

Planning for the Partition of India 1947: A Scuttled Affair

Rabia Umar Ali*

Abstract

The history of the struggle for independence and partition of India from British stronghold needs an authentic and objective analysis not only of the course that it followed or the humanistic perspective that it developed but the sheer manner in which it was planned by the departing authorities. It was not the act but the way it was performed that has brought a whole aura of negativism to be associated with such a historic episode leading many to state and believe that it was a mistake. Partition needs to be salvaged from such a myopic approach to be redefined as the most significant event in the evolution of South Asia as a socio-political unit. There is hardly any doubt that the Indian subcontinent was partitioned on the forceful demand of the Muslims represented by Jinnah and the Muslim League. It was neither the desire of the British nor the dream of the Hindu led Congress to see India divided and separate states emerging out of a single and untied entity. The fact that Pakistan was, nonetheless, created speaks volumes of a leader's perseverance and a nation's will to sacrifice for the cause of independence. The British could not reconcile to the ending of a Raj they had come to regard as their most prized possession and the Hindus could hardly accept their motherland breaking up and the Muslims gaining a land of their own. The plan to bring about such a partition that did not enjoy the willing acceptance of two out of three major parties involved, therefore, offers an interesting

* Assistant Professor, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

study, for therein lie most of the troubles that a nascent state of Pakistan had to encounter soon after independence.

The systematic exploration¹ that the partition of the Indian subcontinent demands vis-à-vis its planning and implementation has largely escaped the attention of writers and scholars of Indian history. Political accounts of official policies and procedures that precipitated partition have generally formed the core of major studies made on the subject.² The human dimension constituting the violent aftermath of partition and resulting from a hasty planning and an even more ill-conceived implementation has also not been catalogued in detail and density that its scale and historical importance might warrant.³ It is indeed true that issues relating to the historic event that produced two new nation-states on the subcontinent in 1947 have received comparatively greater importance in the recent years and a kind of ‘partition industry’ seems to have been set in motion. Nevertheless, most works still concentrate on the political or rather official aspect of it. Some social and cultural studies highlighting the ‘human dimension’ have surfaced in the last decade or so, but the overtones ascribe a rather melancholy if not an altogether macabre touch to the division of India as if its happening was indeed a misdeed. Some scholars of Modern South Asia have even begun to use the term ‘holocaust’ for the tumultuous episode of the partition either in a direct context or by assumption. Works of Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Gyanendra Pandey, Urvashi Butalia and most recently Madhav Godbole are some instances. Such studies having emerged in the last two decades and mainly falling in the realm of social history have attempted to change the mind set in which partition was so far understood. Literary efforts had always been there to capture through drama the agony of millions who crossed over

1 History of the partition is fast developing into a distinct discipline that can no longer remain confined to the description and analysis of just a few subjects that largely fall into the realm of official narrative. The exploration of all aspects that went into the making of this historic episode and thereby initiated and recorded the first and the largest decolonization operation need to be reviewed particularly in the light of new evidence that has surfaced in the recent years.

2 Suvir Kaul, ed., *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p.4.

3 *Ibid.*, p.9.

from one land to another or lost their lives. But society becoming an academic subject of post partition milieu is a recent and fast developing phenomenon highlighting human sufferings in all their agonizing details. There is no denying the fact that partition was a painful event⁴ in the light of the violence and dislocation it brought in its wake with thousands killed and millions displaced, yet not a ‘tragedy’⁵ as some prefer to regard it and for which catharsis has not yet come about.⁶ Moreover, partition must also be considered synonymous to a nationalist struggle that culminated in independence and freedom for a great multitude of souls held in bondage for over a century. The history of this struggle needs an authentic and objective analysis not only of the course that it followed or the humanistic perspective that it developed but the sheer manner in which it was planned by the departing authorities. It was not the act but the way it was performed that has brought a whole aura of negativism to be associated with such a historic episode leading many to state and believe that it was a mistake. Partition needs to be salvaged from such a myopic approach to be redefined as the most significant event in the evolution of South Asia as a socio-political unit.⁷

The Indian subcontinent was partitioned on the forceful demand of the Muslims represented by Jinnah and the Muslim League. It was neither the desire of the British nor the dream of the Hindu led Congress to see India divided and separate states emerging out of a single and united entity. The fact that Pakistan

4 Claude Markovitz, “The Partition of India”, trans. from French by Stephen Wright, in *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition*, eds., Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes and Rada Ivekovic (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.50.

5 There are quite a few intellectual circles that tend to believe in the division of the subcontinent as an event that only brought misfortune and ill-luck to the region and to its inhabitants and that it could have been avoided to save millions of innocent lives. Such opinions have found favour with all those elements whose acceptance of partition, and in particular the birth of Pakistan, was reluctant and not without serious reservations. Mushirul Hasan’s two recent edited works *Inventing Boundaries* (2000) and *India’s Partition* (2001) carry articles that question the need and basis of partition and the intentions and motives of Jinnah in demanding a separate state for the Muslims.

6 Claude Markovitz, ‘The Partition of India’, p.52.

7 Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947: Contour of Freedom* (London: Rutledge Curzon, 2004), p.1.

was, nonetheless, created speaks volumes of a leader's perseverance and a nation's will to sacrifice for the cause of independence. The British could not reconcile to the ending of a Raj they had come to regard as their most prized possession and the Hindus could hardly accept their motherland breaking up and the Muslims gaining a land of their own. The plan to bring about such a partition that did not enjoy the willing acceptance of two out of three major parties involved,⁸ therefore, offers an interesting study for therein lie most of the troubles that the nascent state of Pakistan had to encounter soon after independence.

The question as to 'Why' India was divided has been debated upon from almost all conceivable angles and in almost all the studies that have been conducted on the subject. It is the essential theme on which revolves the political writings of Modern South Asia. It is the issue of 'How' India was partitioned that has received much less of any serious attention. More than sixty years have elapsed since the occurrence and that definitely gives sufficient historical period to reflect upon its ramifications.⁹ In other words most of the studies conducted so far on partition revolve around factual details and the analysis of the outcome of this historic deed. Very few have deliberated upon it as an act in its own right with direct emphasis upon its planning and execution. Though many would find no benefit in repeating old and worn out arguments of apportioning blame for the communal frenzy that accompanied the execution of Partition Plan,¹⁰ it nevertheless,

8 Percival Spear, "Britain's Transfer of Power in India", *Pacific Affairs*, vol.31, no.2 (Jan. 1958), p.175.

9 Yunas Samad, "Reflections on Partition: Pakistan Perspective", in *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the subcontinent*", eds., Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.375.

10 *Ibid*, pp.375-376. For this communal frenzy none other than the last Viceroy must take full responsibility of, as he was unable to control a situation for which he had all the authority, power and resources at his disposal. H.V. Hodson in his *Great Divide* has tried to exonerate him from the burden of the devouring flame of violence that engulfed the subcontinent on the eve of partition and was the direct result of British callousness and neglect of duties at probably the most crucial time in South Asian history. Others, however, have not been as generous in their appreciation of the last Viceroy's accomplishments. Ayesha Jalal in *The Sole Spokesman* clearly labels Mounbatten's operation as an 'ignominious scuttles' and 'a complete failure of responsible political leadership.' Penderel Moon's first hand narrative *Divide and Quit* tells the same story. Ch. Muhammad Ali, Andrew

remains a reality which has for long suffered unfortunate scholarly neglect and unwarranted academic evasiveness. The onus of partition has to be appropriately delegated to the rightful doer, as it entails matters of intense and very sensitive nature. The British having reluctantly accepted partition found themselves in a tight niche; the desire to appease the Congress on the one hand and to fulfill the Muslim League demand for Pakistan, on the other required a level of impartiality and administrative acumen, the combination of which was no minor task. A subcontinent was being divided with a great chunk of its population and assets. The planning to execute and implement this was indeed a job that needed sufficient time and efforts of a high caliber. The framework that was ultimately approved to work out the modalities of the division of India, by authorities in London, compromised on both with the result that partition became synonymous to a colossal tragedy.

Some writers of partition history hold the view that the Indian leaders, mostly tired old men, sacrificed the national cause by seizing the first opportunity to grasp power and thus hastily accepted partition of India.¹¹ It is, however, the definition of this 'national cause' and its interpretation that has largely made this argument controversial and debatable. Indian destiny might have been in the hands of these, as some tend to believe, worn out men who were only jockeying for power,¹² and not actually fighting a freedom struggle, but the goal orientation of individual leaders varied and made all the difference in the final analysis. For some it was nothing more than preserving the unity of India and for others nothing less than partition and a separate homeland. This was the difference in the Congress and the Muslim League perspectives.

Roberts, H.M. Close and many other writers of the contemporary period have given the same verdict.

11 D.N. Panigrahi, *India's Partition: The Story of Imperialism in Retreat* (London: Rutledge, 2004), p.12.

12 The argument is taken from Nehru's statement given to Leonard Mosley in 1960 when he said, "The truth is that we are tired men and we are getting on in years too. Few of us could stand the prospect of going to prison again—and if we had stood out for a united India as we wished it, prison obviously awaited us.... The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it... We expected that partition would be temporary, that Pakistan was bound to come back to us." (See Ajit Bhattacharjee, *Countdown to Partition: The Final Days*, p.xxvi).

Independence from the British, however, remained a common ideal with both and it was towards this end and on this ideal that all efforts were concentrated. Moreover, the whims and idiosyncrasies of individuals do not alone create nations; the conjunction of forces and circumstances do.¹³ In case of India, however, leadership remained a crucial factor all along that played its role forcefully and very effectively.

The British considered partition to be a natural consequence of the communal divide,¹⁴ a very normal sequel to the age old Hindu-Muslim enmity, something that they failed to acknowledge was of their own doing. The policies of the colonial government and its representatives, so central to the evolution of 'separatist politics'¹⁵ in India, however, speak an altogether different jargon, that does not either lift the burden of responsibility from their shoulders nor exonerate them of the gruesome errors committed in executing the deed of partitioning India. In the decade preceding the divide all attempts made at the official level to resolve the communal deadlock aimed at preserving the unity of India one way or the other. As late as August 1945 Churchill was advising the then Indian Viceroy Lord Wavell "to keep a bit of India"¹⁶ and the last constitutional effort that came in the form of Cabinet Mission in 1946 was essentially for a union of India and reluctant to accept the idea of partition straightaway.¹⁷ Then there were occasions that the British could have acted positively to heal the growing rift¹⁸ between Muslims and Hindus as in the fateful days of 1937 Congress Ministries. But they preferred to watch the developments with mild complacency and woke up to the fearful consequences when even the most desperate efforts could not avert them.¹⁹ It

13 Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.42.

14 S. Settar and Indira Baptista Gupta, eds., *Pangs of Partition: The Parting of Ways*, Vol.1, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), p.7.

15 Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India's Partition*, p.2.

16 D.N. Panigrahi, *India's Partition*, p.273.

17 *Ibid*, p.274.

18 Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit: An Eyewitness Account of the Partition of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.14.

19 *Ibid*.

was, however, the last act of the drama — the partition of India; its planning and implementation — that exposed and revealed the policies of the Raj, its intentions, motives and limitations, like no other prior episode had done. The holocaust that accompanied partition was undoubtedly the end result of human errors and not the culmination of long term trends in the Indian polity.²⁰ Never before had South Asian history witnessed so few deciding the future and the fate of so many.²¹ The political negotiations of the last ten years of British rule in India seem to have been made up of a policy of delaying tactics so obviously conspicuous in the picture from 1940 onwards.²² Finally, when it appeared impossible to sit on the political fence indefinitely until the two parties resolved their major disputes,²³ partition remained the only option to avoid outright civil war and anarchy,²⁴ and the only way to conduct a graceful retreat. However, with thousands raped and massacred, and millions uprooted and displaced, it could hardly be termed graceful. Moreover, as far as the British were concerned the constitutional change that they so magnanimously brought about in the form of partition was not designed to destroy but preserve and develop an important relationship.²⁵ Prime Minister Attlee's historic reading of the Indian Independence Bill on 4th July 1947 in the House of Commons that "this Bill brings to an end one chapter in the long connection between Britain and India, but it opens another," clearly influenced the way in which the British were conducting their part of the negotiations for a complete transfer of power.²⁶

20 *Ibid*, p.306.

21 Mushirul Hasan, *India's Partition*, p.42.

22 Percival Spear, "Britain's Transfer of Power in India", p.174.

23 *Ibid*, p.176.

24 Not only was partition seen as the only way to avoid violence in communally sensitive areas of India but also to extricate Britain from a 'troublesome responsibility'. The speed factor was therefore endorsed by the authorities in London and so were other policies of Mountbatten whom they had appointed to conduct a British withdrawal, amicably and gracefully. (See H.M. Close, *Attlee, Wavell, Mountbatten and the Transfer of Power*, pp.52-53).

25 Gordon Johnson, "Indian Independence: (1) Taking the Strain (2) Cutting the Knot", *Asian Affairs*, Vol.16, No.3 (Oct. 1985), p.255.

26 *Ibid*.

The role of individual leaders who by their acts of omission or commission made partition a *fait accompli*²⁷ offers interesting insight into the making of a plan for dividing India. Lord Mountbatten as the last Viceroy of united India assumes the most controversial place in the vast gallery of leaders in the final phase of India's freedom movement. Appointed by Attlee to replace Lord Wavell at one of the most sensitive times in South Asian history when the subcontinent was on the brink of a major change, Mountbatten arrived with a prepared agenda, extraordinary powers, special instructions and a selected staff. This change in Viceroyalty has remained a contentious issue not only because Wavell was removed so unceremoniously long before the completion of his term but also because India of 1947 could not afford a replacement of such a massive scale given the economic, political and communal crisis. But Mountbatten as was soon revealed was a man given the task of averting partition if not independence to which the British had already committed themselves in Attlee's speech of February 1947. To establish his credibility he carried with him the precise date — 30th June 1948, by which the British intended to make a peaceful transfer of power to Indian hands.²⁸ At least British withdrawal was in sight even if partition still remained a subject to contend with, largely because it jeopardized British interests of keeping a united India in the commonwealth.²⁹

June 1948 gave to the British authorities a mere fifteen months to wrap up an empire whose political, administrative and constitutional decisions were far too tricky to be resolved in such a short period.³⁰ The issues were many and needed not only concentrated attention but essentially a lot more time that was finally made available. There was the question of law and order which loomed large particularly in the Punjab given the hold of the

27 S. Settar and Indira Gupta, eds., *Pangs of Partition*, p.7.

28 Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon, eds. *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47*, Vol. XII (The Mountbatten Viceroyalty: Princes, Partition and Independence, 8 July-15 August 1947), (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1983), pp.514-15.

29 Chaudri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1973), p.117.

30 *Ibid.*, p.118.

Sikhs who were apprehensive and extremely jittery about the division of the province.³¹ The Princely States posed yet another sensitive issue that demanded careful handling, which unfortunately it did not receive and opened up a new chapter of tension and turmoil in South Asian history. Kashmir stands even to the present day as a bitter legacy of mishandling the partition process.³² Then there was the crucial matter of the division of the Indian armed forces along with its so many allied subjects. Mountbatten's abilities might have been varied as believed by those who chose him for the task.³³ Attlee's belief was that only a new man could find a new way,³⁴ for in his view the Indian situation demanded a different style and a fresh handling, but Mountbatten's approach towards resolving practical problems of the day remained overshadowed by an imperialist thinking pattern and ill-conceived Congress links. His personal charm and charisma could have carried the opinion of many in his favour but the ground realities of dividing an empire needed more solid credentials than that. Apart from the fact that his administration was the last British government of India, he brought few new ideas.³⁵

It was above all the 'antedating'³⁶ of partition by Mountbatten from June 1948 to August 1947 that resulted in one of the greatest upheavals in recorded human history. At the most conservative estimate 200,000 people had been killed and five million made homeless.³⁷ Figures may vary but their staggering nature remains in tact. The justifications extended for this early transfer of power

31 Shreen Ilahi, "The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Fate of Kashmir", in *India Review*, Vol.2, No.1, (Jan. 2003), p.87.

32 *Ibid*, p.79.

33 Jean Alphonse Bernard, *From Raj to the Republic: A Political History of India (1935-2000)* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2001), p.107.

34 W.H. Morris, "Thirty-Six Years Later: The Mixed Legacies of Mountbatten's Transfer of Power", *International Affairs*, Vol.59, No.4, (Autumn 1983), p.623.

35 Gordon Johnson, 'Indian Independence', p.263.

36 Ian Talbot, "Mountbatten and the Partition of India: A Rejoinder", *History*, 69, (225), 1984, p.29.

37 *Ibid*. Alan Campbell-Johnson in his *Mission with Mountbatten* has described the 'scale of killings and the movement of refugees even more extensive than those caused by the more formal conflicts of opposing armies'.

have been numerous given by all shades of British historians but the real fact of the matter was none other than a desire for pressing on to glory in the annals of future history by achieving a fast handover of formal authority.³⁸ The capacity of the government to control the situation or the parties was fast diminishing and it was essential to transfer power before nothing was left to transfer.³⁹ Moreover, it was the price paid to the Congress for consenting to stay within the commonwealth and for this one benefit the British were prepared to go to any extremes,⁴⁰ even at the cost of severely threatening the interests of the other party i.e. the Muslim League. Mountbatten realized the gravity of the situation and forwarded his plan of 3 June 1947, after hasty negotiations and talks with Indian leaders led to partition as the only logical conclusion of the problem. The British Cabinet urged by him to make haste also approved of the plan within a week, virtually unaltered.⁴¹ All this surely gives a lucid insight into British policy at this precise moment in Indian history, for only a couple of weeks earlier they had been seeking the new Viceroy to work for a united India.⁴² To project an image of victory in retreat, they put a lot at stake in India, throwing to the winds their responsibility of ensuring a smooth transfer of power to the successor states. It was the 'manner and method'⁴³ of partition that resulted in a high cost of human lives and brought untold misery to millions.⁴⁴ This 'hurried scuttle'⁴⁵ could have been avoided only if the British had considered their obligation to the India they so proudly ruled over

38 W.H. Morris, "Thirty-Six Years Later", p.623.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, p.138.

41 Cyril Philips, "Was the Partition in India in 1947 Inevitable?" *Asian Affairs*, Vol.17, No.13, (Oct. 1986), p.250.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, p.128.

44 *Ibid.*, p.133.

45 *Ibid.*, p.118. Mountbatten's failure to make the British withdrawal a peaceful and smooth affair has become more of a proverbial legacy in terms of the speed factor that he so vehemently propagated and so religiously believed in. It has been variously referred to as 'indecent haste', 'a quick fix', '10-week scramble' and a 'shameful flight' by different writers, all indicating the utter lack of imagination and foresight in his decisions and deeds at the time of partition.

for decades, supreme to preserving a hollow world image. Mountbatten's role holds verdict to not only hasty and flawed planning of one of the greatest events of history but also to the farce of impartiality that he conveniently and boastfully adhered to but could not honour in the entire partition proceedings. He had a reasonably good idea of the colossal administrative difficulties involved in the transfer of power, had been in knowledge of what was happening particularly in the Punjab through his Governor Evan Jenkins,⁴⁶ but still preferred to mess up the entire situation with his ill-placed sense of urgency and speed. For Pakistan it amounted to nothing but a calculated attempt to bring about a complete breakdown of political, administrative and economic structures.⁴⁷

For a person who comes to India as a Viceroy with a mandate of rendering the subcontinent independent and for supervising British withdrawal, with intentions and instructions to the effect that Indian union can still be preserved, but under the compulsion of circumstances, is forced to draw a plan for partition for which he has just seventy two days⁴⁸, could not be expected to do justice either to his role or to his task. Time became a matter of the most crucial importance. Nations that take thousands of years to be built deserve at least some reasonable time to go through the process of reorganization and re-demarcation if such a need arises, given the complex nature of their administrative and constitutional systems. The division of India was one such case that put to test the abilities of those who had once ruled over an extensive empire but unfortunately could not live up to the tradition of that 'glorious' past in working out a smooth transfer of power to two successor states. The issues were varied and each demanded separate and

46 V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1957), p.354.

47 Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, p. 137.

48 *Ibid.*, p.159. It was soon clear both to the British and the Congress that partition was inevitable and independence would take the shape of the division of the subcontinent as well. It was now just a matter of how that was to happen. Patel's private confession that 'Frankly speaking we hate it, but at the same time see no way out of it' as recorded in Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, p.359, clearly shows how partition was reluctantly accepted by them with no other alternative available.

individual attention for which not only expertise but time was required. It was a commodity the importance of which was neglected altogether leading to a speedy and scuttled transfer with extraordinary misfortune attending upon the populace caught in the turmoil.

The demarcation of boundaries resulted in a movement of people which has been described as the largest migration of its kind in world history.⁴⁹ The planning to set India free had started with Prime Minister Attlee's announcement of February 20, 1947, both in India and Great Britain and its culmination was the Radcliffe Award of August 1947 that initiated the process of chalking out the boundaries of the new states. It was the result of prolonged deliberations to meet the deadline of a hasty decision and the outcome of this decision proved to be one of the most fateful in the history of South Asia. The two Boundary Commissions that were constituted by June 30 1947, had members both from the Congress and the Muslim League.⁵⁰ Sir Cyril Radcliffe chaired both the commissions, for the division of the Punjab and Bengal, that were evenly divided between pro-India and pro-Pakistan members with the chairman holding the all important power of the deciding veto.⁵¹ When he was initially approached to act as the chairman of the commission, the date of granting independence was June 1948,⁵² which was later brought back to August 15, 1947 as announced in the Mountbatten Plan of June 3, 1947. Herein lay not only Radcliffe's difficulties but this acceleration of the process of independence with the Award of the Boundary Commission creating the most serious of all crisis,⁵³ consequently also effected the new states, in particular Pakistan,

49 Paul R. Brass, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1947-47: Means, Methods and Purposes", *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 2003) p.75.

50 Lionel Carter, ed., *Mountbatten's Report on the Last Viceroyalty: 22 March-15 August* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), p.173.

51 *Ibid.*

52 Hugh Tinker, "Pressure, Persuasion, Decision: Factors in the Partition of the Punjab, August 1947", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.36, No.4 (August 1977), p.698.

53 Viceroy's Personal Report, No.17, 16 August 1947, L/PO/6/123, ff 245-322, OIOC.

largely because of its vulnerability that was left inherent in its roots at inception.

Radcliff Award has been critically analyzed from various standpoints; that it was an arbitrary and biased Award far from the judicious document that it was supposed or acclaimed to be; that Radcliffe had virtually no idea of the Indian terrain that he was assigned to dissect being only at the mercy of maps and that the Award came two days after independence causing not only confusion and chaos but huge loss of precious human lives. But still the need to review it remains pressing, for its rulings were at the core of all the injustices that were done to Pakistan in the early days of its birth. Despite all British proclamations, Mountbatten was tacitly kept informed about the proceedings of the Boundary Commissions and the details of not only their findings but also decisions.⁵⁴ Kashmir dispute that has crippled the relations of the two states for all the years of their existence,⁵⁵ was not merely a legacy of partition but more specifically of the Radcliffe Award. Then the lines demarcated on the map ran through villages and deserts, along rivers and canal banks and at some points across waterways, railways and roads.⁵⁶ The demarcation of such complex boundaries of which Radcliffe had only a cursory knowledge added to the misery of the inhabitants of a nascent state. Such circumstances were bound to give rise to boundary disputes of serious magnitude.⁵⁷ Finally, the delay in the announcement of the Award served as the proverbial last nail in the coffin. Here again Radcliffe acted on the behest of Lord Mountbatten⁵⁸ who did not wish to tarnish the grandeur and

54 Hugh Tinker, *Viceroy: Curzon to Mountbatten*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.250. Andrew Roberts in *The Eminent Churchillians* corroborates the view being a close ally of Christopher Beaumont, the personal secretary to Sir Cyril Radcliffe in India.

55 H.M. Close, *Atlee, Wavell, Mountbatten and the Transfer of Power*, (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 1997), p.13.

56 *After Partition, Modern India Series*, (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1948), p.35.

57 *Ibid.*

58 Ajit Bhattacharjee, *Countdown to Partition: The Final Days* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1997), p.102. Ch. Muhammad Ali in *The Emergence of Pakistan*, Patrick French in *Liberty or Death* and Andrew Roberts in *Eminent Churchillians* have all pointed to similar incidents. It is now a matter of general academic understanding

glamour of independence celebrations by letting people know of the fate that lay in store for them and thereby unleashing a chain of violent communal strife. Not only that but it was also an impulsive attempt to avoid turning a day of rejoicing into one of mourning over disappointed territorial hopes.⁵⁹ The Award came on August 17,⁶⁰ two days after freedom had dawned on the subcontinent horizon with the people rejoicing the birth of a new era but unaware of the true nature of their identity and forced to embark upon unplanned migrations⁶¹ under extremely unguarded and dangerous circumstances. A job that required months of grueling paperwork and hectic ground activity was completed in thirty six days,⁶² and by the time it was made public, its chief architect Sir Cyril Radcliffe had left India,⁶³ unable and unwilling to face the consequences of his deed.

The implementation of the Partition Plan entered its final phase as the two nations began a frenzied move to divide the assets of a united India into two halves. It entailed a very sensitive aspect since the two states were technically equal inheritors to the departing authority of the British government. The assets of the Government of India consisted of almost everything ranging from the armed forces, waterways and railway networks down to printing presses, chairs and typewriters, and offered a challenge of no less magnitude than the division of the subcontinent itself. It was further aggravated by the heavy influx of refugees on both sides that Gyanendra Pandey chooses to call the 'third partition'.⁶⁴ For the state of Pakistan these issues once again spelled disaster as

on Indian historiography that Mountbatten was not an impartial observer of the events that led to the making and declaration of the boundary award.

59 Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947*, p.164.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Hugh Tinker, *Viceroy: Curzon to Mountbatten*, p.252.

62 V.N. Datta, "Interpreting Partition", in Amrik Singh, ed., *The Partition in Retrospect* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers, 2000), p.277.

63 *Ibid.*

64 Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.25-39. The author in his elaboration of the term 'partition' regards the Muslim League demand for Pakistan from 1940 onwards to be the first partition and the splitting up of the provinces of Punjab and Bengal as the second partition.

Hindustan was taken to be the actual successor of former India and Pakistan was just cutting itself off from India.⁶⁵ In all the assets Pakistan's share remained cut to the minimum; in cash payments, arms and ammunition, railways, industries, secretarial staff and structure or canal and water distribution the Congress/British liaison remained strong and over bearing.

The question of the division of army posed the most serious of all problems. It was on this score that the new governments faced a big challenge given the very sensitive composition of the British Indian Army. On Jinnah's insistence it was decided that the armed forces were to be split up on communal lines,⁶⁶ dividing Hindu and Muslim regiments respectively. No other decision could have suited the nature of the defence requirements of the two nations more adequately in the existing scenario that was charged with a heightened level of communal tension and strife. However, the whole idea of dividing the Indian Armed Forces remained abhorrent to the British till the very end even when partition had been accepted in principle and reality by all parties concerned. Mountbatten had carried with him specific instructions "to avoid a break in the continuity of the Indian Army."⁶⁷ Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army also refused to hear of any such plan that would split up an institution they had built up so proudly and with so much devotion and skill.⁶⁸ The delay in such a sensitive matter of national importance suited the Congress designs well, as it would inherit the capital at New Delhi along with its civil and military administration, including control over the armed forces.⁶⁹ The result of yet another mismanaged affair was obvious. Pakistan ended up with its share of military stores withheld, with not even a

65 Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p.314. Nehru is said to have called it 'secession' also 'believing that it would pave the way for reunion...', (See Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, p.359).

66 Kanji Dwarkadas, *Ten Years to Freedom* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1968), p.221.

67 Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians* (London: Widenfeld & Nicholson, 1994), p.132.

68 Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, p.131.

69 *Ibid.*

single ordnance factory, with shortages in technical arms and trained personnel and with only one school of instruction at Quetta.⁷⁰

The decision regarding the fate of Princely States was no small issue when preparations for implementing the Partition Plan actually began. Junagardh, Kashmir and Hyderabad had not come to any agreement with regard to their future course of action at the time of independence in August 1947.⁷¹ Had the British conduct been more impartial and had the Congress adhered to the generally accepted and jointly agreed upon principles of geographical contiguity and notional representation as laid down in the Partition Plan, Indo-Pak history might have not been blemished by so much strife and turmoil as in the early years of freedom. Nehru's passionate attachment to Kashmir swayed the balance in favour of India and the last act of the drama saw the Maharaja signing the instrument of accession for India resulting in the speedy landing of Indian troops to forcibly occupy the state. Among the scars of partition it is the one still profusely bleeding. The amicable structures that the two states are now struggling to build could have been established decades ago, only if the last Viceroyalty in its connivance with the Congress had not failed so miserably in this respect.⁷² Its performance was undoubtedly flawed in the most important matters⁷³ concerning the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

Conclusion

The planning and implementation of partition of the Indian subcontinent proved to be a far more complex phenomenon than it was initially perceived. The human aspect of migrations and massacres made it one of the greatest man-made tragedies to have ever taken over humanity in times of peace.⁷⁴ The administrative,

70 *Ibid.*, pp.376-77.

71 *Ibid.*, p.276. Like so many other matters Pakistan suffered from a "less than happy start", as W.H. Morris calls it in "Thirty Six Years Later: The Mixed Legacies of Mountbatten's Transfer of Power", on the 'states issue' particularly in respect of Kashmir.

72 W.H. Morris, "Thirty Six Years Later", p.628.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, p.132.

political and economic side of it cost the state of Pakistan a very big price mainly resulting from the decisions and policies of men who could have acted differently,⁷⁵ who belonged both to the Congress and British ranks and whose acceptance of partition was reluctant and thereby not without malice towards Jinnah, the Muslim League and eventually Pakistan. From a social and emotional standpoint partition and its related horrors continue to remain in the ever-present past of the collective consciousness of people⁷⁶ on both sides of the border, resurging at crucial and critical moments in the life of the two neighbouring countries. The bitter legacies of British rule and the ugly memories of its departure have in the hearts and minds of many created inaccurate images of partition as being a ‘rupture’⁷⁷, a ‘historical accident’⁷⁸ and a ‘colossal tragedy’.⁷⁹ Independence and partition had become inevitable by the early twentieth century. It was only the manner and method to it that needed debate and that was essentially messed up in the final rounds by those whose responsibility it was to see to a peaceful and planned transfer of power. Partition historiography, therefore, needs to be rescued from such damaging opinions that have come to dominate a few influential intellectual circles. This unfortunate tendency to see 1947 as an ‘hour of sorrow’⁸⁰ is nothing but a historical drift, for if partition was the most traumatic event of the century, independence and freedom were indeed its most wonderful and magnificent legacies.⁸¹ The ‘history and meaning of partition’,⁸² therefore, assume new

75 Cyril Philips, “Was the Partition of India Inevitable”, p.245.

76 D.N. Panigrahi, *Imperialism in Retreat*, p.13.

77 W.H. Morris, “Thirty Six Years Later”, p.627.

78 Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India's Partition*, p.1. He carries the argument forward by calling “the birth of Pakistan an ‘aberration’ caused by a configuration of forces at a particular historical juncture...the result of a campaign that was hardly embedded in the historical logic of the two-nation theory.”

79 Mushirul Hasan, *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and Partition of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.27.

80 Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), p.391.

81 *Ibid.*

82 Ayesha Jalal, “Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of ‘Communalism’: Partition Historiography Revisited”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.30, No.3, (July 1996), p.681.

dimensions that need to be probed into in order to rethink the factors and motives bringing about not only the division of India, the role of parties and people related to this watershed event but also its planning and implementation in the critical days of August 1947.