

August 2025
Shrawan, Shaka 1946

PD XX BS

© ***National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2025***

Published at the Publication Division, by the Secretary, National Council of Educational Research and Training, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110 016 and printed at

Partition Horrors Remembrance Day



Introduction

Independence on 15th August 1947 came with the partition of united India into India and Pakistan. Pakistan constituted West and East Pakistan based on majority of Muslim population. In the new Pakistan, countless Hindus and Sikhs were forced to migrate in order to save their lives and the honour of their families or to become Muslims.

It is important to remember all that they endured during that tragedy. That is why, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the observance of 'Partition Horrors Remembrance Day'



Narendra Modi, *Prime Minister*

“Partition’s pains can never be forgotten. Millions of our sisters and brothers were displaced and many lost their lives due to mindless hate and violence. In memory of the struggles and sacrifices of our people, 14th August will be observed as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day.” (14 August 2021)

Horrors of the Partition

The Partition was the largest displacement in human history. At least 6 lacs people were killed in communal violence during the Partition. Crores of people became homeless and, as refugees in their own country, were forced to search for shelter. The atrocities committed against women were unimaginable.

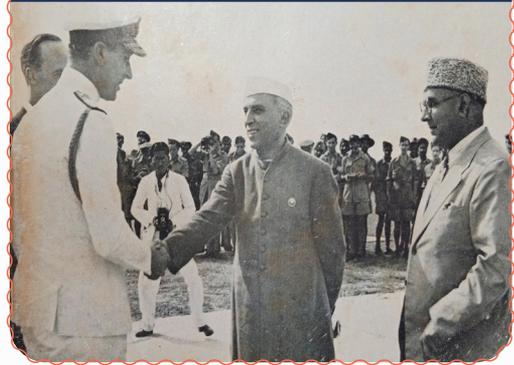
In many places, to preserve their honour, they jumped into wells and gave up their lives. For all these reasons, the Partition turned into an unprecedented human catastrophe. All this did not occur as any natural calamity.

Losses of the Partition

The Partition of India caused immense loss to the country. India is still suffering from its ill-effects. The remaining India became surrounded on two sides by unfriendly borders. This gave rise to new security problems.

The communal animosity between the two major communities of the country remained. Apart from this, Kashmir emerged as a new problem, which had never existed in India before. It created a challenge for India's foreign policy. Some countries, in the name of Kashmir, keep giving aid to Pakistan and use it to exert pressure on India.

Pandit Nehru greeting Lord Mountbatten on his arrival at the airport in New Delhi on 25 March. Liaquat Ali Khan is on the right



The burden of uncertainties



Lord Wavell (*Viceroy of India*, Oct. 1943 - Feb. 1947)

“Partition would be a frightfully disruptive operation. It would not solve the communal problem, but would perpetuate it. It would leave Hindustan and Pakistan still face to face with all the same problems of defense, minorities, and so on, and probably increase bitterness.” (In his personal diary, dated 4 February 1946)

How the Partition happened

India's Partition happened due to wrong ideas. The party of Indian Muslims, the Muslim League, held a conference in Lahore in 1940. Its leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah said that “Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures. ... They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often, the hero of one is the villain of the other. Their victories and defeats overlap in such a manner.”

That everything about Muslims is different from Hindus. Therefore, their country should also be separate. It was this idea that ultimately led to the partition of India.

Although the British rulers made many efforts to grant India independence keeping it united. The first major effort was the Cripps Mission, sent from London in 1942. It proposed to grant India 'Dominion Status', in which the British Crown would remain the formal head of state, while internal administration would be in the hands of Indians. Along with this, different provinces were given the option to join or not to join this dominion. The Congress rejected



Meeting with the Indian Leaders on 2 June 1947. From Mountbatten's left: Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, Sardar Baldev Singh, Acharya Kripalani, Sardar Patel, and Pandit Nehru.

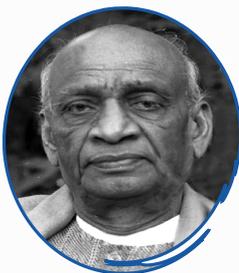
On 4 June, at a Press Conference, Lord Mountbatten, Viceroy of India, announced the date of independence as 14/15 August. This was much sooner than anyone had expected. The Independence of India Act was passed by the British Parliament on July 18 to accommodate the faster time-table announced by Lord Mountbatten.

The Congress rejected this proposal.

PUNJAB NEWSLETTER
WOMEN JUMP INTO WELL TO AVOID CAPTURE
 FROM OUR STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The story of 90 women of the little village of Thoha Khalsa, Rawalpindi District, who drowned themselves by jumping into a well during the recent disturbances, has stirred the imagination of the people of the Punjab.
 They revived the ancient tradition of self-immolation when their menfolk were to fight and to die for them. They also followed Mr Gandhi's advice to Indian women that in certain circumstances even suicide was morally preferable to submission.
 Thoha Khalsa situated at the foot of a hill, until recently belonged to members of a minority. It was small, prosperous and free.
 About a month ago, a communist army, 5000 strong, armed with machine guns and hand grenades, surrounded it. The villagers defended themselves as best they could. They had no guns which they put to good use. But in the end they had to raise the white flag.
 Negotiations followed. A sum of Rs 10,000 was demanded by the invaders. It was promptly paid. The intruders gave a solemn assurance that they would not come back. The promise was broken the next day.
 They returned to demand more money and in the process hacked to death all but the defenceless. Heavily outnumbered, they were unable to resist the onslaught. Their women held a hurried meeting and came to the conclusion that all was lost except their honour. Following the example of Indian women of yore, they decided to evade ignominious capture. Ninety women jumped into a small well. Only three were saved. There was not enough water in the well to drown them all.

Women suffered enormously during the Partition, and their experience of the Partition and its trauma was very different from that of the men. They were abducted and raped and many were sold into prostitution. Many were forced to convert their religion and marry the very men who might have slaughtered their family. In addition, their own family members often undertook to kill them to 'save the honour of the family'. The Indian government reported 33,000 women as abducted, while the Pakistan government estimated 50,000 abducted women. But these statistics vastly underestimated the extent of suffering.

The second effort was the Cabinet Mission in 1946. In its proposal, India would remain a federation, with three types of provinces: 'A', 'B', and 'C'. 'A' would consist of Hindu-majority provinces. 'B' and 'C' would consist of Muslim-majority provinces, which would have autonomy. The central government would retain powers over defense, foreign policy, and communication. Thus, with a center having slightly limited powers, India would remain one country.



Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (Senior Congress leader)

"I am not in favor of partition; I am against it. But we have to accept it as a bitter medicine. The country has been turned into a battlefield, and the two communities cannot live together in peace. It is better to have partition than to have a civil war." (Speech in Bombay, July 1947)

The Congress initially accepted that proposal. Then it backed out. Jinnah became angry and declared 'Direct Action Day' (16 August 1946). He said that they would also use violence to press their demand for Pakistan. As a result, in just two or three days of that 'Direct Action', 6000 people were killed in Calcutta alone.



Condition of Noakhali



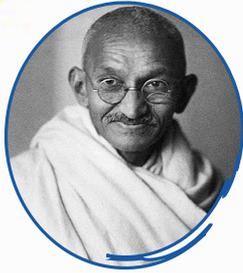
Lord Louis Mountbatten (*Last Viceroy of India*)

"I did not partition India. The plan for partition had been accepted by the Indian leaders themselves. My role was to execute it in the most peaceful way possible. ... I accept the blame for the haste... But I do not accept the blame for the violence that followed. That was the responsibility of Indians themselves." (c. 1970s, to Collins, Lapierre)

After this, the Congress and the British government became very troubled. The last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, took office as the new Viceroy in March 1947. He held consultations with top Congress leaders Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and the Muslim League leader Jinnah. Jinnah was adamant on a separate Pakistan. For this, the Muslim League was resorting to violence in various places. Giving in to this, Nehru and Patel also became ready for Partition. Then, on 3 June 1947, Mountbatten presented his plan for the transfer of power. It included dividing India to create a separate Pakistan for Muslims, and giving all princely states the option to join either India or Pakistan. This proposal was accepted by both the Congress and the Muslim League.



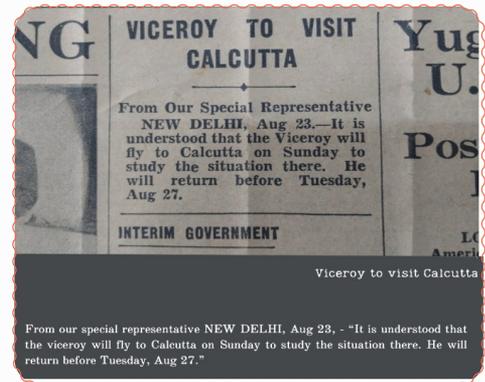
The historic conference in New Delhi on 7 June 1947 when the British plan for partition was accepted. *Left to right* Pandit Nehru, Lord Ismay, Lord Mountbatten, Mohammed Ali Jinnah



Mahatma Gandhi

"If the Congress wishes to accept partition, it will be against my advice... But I will not oppose it with violence or anger." (Prayer meeting, 9 June 1947).

In fact, Nehru and Patel accepted Partition due to the fear of civil war. Upon their agreeing, Mahatma Gandhi, also gave up his opposition to Partition. On 14 June 1947, in a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, he persuaded other Congress leaders also to accept Partition.



Cyril Radcliffe (*Chairman, Boundary Committee, June - Aug. 1947*)

"I had no alternative; the time at my disposal was so short that I could not do a better job. I was given a job to do and I did my best, though it may not have been very good."

Culprits of the Partition

In this way, ultimately on 15 August 1947, India was divided. But this was not the doing of any one person. There were three elements responsible for the Partition of India: Jinnah, who demanded it; second, the Congress, which accepted it; and third, Mountbatten, who implemented it.

But Mountbatten proved to be guilty of a major blunder. He preponed the date for the transfer of power from June 1948 to August 1947. He persuaded everyone to agree to this. Because of this, complete preparations could not be made before the Partition. The demarcation of the Partition boundaries was also done hastily. For that, Sir Cyril Radcliffe was given only five weeks. In Punjab, even two days after 15 August 1947, millions of people did not know whether they were in India or in Pakistan. Such haste was a great act of carelessness.

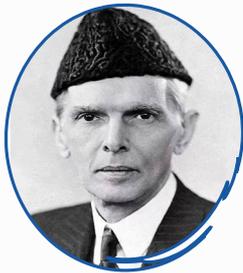


Jawaharlal Nehru (*Senior Congress leader*)

"We have come to a stage when we must either accept division or face continued conflict and chaos. Partition is bad. But whatever the price of unity, the price of civil war would be infinitely greater."
(Speech in July 1947).

Partition was not inevitable

India's Partition was not inevitable. In fact, even six months before it, no one took the idea seriously. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who had been observing events seriously for decades, wrote that within six months, Partition was declared, accepted, and implemented.



Muhammad Ali Jinnah (*Muslim League leader*)

"Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature... To yoke together two such nations under a single state... must lead to growing discontent and final destruction. The Muslims are a nation by any definition. By all canons of international law we are a nation." (Speech at the Lahore session, 22 March 1940)"

Later, even Jinnah admitted that he had not expected Partition to happen. He told his aide, "I never thought it would happen. I never expected to see Pakistan in my lifetime." Even in the Muslim League, apart from two or four top leaders, no one considered the demand for Partition practical. They saw it as a means to pressure for a greater share of power for Muslims.

Congress leaders believed that Partition was impossible. But, troubled by the Muslim League's violence, they finally accepted Partition. Unfortunately, that led to even more violence and destruction!

Lessons of Partition

Now everyone agrees that the Partition turned out to be very different from what its initiators had imagined at the time. It became a catastrophe that shattered India's civilization and culture. For centuries, India had upheld an example of coexistence. For the first time, it was fundamentally torn apart. Until then, foreign invaders would come to India, cause destruction, and rule here for short or long periods. They would also commit various atrocities on the people. But India's geographical integrity remained intact. It was in 1947 that it broke for the first time. Indian leaders, with their own hands, removed a large part of India—along with crores of its citizens—from the country! This was unique in history, where the leaders of a country, without any war, sat among themselves and suddenly severed crores of people from the nation! It turned out to be a great horror.

Therefore, there are many lessons of India's Partition. It is necessary to remember them and remain aware.

First, the claim of special privilege for any religion or creed must always be rejected. The government should have an equal view toward every religious community. Communal politics should be strictly kept away. The logic of violence must be categorically rejected. Partition showed that accepting the demands of violent people in the name of peace becomes an encouragement to violence. It weakens the nation.





Sri Aurobindo (Yogi, Philosopher)

"The Partition must go. Let it be only a temporary and not a permanent dismemberment. The Partition of the country must be removed. For that I consider the present division of the country as a temporary expedient. I do not believe that the division will last. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled; civil strife may remain always possible, possibly leading to a new and more disastrous Partition. That must not be; the Partition must go." (15 August 1947).

Some of the many thousands of victims of the riots in the Punjab which followed the partition announcement



Second, the leadership of the country must be wise and prudent. Those who decide the fate of the people should rise above their personal or party interests. Dogmatism, arrogance, and misjudgments of leadership can cause immense damage. For example, due to Partition, most prosperous and well-educated provinces like Bengal and Punjab were suddenly devastated. Even the noble people of those areas could not stop the demonic acts happening in their regions after Partition. Therefore, it is useless to blame the people for the consequences of the leaders' decisions.



Shimla, Viceregal Lodge, 1946. Talks to keep India united. Viceroy Lord Wavell with M A Jinnah, Liyaqat Ali and others.

Third, politics should not be based solely on ideal imaginations, preachings, or ideologies. Right decisions are possible only on the concrete assessment of actual relationships among the people of the country and administrative capacity. Among the driving forces of human life are also greed, fear, hatred, anger, revenge, etc. In critical moments, no sermon or ideal can suppress them. Hence, the task of politics is to firmly deal with the problems arising from such vices. Despite good intentions, lakhs and lakhs of innocent people may suffer. This is also an essential lesson of India's Partition.



The table at the Viceregal Lodge, Shimla where finally the Partition plan was discussed between Lord Mountbatten and J L Nehru in 1947.

And the final lesson is that the citizens of the country must know the history. History should never be whitewashed or exaggerated for any reason. This has been a shortcoming in India for a long time. In the name of creating harmony, the ugly aspects of history are put under the carpet. That is why, even today, many people know very little about India's Partition. But ignorance of history keeps difficult problems alive in the same form. As a result, the new generation is not prepared to face them. Therefore, knowing history is absolutely necessary.

Only by remembering these four lessons will the remembrance of the horrors of Partition become meaningful. Otherwise, the poet's voice will forever condemn us:

"... The body bears the weight of even its own disease.
Shame! Again, shame!
And this shame is neither Hindu nor Muslim—
It is the outrage
of my insulted humanity!"

— (S H Vatsyayan 'Ajneya', 4 Nov. 1947)

Partition Horrors Remembrance Day

विद्यया ऽ मृतमश्नुते



एन सी ई आर टी
NCERT

