to a third rate power.



Answer the following :

1. Discuss the proposals made by the Cabinet Mission.
2. Why Cabinet Mission rejected the Pakistan demand ?
3. State the main features of the Mountbatten Plan.
4. Why it was accepted by the Congress leaders ?