

British Rule in Punjab: 1849-1947

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Abstract

This article is about British rule in Punjab from 1849 to 1947 as the title suggest. It covers the political aspects, constitutional reforms, introduction of canal colonies, which changed the pattern of life in Punjab. The land transformed into green field yielding different crops. The settling of pastoralist and migrates from central Punjab. The British created a hierarchy by gifting large area of land for cultivation and stables for horses and donkeys for military and surveillance purposes. This new class played a definite role in politics, economic uplift and in securing and stabilizing British rule in India after 1857 upheaval, when natives stood up against British rule in India. That class still hold the reign of power to some extent and are still pawn in the scheme of things of new world order.

The British introduced constitutional reforms in Punjab, which played a vital role in awakening separate identities among the populous. The World Wars clear the way for new nations and they jump on the bandwagon for independence.

The article emphasis is on the constitutional struggle, and this struggle must continue, there are all sort of forces that either hamper or propel the nations to achieve what they envision for the prosperity of their people. The Pakistanis have to realize their impediments and with the same force of realization remove those hurdles, so they can achieve their niche among honourable fraternity of nations.

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Introduction

Punjab was a province of British India from 1849-1947. It was one of the last areas of the Indian subcontinent to fall under British rule. In 1947, Punjab total area was 136,330 sq. miles, and population consisted of 28,418,819.¹ It comprised of the present day areas of the Pakistani Punjab and Islamabad to Delhi.

With the end of British rule in 1947, the province was partitioned between India and Pakistan. According to 1941 census, the population of Punjab consisted of following communities:²

Province	Total Population	Hindus	Schedule Caste	Muslims	Sikhs
Punjab	28,418,819	6,301,737	1,592,320	16,217,742	3,757,401

In Punjab though the Muslims were concentrated mainly in the West and North and the Hindus and Sikhs in the East and South, however, the three communities were thoroughly mixed all over the whole province.³

Historic Background of Punjab

Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (971-1030 A.D.) was the first Muslim emperor of Punjab from whose descendants its control was wrested by Shihab-ud-din Ghauri in 1186. It formed a part of the Delhi Sultanate from 1206 and continued to be a part of the Mughal Empire until the middle of the eighteenth century and it became a conflict amongst the Afghans, the Marathas and the Sikhs. The Marathas their own territory was in Deccan, they have gathered around Delhi to oust the weakened Mughal empire. They took part in power struggle in 1757. Afghan General Ahmad Shah Abdali (1722-1773) fought against Marathas; he fought about eight battles against them and liquidated their power at the third battle of Panipat in 1761; and on the death of Ahmad Shah Abdali. Sikhs began to increase their power until Ranjit Singh (1790-1839) turned Punjab into a strong and independent Sikh kingdom. The death of Ranjit

1 Nripendra Nath Mitra, "The Indian Annual Register", *The Annual Register Office* (Calcutta), Vol.I, (Jan.-June 1947), p.3.

2 M. Rafique Afzal (ed.), *The Case for Pakistan* (Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1979), p.30.

3 H. M. Close, *Atlee, Wavell, Mountbatten and the Transfer of Power* (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 1997), p.32.

Singh ensued disorder in the state. The Sikhs became weak because of internal disorder and ultimately as a result of two wars between the Sikhs and the British. Punjab was annexed under the British suzerainty and it became part of their domain in 1849.⁴

John Lawrence (Lieutenant- Governor of the Punjab 1st January 1859) offered to the people of Punjab that “How should they be governed by sword or by the pen”, as was recorded on the pedestal of a statue at Lahore Museum.⁵ The statement of Lieutenant Governor depicts the authoritarian rule in Punjab. No doubt he was an authoritarian administrator of Punjab, but at the same time he and his teams of man was benevolent and concerned about the welfare of his subjects, his lieutenant John Nicholson rode on a horse from Attock to Peshawar, so he might had first hand knowledge about the people he was ruling upon. To honour his services (John Nicholson) an obelisk of blue grey limestone was constructed, its height is two hundred and thirty feet high, on top of a hill at Margalla Pass.⁶

British in Punjab 1849-1947

The British Punjab boundaries stretched from Afghan frontier to Delhi from 1849- 1892. The British tried to tame the tribal belt of frontier region attached with Afghanistan and failed to administer under their rule. The area of NWFP was also part of Punjab; the five frontier districts (Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and Hazara) were formerly Punjab, subsequently separated in 1901 to form the North West Frontier Province. Delhi district parted from Punjab a decade after when the Government of British India transferred its capital to Delhi (1911) from Calcutta. People of Punjab were strong and sturdy their heritage a blend of many fighting races. The majority, though Rajput were Muslims an assets for armed forces.⁷ The British realized that poor peasants had no land of their own to cultivate, as most of the province largely owned

4 Sachchidananda and Bhattacharya, *A Dictionary of Indian History* (New York, George Braziller, 1967).

5 Dushka Saiyid, *Muslim Women of the British Punjab*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), p.x.

6 Maud Diver, *The Unsung: A Record of British Services in India* (London: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1945), p.68.

7 Maud Diver, *The Unsung: A Record of British Services in India*, William Blackwood & Sons Ltd, London , 1945, p.210.

by proprietors on Eastern side. They were also aware that the Punjab was an old and distinct society, which was been greatly influenced by its geographical location and had a turbulent past. Thus, they planned to develop the province as a model of prosperity and agricultural stability. The canal colonization began in 1885, based on a network of canals, which extended from the rivers and spread over mostly uncultivated plains of western Punjab. As a result of this, the canal irrigated area of Punjab increased from three to fourteen million acres in the period from 1885 to 1947.⁸

To keep the province peaceful and agitation free, the British relied on the rural nature of the province and capitalized on the communal harmony between, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. They improved irrigation by construction of canals and better irrigation methods. Thus they created a new ruling elite by supporting those who had helped them in the annexation of Punjab during British East India Company expeditions and during the Second Sikh War and the “War of Independence” of 1857. The British bestowed on them cash, grants of land and titles for their treachery against their relative. The British helped the new elite to gain the position of authority in the new set-up and consequently won the crucial support of the so-called Punjab Chiefs created by themselves who went on to safeguard the British Raj. The recruits in the army included Hindu Dogras, Sikh Jats and Muslim Rajputs. They served British at Flanders; the deserts of Arabia and in the bush of East Africa in First World War.⁹ The Muslim soldiers fought with the British on most fronts and even confronted Turks on the battlefield.¹⁰ They won over two thousand medals and awards, including the three Victoria Cross.¹¹ The First World War bought a significant change in the governing structure of the province, the peacetime soldiers were insufficient during the war, and the province had to withstand the worst of raising necessary work force. The whole government structure in Punjab was militarized, its

8 Saiyid, *the Muslim Women of the British Punjab*, p.4.

9 Farooq Ahmad Dar, *Communal Riots in the Punjab 1947* (Islamabad: NIHCR, 2003), pp.1-2.

10 Ian Bryant Wells, *Ambassador of Hindu Muslim Unity* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), p.112.

11 Dar, *Communal Riots in the Punjab 1947*, p.3.

activities geared towards the provision of men and material for the war fronts. That process laid the foundation of a militarized bureaucracy in Punjab, which administrative and military tentacles were able to reach into every level of society and the economy.¹²

Punjab Demography

Punjab was one of the two largest (Punjab and Bengal) and most important Muslim majority provinces in India, Punjab figured prominently in the history of Pakistan Movement and illustrated the crosscurrents in the Muslim Politics. Stretching from Delhi to Indus River, British Punjab was distinct by religious and geographical diversity. According to 1931 census, Muslim made up a little over 56 percent of the population, concentrated in the western part of the province. Sikhs were an important minority both within the predominantly Hindu Jullundur division and within the predominantly Muslim Lahore division in the centre of the province. In general, Hindus predominated in the East and Muslims in the West, with Muslims composing over 80 percent of the population in the far western Punjab districts bordering the Jhelum and Indus rivers.¹³ West Punjab had been pastoral; the vast land between the river called barrages was used as the grazing land for animals; the people moving with their herds of animals between the river valleys and the barrages- the flat upland tracts between the rivers. But in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century a great part of the southwestern Punjab had come under canal irrigation – leading both to the settling of pastoralist and to the migration of settlers from central Punjab. This led to the settlement of an important rural Sikh minority in some areas, and to the growth of Hindu-dominated market towns. However, in the canal colonies, as elsewhere in western Punjab, the great majority of the population remained Muslim and rural. As for urban population, with ties to the Mughal past, as Mughul ruler Shah Jahan had great attachment for this town and Mughals had built number of buildings of prominence in Lahore. The Mughal administration often visited and stayed there for long period; for expedition and governmental functions; some of the

12 Tan Tai Young, *Punjab: The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2005), pp.305-06.

13 David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1988), p.6.

officials and others who migrated to Lahore and other areas of Punjab settled there permanently. When British came to these areas they introduced canal system of irrigation that changed the ecology of the area and people who only used to rear animals on the vast land of Punjab began to settle down. Thus, there were two groups in Punjab the urban and the rural group. Then by introducing different taxes on these groups, the British created a cleavage between the two. The rural thought that they were the ones who were burdened with taxes and urban are free of them. The rural were only the then recently settled pastoral population.

Demographically, the urban population, with ties to the Mughal lineage to only then recently settled pastoral migration and the converts formed the urban social milieu. In the face of this diversity, Islam had historically served as a symbol of unity in a larger way. Even after the establishment of British rule, Islam continued to play the unifying role although, strongly influenced by the colonial state, probably British constitutional reforms made major communities of India more conscious of their separate identities.¹⁴

British rule in Punjab, showed how the British attempted to build an indigenous hierarchical ideology of state authority by appealing directly to the political primacy of local Punjabi identities. The political role of Islam in British Punjab was due to the distinctive cultural relationship established by the British between the state and Punjabi society.¹⁵

The political conflict after 1936 was that Sikander Hayat Khan in Punjab led the unionist party, though his party had comfortable majority but Congress leaders treated them harshly as in over-all India scenario Congress was in majority. The Congress hold the sway in eight provinces out of eleven; the Muslims felt the Congress wrath which latter led directly to the creation of Pakistan. Rural Muslims' interests dominated Punjabi politics under the banner of the Unionists party controlled the votes of rural Muslims of selected section of society. Faced with increasing conflict within the structure of imperial power, Muslim leaders sought in the concept of Pakistan a new symbolic Islamic foundation for the political

14 *Ibid.*, p.8.

15 *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

order. The demand for Pakistan reflected both an ideology of Muslim “national” solidarity rooted in the new institutions of urban, public life and a response to long standing tensions in Muslim politics.¹⁶

The idea of separate Muslim state within or outside India was not a new idea though it got some prominence in December 1930, the Muslim League held its annual session in Allahabad. The Muslim League at that time was not prominent for its activities at party level; however, session was unusual because it was presided over by a poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal who delivered an unusual address. In his presidential speech, Iqbal surveyed the political scene and illuminated it with philosophical insight. In striking words, he indicated the goal toward which the conscious and unconscious striving of the Muslim community was taking them in conclusion of his speech he said;

I would like to see the Punjab, North West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.¹⁷

The idea itself was not new. In 1920, Muhammad Abdul Qadir Bilgrami had advocated “the division of the Subcontinent between the Hindus and Muslims even giving a list of the districts fundamentally not too different from the present boundaries of East and West Pakistan.”¹⁸ Three years later that was 1923, in his evidence before the enquiry committee, Sardar Gul Muhammad Khan of Dera Ismail Khan had opposed the partition of India by which the Muslims were to get the area from Peshawar to Agra.¹⁹ In 1924, Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the founders of the Hindu Mahasabha, had suggested the partition of India between Hindus and Muslims. Nevertheless, those earlier tentative proposals had not received any attention. However, in 1930 for the first time Dr. Muhammad Iqbal a person with high intellectual stature and prestige expounded a

16 *Ibid.*, p.9.

17 Chaudri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (Lahore: Service Book Club, 1988), p.25.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

scheme for the establishment of a Muslim state from an authoritative platform. A new angle of vision had transformed the picture. Muslims saw themselves as a nation entitled to build a just social order based on their religion with a homeland of their own.²⁰ Jinnah was a political strategist with a perfect sense of timing. In Muslim League session at Patna, he said in December 1938, 'one has to play his game as on a chess board.' Without fully organizing the Muslim League and making it a power to reckon with such a demand [like Pakistan] was likely to backfire.²¹

Constitutional Development and Classification of Separate Identities: Beginning of Self-Government in India

The initiative taken toward self-government in British India was in the late 19th century, it was the appointment of British counselors to advise British viceroys and the establishment of Provincial Councils with Indian members; the British subsequently widened participation in legislative councils with Indian Councils Act of 1892. Municipal Corporation and district boards created for local administration, they included elected Indian members.

The Government of India Act of 1909 also known as the Morley Minto Reforms increased the number of additional members in the Viceroy's Legislative Council from sixteen to sixty. Of these, twenty-seven indirectly elected. The Provincial Legislatures Councils number was increased. The Muslims had the right of separate representation in the provinces.²² Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India from 1905 to 1910, on the demand of Muslim of India for separate electorate, he said "let us not forget that the difference between Mohammedan and Hindus is not mere difference of articles of religious faith and dogma. Their difference of life, in tradition, in history, in all social aspects, as well as articles of belief that constituted a community. Do not let us forget what makes it interesting and even exciting. Do not let us forget that in talking of Hinduism and Islam, we are dealing with and are bought face to face with mightiest forces that through all the centuries and

20 *Ibid.*, p.25.

21 Waheed-uz-Zaman, *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah: Myth and Reality* (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1985), p.24.

22 Hussain, *A History of the Peoples of Pakistan* (Karachi: OUP, 2006), p.396.

ages have moulded the fortunes of great states and the destinies of countless millions of mankind.”²³

Indians, were previously been appointed to legislative councils, but after the reforms, some were elected to them. At the centre, the majority of council members continued to be government-appointed official, and the viceroy was in not responsible to the legislature.

At the provincial level, the elected members together with unofficial appointees, outnumbered the appointed official, but responsibility of the governor to the legislature was not contemplated. Morley made it clear in introducing the Indian legislature to the British Parliament that the parliamentary self-government was not the goal of British government.

The Morley-Minto Reforms were a milestone. Systematically the election principles introduced for membership in Indian legislative councils. The ‘franchise’ was very limited. Lord Minto kept his promise to the Muslims, and ensured about separate electorates. The Councils were essentially advisory, with no control over the executive, and the result was an increase in the demand for self-government rather than curbing it.²⁴ The communal electorate later extended to other communities and made a political factor of the Indian tendency toward group identification through religion. In the Provinces the Muslims were to have 50 per cent of the Indian elective seats in the Punjab; 30 per cent in the United Provinces; 40 per cent in Bengal; 25 per cent in Bihar; 15 per cent in the Central Provinces; 15 per cent in Madras; and 33.3 per cent in Bombay; Both in the Provinces and at the Centre the Muslims were to have their own separate electorates. No bill affecting a particular community should be proceeded within any council if three-fourths of the representatives of that community opposed it.²⁵

23 G. Allana (compiled and ed.), *Pakistan Movement: Historic Documents* (Karachi: Paradise Subscription Agency, 1968), p.24.

24 Richard Symonds, *The Making of Pakistan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p.44. John Morley was the Secretary of State from 1905-10 and Gilbert Elliot forth Earl of Minto was Viceroy; their reforms allowed Indians to be elected to Legislative Council.

25 *Ibid.*, p.45.

Elections took place in 1921, under the Montagu-Chelmsford Constitution. From this time onwards, each election in the Subcontinent split political leaders into two groups, those who called for participation in the electoral process and subsequent government, and those who instructed their followers to abandon the polls and take to the streets. In the new reforms, the British attempted to shift attention from the central government (where they retained almost total power) to the provinces and from the cities (with their trouble-making, westernized educated middle classes) to the countryside (where they still hoped for gratitude and loyalty from both the landed gentry and peasantry).

The educated middle class of India played the same role that performed by the bourgeoisie of French Revolution. Throughout British stay in India, they faced resistance from this segment of population. The natives demanded nothing less than sovereign position in the state. The implication of spread of western political ideas to India was that, some of the leaders of Muslim Community became more knowledgeable. As early as 1909, if not earlier, they had foreseen that the development of representative institution would eventually lead to the introduction of full-fledged parliamentary system based on the British model. Their alarm at the prospect was due to the recognition that it would be governed by ministers responsible to the elected representatives of the majority; and in the Indian conditions, they argued, majority rule would be in effect the rule of the Hindu majority, with the Muslim minority in perpetual subordination.

In 1909, therefore they asked for and obtained safeguards in the form of separate electorates for Muslims, from where they alone, would elect representatives to seats reserved for them. This, of course, was radically inconsistent with any comprehensive notion of democracy, embracing, as it should not only the principle of majority rule but also the complementary principle that minorities must feel assured of fair treatment at the hand of majority.²⁶

Montagu Chelmsford Reforms 1919 increased the franchise and transferred the control of certain subjects to provincial

26 E. W. R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India 1945-47* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1954), pp.11-12.

administration. In those circumstances, the British decided to establish an organized political party in the Punjab, which could strive for the protection of their interests. Their friendship with the rural elite of the province came in handy. That, in fact, paved the way for the creation of the Unionist Party. The Unionist Party's successes depended on a careful balance of the interest of its Muslim property owners and Hindu Jat sections of the society.

Mian Fazl-i-Hussain, a lawyer involved in the early activities of both the Punjab Congress and the Muslim League, was convinced that the Punjab political arithmetic necessitated inter-communal co-operation as no single community could command an absolute majority. Until 1946, the Unionist, with the help of the British, dominated the politics of the Punjab. The party functioned more as a loose coalition of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh landowners than as a political party in the modern sense. It drew support from large landowners and peasant proprietors and appealed to Hindus of the Eastern Punjab as well as Muslims of the Western Punjab. The Unionist party dominated by Muslim landowners but some rural Hindus and Sikhs also played an important role in its development. Chaudhary Chhotu Ram's (1882-1945) oratory provided a populist appeal for the party's platform. He stood head and shoulder above Muslim Unionists and addressed crowd of peasants without the use of a microphone.²⁷

World War One and Indian Struggle for Self-Government

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Punjab had 100,000 soldiers serving in the British army, and during the war, the British forcefully enlisted many young Punjabis for war fronts. The Punjabi soldiers rendered regular services in defending the British Empire against the Central powers. Punjab also actively supported the British war-effort by extending huge amount of loans; and each of its district provided men and materials to the beleaguered British.²⁸ First World War proved to be a watershed in the imperial relationship between Britain and India. 1.4 million Indian and

27 Dar, *Communal Riots in the Punjab 1947*, 5. Under the terms of Lucknow pact, the Muslims had sacrificed their majority position in the Punjab Legislature to secure weightage for the Muslim minority areas.

28 Iftikhar Haider Malik, *Sikandar Hayat Khan A Political Biography* (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1985), p.17.

British soldiers of the British Indian Army took part in the war and their participation had wider cultural fallout. By the end of the war, more than a million 1,096,013 Indians had served abroad in one capacity or the other.²⁹

In 1916 in the face of new strength demonstrated by the moderate nationalists with the signing of the Lucknow Pact; the founding of the Home Rule Movement which was led by Annie Besant and was supported by both Muslim League and Congress, demanding for Self-Rule in India within British Empire like in Australia, Canada, South Africa. The First World War was disastrous for Indians as British had not provided them with up-to-date training or weapons ever since 1857 upheaval and it resulted in high number of Indian casualties. Lord Chelmsford cautioned that the Government of India needed to be more responsive to Indian opinion. In August 1917, the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, made a declaration in the House of Commons. Which aroused high hopes in Indian nationalist circles, that, the British aim of “increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of British Empire.”³⁰ Although the plan envisioned limited self-government in the provinces with India emphatically within the British Empire, it represented the first British proposal for any form of representative government in a non-white colony.³¹

Communal Award 1932

The communal award for the provinces, announced by the British Government in April 1932, gave separate electorates and reserved seats for Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs, Indian-Christians and Anglo-Indians to minorities. Thus, in Bombay, where the Muslims were less than 10 per cent of the population, had 30 reserved seats in the Assembly out of 175, a proportion of 17 per cent; whereas in the Punjab, where they were 57 percent of the population, they were

29 M.Yaqub Mirza, *The Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (Islamabad, National Book Foundation, 1999), pp.19-20.

30 Richard Symond, *The Making of Pakistan*, p.45.

31 *Ibid.*

awarded only 86 out of 175, too fewer than a majority. An award for the Centre, made in November 1932, gave Muslims one-third in the central legislation though they were only quarter of the British India population. It was this numerical arrangement upon which the communities and parties in India could not agree among themselves. This set the pattern of representation, especially in the provinces later used for the partition of India.³²

Government of India Act 1935

The deliberations of the Round Table Conferences spreading over three years from autumn of 1930 to winter of 1932-1933. Due to those discussions, the British Parliament published a White Paper, in 1933, which resulted in the Government of India Act, 1935, which provided for a “federation of India”. The Act granted self-government and substantial autonomy to the provinces. It envisioned a federal form of government, with one third of the seats in Central legislature reserved for Muslims, and one-third for nominees of the Indian princes. The number of qualified voters increased drastically. This actually was the voluntary giving up some part of imperial authority. The power so shed transferred into Indians hands, consequently, placing upon the government an obligation to obtain the co-operation of locals for proper administration of the Raj.³³ Although departments like defense, foreign affairs, criminal law, communications and revenue was retained by the Central Government in New Delhi. Other departments like public health, education, land-revenue and local self-government transferred to the provinces. The core of the Act was the establishment of autonomy, with a representative Parliamentary system of government, for eleven British Indian provinces.³⁴

In clearing the way for this constitutional system, however, three other important decisions were embodied in the Act of 1935; that were Burma and Aden were separated from India; Sind was separated from Bombay and Orissa was separated from Bihar

32 *Ibid.*, pp.48-49.

33 Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, p.27.

34 H.V.Hodson, *The Graeat Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan* (Karachi: OUP, 1997), p.48.

and were made separate provinces; secondly, the authority of crown was removed from Government of India. Thirdly, a decision was as to give communal representation in the new legislatures.

Sikander -Jinnah Pact

The Muslim League had failed to seek any significant number of seats in the provincial election of 1937; it looked like the demise of Muslim League in the politics of Punjab. Jinnah called a conference of the Muslim League in Lucknow on 15-18 October 1937, to which Sikander and his newly elected Muslim Unionists members invited as well. Sikander Hayat accepted the invitation, went to Lucknow, admitted the supremacy of Jinnah, and signed an agreement called as Sikander- Jinnah Pact. Out of many clauses in the agreement there was also a clause that ‘all Muslim member of Unionist Party to be advised to become the members of Muslim League’. This clause in Jinnah-Sikander Pact changed the political scenario of Punjab.³⁵ Thus, Muslim League’s influence in Punjab politics became apparent.

On 14 September 1939, Congress demanded for total independence, which was ignored by the British Government in India. Then a month later on 18 October 1939, Viceroy Linlithgow assured Muslims that “full weight would be given to their views and interests.” He reiterated the offer of dominion status for India somewhere in the unspecified future. At the same time, he shifted the blame for failure to achieve constitutional advance squarely on Indian politicians. The Congress high command then had no option but to ask its eight provincial ministries to resign; they did so on 10 November 1939 and the Governors took charge of their administration under Section 93 of India Act.³⁶

British Policy, 1937-1947

In 1939, as in 1914, the British Government did not take the Indian leadership in confidence about pushing Indians into their war, and took India into the Second World War arbitrarily. The consequential resignation of the Congress ministries, and the growing division of opinion between the Congress and Muslim

35 K. C. Yadav, *India Divided 1947: Who did it? Why? How? and What Now?* (New Delhi: Hope India, n.d.), p.211.

36 Aysha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, Lahore (Sang-e-Meel Publication, 1992), p.48.

League produced a deadlock, which remained unbroken throughout the war. Despite successive British efforts, notably the Cripps plan of 1942 and in the three-tiered proposal of 1946 at this stage the British Government, was placing its emphasis on responsible rather than strictly representative government, and on the maintenance of the unity of India. It failed to carry the Congress and Muslim League with it. Congress leadership was more concerned with the struggle for achieving effective power, and while the Muslim League was battling the implications for them of representative government.³⁷

On May 10 1940, Prime-Minister Churchill took office. He described Hindu-Muslim antagonism as ‘bulwark of British Rule in India’, and noted that, were it to be resolved, their concord would result in ‘the united communities jointly showing us the door’.³⁸

From Viceroy Lord Linlithgow the Indian viceroyalty handed over to Lord Wavell. He served India for three and a half years from October 1943 to March 1947. He had to face difficult and momentous period of office.³⁹ The political problem occupied Wavell’s mind from the first moment of his appointment as Viceroy, and during his last two years of office it came to dominate all else. At the very outset, he was confronted with a famine in Bengal and thereafter, right till the end, amid all his other duties he had to meet repeated threats of famine and chronic shortage of food, cloth, coal and other essentials. As soon as the war ended, there were, as he had foreseen, a renewal of political agitation and popular discontent, which followed by strikes, outbreaks of disorder and both anti-government and communal, and the threat of rebellion or civil war.⁴⁰

On 31 January 1947, a letter of C.R. Attlee, the Prime Minister of Britain, informed Lord Wavell about his removal from duty mainly due to his disagreement with the policy of Her Majesty’s Government (HMG). Further, there was an addition that his was a

37 C. H. Philips, *The Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858-1947 Select Documents* (London: OUP, 1965), p.337.

38 Alex Von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire* (London, Simon and Schuster, 2007), p.109.

39 Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell The Viceroy’s Journal* (Karachi: OUP, 1974), p.xi.

40 *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

war appointment. Wavell was not happy with this forced removal and he replied to Attlee on 5th February that

You are causing me to be removed because of what you term a wide divergence of policy. The divergence, as I see it, is between my wanting a definite policy for the interim period and HMG refusing to give it to me one. I, will not at this time enter into further argument on this. I do not of course question your decision to make a change. I have no desire except to serve the state to the best of my ability; obviously I cannot continue to do so if I have not the confidence of the Government in power.⁴¹

Lord Wavell's successor who finally negotiated the transfer of power was Lord Mountbatten. Wavell's role seemed waning as compared to Mountbatten, for without any justification whatsoever, neither the British prime minister nor the Indian leaders trusted him (Wavell). In fact, Wavell's virtues made him unsuitable for the office of viceroy. He was blunt in the face of deviousness. He still thought that, as viceroy, his was the ultimate responsibility for what went on in India. He was a caretaker who refused to act like one. He believed, that 'he had a double purpose to carry out British thinking that they should lose a lot by leaving India at that point in time, and that feeling was undoubtedly wide spread there,'⁴² he mused that the government of India could not neglect its responsibilities to those it still ruled over. Unfortunately, the time was not reasonable, nor was their any precedent for the events in which he enmeshed; no great empire had ever negotiated itself away after emerging victorious from a major war. Wavell was naïve enough to think that everyone should be as honest as he was and that India's leaders should be thinking of India and not of themselves. Wavell's greatness was over-shadowed by the reputation of the man who took his place.

Lord Mountbatten advantage over Wavell was considerable. He was extrovert, handsome, and had a natural charm. A relative of the King Emperor, he had brought to India some of that mysterious glamour of royalty, which appeals so much to Indians.⁴³ On 20th February Prime Minister Attlee made an announcement in the

41 *Ibid.*, p.498.

42 Michael Edwardes, *The Last Years of British India* (London: Cassel, 1963), p.94.

43 *Ibid.*, p.95.

House of Commons transferring power in British India to Indian hands by a date which would not be later than June 1948.⁴⁴

Britain's Condition in 1947

The most important factor for empire relenting power was its resources. Britain was facing tough times after the Second World War, its economy was shattered, and everything was rationed from food items to clothes. According to Alex Von Tunzelmann author of *Indian Summer*, that there was very little popular understanding about what was going on in Punjab, and even less interest shown. The British had recently emerged from six years of war. Hundreds of thousands of British killed, and millions wounded. Their normal industry battered, their towns destroyed, their families broken up and stuck back together. They were facing strictures of rationing, which got tighter. To the ordinary people, the Empire was superfluous setup. Edie Rutherford, a forty-three years old house-wife from Sheffield, had a typically indifferent reaction to the mass of press coverage about the effective end of British empire and the independence of 400 million of her fellow subjects. "I swear most fellow couldn't care less, 'she wrote in her diary on 16th August 1947.' And I resent the inference that we had enslaved them up till then". Churchill's warnings about indignant Britons awakening sharply to defend their empire came to nothing. Even he himself had relented. 'I do not think we shall lose very much leaving India at the present time, and that feeling is undoubtedly widespread here,' he had mused in an unsent letter to Jinnah.⁴⁵

British Economy in 1947

On 8 May, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced that Britain would freeze further payments on all its war debt until the creditors agreed to reductions. The exchequer was more than three billion pounds in the red, thanks to the war; it owed Egypt 450 million pounds, Ireland 250 million pounds, Australia and New Zealand 200 million pounds each and further enormous sum to Argentina, Norway and Brazil. The largest creditor of all, with a

44 Mitra, "The Indian Annual Register", pp.142-43.

45 Alex Von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire*, London: Simon and Schuster, 2007), p.256.

billion and quarter pounds owed, was India.⁴⁶ The British government had made it clear that they would send no troops or resources to India. Britain's balance of trade with India was in red by over 50 million pounds. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton, had announced that imports of tobacco, newsprint, petrol and some food items were not available. All Mountbatten could propose was the setting up of multi-faith secular committee, which sat in Delhi and resolve that things would be better if everyone stopped killing each other.⁴⁷

On 18th July 1947, the king signed the India Independence Act in London, and the Mountbatten celebrated their silver wedding anniversary in Delhi. Edwina was touched by the message from Gandhi, he wrote Dear Sister, and 'I hope that your joint careers were blossoming', however they were not getting along well. Dickie would come up to Edwina room every night to kiss her goodnight before returning to work. Every night, there would be a row.⁴⁸

Personal Factor

A few months before Mountbatten's went to India, their marriage was in one of its healthier phases. Photographs of the time show them smiling, affectionate and relaxed, and their letters revealed a matching picture. A few weeks afterwards, they reached a nadir, and by the beginning of June were constantly fighting. It is difficult to believe that the turbulence did not effected on Mountbatten professionally- especially as he had to work closely with Nehru and Gandhi, two men whose company his wife preferred than to his. Edwina had not wanted to be in India in the first place, and in the first few weeks of their arrival in India put pressure on her husband to ensure that they would be on their way back to Britain as soon as possible. Dickie had always striven to impress her with his achievements at work. Perhaps, if he could carry out the transfer of power swiftly and efficiently enough, he would be able to save his marriage.⁴⁹

46 *Ibid.*, p.192.

47 *Ibid.*, p.206.

48 *Ibid*

49 *Ibid.*, p.202

It was Edwina's duty to charm the Mahatma, which she did; and he charmed her. His 'dear sister', as he called her. From that point on cordial relations between the Viceroy's house and Gandhi were maintained by Edwina, who regularly visited Gandhi's hut in the polluted Bhangi Colony, home to many of Delhi's untouchables. Dickie never went.⁵⁰ Abul Kalam Azad wrote in his book *India Wins Freedom* that I often wonder how Nehru was influenced to agree on India's partition. He was a man of principle but he was also amenable and impulsive to personal influence. Lady Mountbatten was highly intelligent and had an attractive and friendly temperament. She admired her husband's position greatly and in many cases tried to interpret his thoughts to those who at first would not agree with him.⁵¹ Probably her influence made Nehru to change his stance and he reluctantly agreed on partition of India.

In 1946 Mountbatten was serving in British Navy as Supreme Commander, however, he was hesitant to accept the gigantic task of becoming India's viceroy and that too at that ignoble stage, a fear loomed upon him, 'what if he fails?' However, after much persuasion his naval superior relented that he would be allowed to return after his two years leave time as Supreme Commander.⁵² Earl Listowel (Secretary of State for India and Burma) argued that Mountbatten could influence India to stay in the Commonwealth and to negotiate defence arrangements that would be beneficial for Britain.⁵³

Punjab Elections 1945-46

The elections of 1945-46 were the litmus test for both Muslims and non-Muslims whether they wanted independence from British rule or not? Muslims of India were eager for independence from British as well as Hindu dominance. For people like Nehru it was not easy to accept Pakistan independence, during his election campaign at Lucknow he said, "The cry of Pakistan is an imaginary slogan. The Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab and minorities of Bengal

50 *Ibid.*, p.186.

51 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1989), p.198.

52 Philip Zeigler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), p.354.

53 Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer*, p.256.

are deadly against it, and no one can force it upon them.”⁵⁴ Indian leaders Pandit Pant said during Lucknow election campaign that Congress had call a halt to the policy of appeasement of the Muslims League on the question of Pakistan. He said that historic ‘Quit India’ resolution still formed part of the Congress programme for achieving independence and that the Congress had emerged stronger many times over “after these three years of ruthless repression by the Government.”⁵⁵ He said League cry of ‘Islam in danger’ was not at all justified. Religion had nothing to do with fight for freedom. The Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind the premier religious institution of the Muslims was with the Congress. Pundit Pant declared that Muslim League had no foundation. Muslims living in villages had not even heard of the name of Muslim League or its leader Mr. Jinnah.

Lord Wavell wrote to Lord Pethick Lawrence in a letter dated 9 October, about Congress election campaign and their bitterness towards the British Government and Muslim League; however, he was concerned about the war cries that were significant. He wrote, “We do not know what Vallabhbai Patel really meant when he said in some of his Bombay speeches that he promises of complete independence within a few years”.⁵⁶

Muhammad Ali Jinnah on 7 December 1945 said from Bombay reported *Dawn newspaper Delhi*, that labour Government was still in dark as to the crux of India’s constitutional problem and were trying to seek light through the circuitous method of sending out a British Parliamentary delegation under the auspices of the Empire Parliamentary Association. Mr. Jinnah suggested that the British Government should apply their mind definitely to the division of India and the establishment of Pakistan and Hindustan that meant freedom for Hindus and Musalmans.⁵⁷

In London, debates were then in process, about India’s intended elections in 1945 which would lay the foundation of a new future for

54 *Dawn*, New Delhi, 7th October 1945.

55 A Number of Congress leaders were in jail during Second World War 1942-45. *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 6th October 1945.

56 For detail see Extract from Private & Secret letters from Lord Wavell to Lord Pethick Lawrence, dated 9th October, 1945.

57 *Dawn*, Delhi, 7.12.45.

India. In one of the 'House of Common' debates, Mr. Wyatt, member of British Parliament made following observation about the Indian elections, he said that he had to refer to an important point that was about the 'conduction of elections'. He quoted Prime Minister Attlee's statement that the election in India would be free and fair. Wyatt thought it was a tribute to government officials in India, both British and Indian. He observed that there was no general complaint about any official partiality. Everyone appreciated their devotion to duties, Wyatt told the House that a number of Indians themselves had approached him and appreciated the impartiality of officials towards contending parties.

However, he was alarmed when reported that government officials were taking sides in Punjab elections. He elaborated that in Punjab the government headed by Unionists. The Unionist party was known for its pro-British stance. Wyatt pondered that perhaps Unionist was the only party in India that was against nationalism and had a desire that British should rule India. The British administration reciprocated and it was convenient for administration to reinstate Unionist government in Punjab. However, unionist comeback was not convincing (due to few seats) and in consequence, the province followed instability.⁵⁸ According to Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Punjab was the corner stone of Pakistan scheme.⁵⁹ Had the Punjabi Muslim not supported the league separatist demands Pakistan could not have come into existence.⁶⁰

From the above narrations, it can be concluded that in Punjab Muslims had to work very hard and they were under constant pressure because the complete official machinery of Punjab was against the creation of Pakistan. The Parliamentarians in London also realized this factor and they pointed out the fact that British impartiality was

58 *House of Commons Official Report*, Column 2658, OIOC, Cat No. L/P&J/8/470, dated 6th December 1945.

59 Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents 1906-1947*, Vol. II (Islamabad: NIHCR, 2007), 376. Also see Kaniz F. Yusuf and others (ed.), *Pakistan Resolution Revisited* (Islamabad, NIHCR, 1990), p.161.

60 Ian A. Talbot, "The Growth of the Muslim League in the Punjab, 1937-46", in Mushirul Hasan, *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (New Delhi: OUP, 2001), p.235.

susceptible in the case of Punjab when Unionists well known for their loyalty to Her Majesty's Government; the reports of threats from different constituencies elaborated how far Britain conducted fair and free elections in Punjab. These factors authenticated the fact that formation of Pakistan was more of a miracle than the so-called fair intentions of British. The Punjab Government played all their cards to fail somehow or the other the Pakistan scheme. No doubt, there were honest people too in the British administration of India but they were not in a position to overcome the vile schemes of unscrupulous elements. The non-Muslims with reference to Punjab Hindus and Sikhs jointly tried to corner the Muslims in every constituency; on the top of it, the Governor of Punjab was sympathetic towards non-Muslims.

He made it a point not to let Muslim League lead the province. The government machinery used every tactics in the elections of 1945-46 to stop people from voting for Muslim League.⁶¹ Despite all coercion Muslim League in Punjab won 75/84 Muslim seats.

Punjab

Number of seats	175
Number of general seats	42 (of which 8 are reserved for schedule castes)
Number of Sikhs Seats	31
Number of Muhammadans Seats	84

The balance is made up of seats of minorities, Special interests and Women.

Party Position after Elections

Party	Number of Seats
Congress	51
Unionists	21
Muslim League	75
Panthic (Akali) Sikhs	23
Independents	5
Total	175 ⁶²

61 Amarjit Singh (ed.), *Jinnah and Punjab* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, 2007), 202-203. For further details read Begum Viqar-un-Nisa Noon's letter to Jinnah, dated 10th October 1945, explaining Punjab political situation, Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *The Punjab Story 1940-47* (Islamabad: National Documentation Centre, 2009), pp.363-65.

62 *Ibid.*

After the elections, the Punjab government made every effort to keep Muslim League away from power corridors. The Governor of the province demanded Mamdot to Approach Sikhs and Hindus for support as he thought he (Mamdot) would not be able to rule the province without their support.

By 1947, British found it difficult to go on with the Indian burden. In Punjab, the British headed by Jenkins used all sorts of tactics to keep Muslim League at side-lines, Jenkins succeeded by not handing over power to the majority party of the province even after Unionist leader Khizr Hayat resigned, but events at that time made it clear that the honour and impartiality of British were at stake. They should hand over power to Indian leaders according to their respective wishes. The British accepted the verdict of electorate reluctantly. The abrupt flight they choose had affected the whole region of South Asia. The year of 1947 would live in the minds of millions as the time during which the British policy fulfilled the dreadful prophecy made by Rabindra Nath Tagore: "The wheels of fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian Empire. However, what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery! When the streams of their centuries of 'administration run dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will they leave behind them!"⁶³ Perhaps, it was a cruel verdict uttered in 1941. However, 1947 proved the axiom. Now, after more than sixty years the seeds of distrust sown by the British arbitrator have grown into nuclear-laced rockets ready to annihilate two countries that are Pakistan and India, suspicious of each other's motives.

63 Mitra, *The Indian Annual Register*", p.96.