

The Great Divide and Its After-Effects

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ABSTRACT

More than a million people died and fifteen million were displaced as a result of the partition of 1947. This Paper is an attempt to portray the Repercussions of Communalism, Anti Nationalism among the different ethnic groups of the society, this paper would explain how the Britishers used Religion as a way of dividing people in India into categories, it would also explain the current situation of the country and the after-effects of the Partition. Analysis of the violent and resettlement processes takes place, and the effects of partition on Indo-Pakistani relations and state formation in India and Pakistan are also taken into account.

INTRODUCTION

Two independent nation-states made up the subcontinent. Three hundred years after the British left India, in August 1947, Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan were established. Millions of Muslims immediately set off for West and East Pakistan (the latter of which is now known as Bangladesh), while millions of Hindus and Sikhs headed the opposite way, beginning one of the greatest human migrations in history. Hundreds of thousands of attempts failed.

In a terrifying wave of sectarian violence, communities that had lived side by side in the Indian subcontinent for almost a millennium started to attack one another, with Muslims on one side and Hindus, Sikhs, and other non-Muslims on the other. This was unexpected and unheard of, a mutual genocide. Massacres, fires, forced conversions, mass kidnappings, and horrifying sexual assaults took place in Punjab and Bengal, two regions that border West and East Pakistan, respectively. Around 75,000 women were sexually assaulted; many of them later underwent deformities or were dismembered.

"Midnight's Furies," by Nisid Hajari (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), is a fast-paced novel narrative history of Partition and its aftermath. Hajari says that "gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death parents and children and the old while dragging off young women to be raped." According to several British soldiers and journalists who had seen the Nazi extermination camps, infants had been found burnt on spits. Pregnant women had their breasts removed and their babies cut out of their bellies.

When the Great Migration drew to a conclusion in 1948, more than fifteen million people were transferred, and between one and two million died. It is not as ridiculous as it first seems that the comparison is to the concentration camps. The split, which left behind memories of almost unfathomable savagery, is as important to modern identity in the Indian subcontinent as the Holocaust was to Jewish identity. Reputable Pakistani historian Ayesha Jalal has referred to Partition as "the fundamental historical event in twentieth-century South Asia." "Partition remains a defining moment that is neither beginning nor conclusion, shaping how the peoples and nations of postcolonial South Asia understand their past, present, and future," the author writes in her essay.

Why was British India partitioned?¹

In 1946, Britain said it would grant India freedom.

It could no longer afford to administer the country, therefore it intended to leave as soon as possible.

The former viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, set the date as 15 August 1947.

The remaining population was made up mostly of Hindus, with Sikhs, Buddhists, and people of other religions rounding out the remaining 25%.

Prof. Navtej Purewal, an Indian fellow with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, asserts that the British used religion to classify people in India.

For example, they created separate voter lists for Muslims and Hindus for local elections. There were designated seats for Muslim and Hindu MPs.

¹<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-62467438>

Religion began to be considered in politics.

Many Muslim Indians began to worry about living in a country where the majority of the people would be Hindu when it appeared that India would get independence, says Dr. Gareth Price of the Chatham House Foreign Policy Institute in the UK.

They knew they would be beaten.

They started supporting politicians who called for the creation of a Muslim nation.

Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the leaders of the Congress Party's independence fight, supported a diverse, united India.

However, the All-India Muslim League leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, sought partition as a condition of the agreement on independence.

Dr. Price claims that reaching a consensus on how a united India would function would have taken a lot of time.

"Partition seemed to be an easy and fast fix."

Why did the 1947 Partition of India unfold the way it did?²

The events leading up to World War II and the change in political dominance significantly influenced the violence. The British imprisoned a large portion of the Congress Party in India during the war. Meanwhile, more aggressive nationalist movements arose, some of which had fascist overtones. Indians who served in the military experienced violent acts while overseas. They were enlisted, along with their weapons, into new paramilitary volunteer organizations and defense forces affiliated with these violent movements, like the Muslim League National Guard and the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). As they transitioned from being the opposition to being the government, certain Indian politicians in provincial governments started to employ these organizations for policing.

British officials hastened matters at every turn after achieving their goal of including both newly independent countries in the Commonwealth. In addition to making it more difficult to confront the violence, the imperial state's quick demise also contributed to much of the violence's inception. The imperial state lost its ability to maintain law and order and a feeling of accountability, providing little assistance to administrators attempting to handle normal municipal politics. Just as India's army was becoming fragmented and unable to be counted on to suppress unrest, the British Army started to disband. Secret orders mandated that British army units in Punjab had no operational duties other than to safeguard British lives in an emergency. As officials considered moving, sought to appease new masters, or gave in to their fear, bureaucracies grew dysfunctional. In their positions, officials were either overtly partisan or not. Everyday life was characterized by suspicion and terror due to the obvious breakdown of law and order. Regardless of any possible theological motivations for the violence, many acts were motivated by a sense of desperate need for survival in a terrifying environment.

A weak, divided police force, a lack of troops, and an armed and terrified populace were all the ingredients for ethnic cleansing. The violence symbolized the dissolution of an established order and the disregard for minorities on the part of everyone in positions of authority.

How much hardship did the partition cause?³

The boundaries between India and Pakistan were drawn by British civil servant Sir Cyril Radcliffe in 1947, roughly splitting the subcontinent into:

a central and southern region with a preponderance of Hindus; two northern and eastern regions with preponderances of Muslims; and numerous Hindu and Muslim communities spread out across British India. About 15 million individuals traveled hundreds of miles to reach the new frontiers. And many were forced from their homes as a result of intergroup violence, which began with the 1946 Calcutta Killings, which are thought to have left 2,000 dead. According to Dr. Eleanor Newbigin, senior lecturer in South Asian history at SOAS, University of London, "The Muslim League organized militias and so did right-wing Hindu groups."

To gain more control over their side, terrorist groups would drive residents out of their villages.

According to estimates, an estimated 200,000 to 1 million people died in or from diseases while residing in refugee camps. Thousands of Muslim and Hindu women endured rape, abduction, or deformity.

What effects did the division have?⁴

India and Pakistan are engaged in the ongoing conflict over control of the Kashmir region since the country's split.

²<https://news.stanford.edu/2019/03/08/partition-1947-continues-haunt-india-pakistan-stanford-scholar-says/>

³<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-62467438>

⁴<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-62467438>

They clashed during the 1999 Kargil conflict and have fought over two wars (in 1947–8 and 1965). Currently, each of them controls a different portion of it.

In 1971, India too became involved to aid East Pakistan in its fight for independence from Pakistan. Hindus today make up less than 2% of the population of Pakistan. According to Dr. Price, Pakistan is becoming more and more Islamic.

"That is in part because there are so few Hindus left there and because so many people there are now Muslims. "And Hindu nationalism is now having a greater impact on India."

"The legacy of partition is painful," says Dr. Newbigin. In both nations, it has led to strong religious majorities.

"Minorities are now more vulnerable and smaller than they were previously." It may have been conceivable to unite India in 1947, according to Prof. Purewal.

It might have been a loose confederation of states, especially those with a large Muslim population. However, both Gandhi and Nehru insisted on a single, centrally-run state. They "really didn't think through how a Muslim minority might survive in that kind of country," according to one scholar.

Hindus and Muslims in India respected the cultural differences before Partition.⁵

A great body of literature has been produced in response to the subject of how India's highly syncretic and intermixed culture came apart so swiftly. Only a few decades of the twentieth century saw the polarization of Hindus and Muslims, but by the middle of the century, it had reached such a degree that many on both sides thought followers of the two faiths couldn't coexist peacefully. A wave of fresh writing has recently contested seventy years of nationalist mythmaking. As the generation of people who lived through Partition is vanishing, there has also been a major effort to record oral histories of the event.

With the conquering of Lahore in 1021, the first Islamic invasions of India began in the eleventh century. The Hindu monarchs of Delhi were overthrown in 1192 by Persianized Turks from what is currently central Afghanistan. By 1323, they had established sultanates from Bengal in the east to Gujarat in the west, and one even reached as far south as Madurai, near the tip of the peninsula.

The invaders from Central Asia are not referred to as "Muslims" in the medieval Sanskrit inscriptions, unlike the common perception today. The newcomers are instead referred to by their language and ethnicity, most frequently as Turushka—Turks—which indicates that they were not mainly viewed in terms of their religious identity. Similar to how India quickly welcomed and altered the newcomers even though the conquests themselves were marked by bloodshed and the destruction of Buddhist and Hindu shrines. A hybrid Indo-Islamic civilization and language, most notably Deccani and Urdu, which combined Indian vernaculars descended from Sanskrit with Turkish, Persian, and Arabic vocabulary, evolved within a few centuries.

Over time, roughly one-fifth of people in South Asia came to identify as Muslims. The Hindu texts were frequently seen as having been divinely inspired by the Sufi mystics who were involved in the propagation of Islam. Some even adopted the yogic rituals of Hindu sadhus, wiping ashes on their bodies or praying while hanging upside down. The two religions' practices were quite similar in rural folklore. Muslims would leave donations to Hindu shrines, while Hindus would pay homage to the Sufi leaders' graves. Punjab and Bengal, which experienced the worst of the bloodshed decades later, were home to a disproportionate number of Sufis and witnessed widespread peasant conversion.

The subcontinent as a whole experienced the blending of cultures. The Sultan of Delhi has occasionally been referred to as the embodiment of the god Vishnu in South Indian medieval Hindu scriptures. The Bhagavad Gita, possibly the most important work in Hinduism, was translated into Persian in the seventeenth century by the Mughal crown prince Dara Shikoh, who also wrote a study of Islam and Hinduism called "The Mingling of Two Oceans" that emphasized the similarities between the two religions. Not every Mughal emperor had the same outlook. Hindus still recall the atrocities committed by Aurangzeb, the prejudiced and puritanical brother of Dara. However, the final Mughal emperor, who came to power in 1837, declared that Hinduism and Islam "have the same essence," and his court upheld this principle on a grand scale.

India was still a location in the nineteenth century where traditions, languages, and cultures crossed religious boundaries and where people did not primarily define themselves by their religious beliefs. A Bengali Sunni Muslim weaver would have had more in common with one of his Hindu coworkers in terms of language, perspective, and love of fish than he would with a Karachi Shia or a Pashtun Sufi from the North-West Frontier.

⁵<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>

The Divide and Rule Policy.⁶

Many authors convincingly attribute the progressive deterioration of these common customs to the British. According to Alex von Tunzelmann in her history "Indian Summer," "many Indians stopped accepting the diversity of their thoughts and began to ask themselves in which of the boxes they belonged" when "the British started to define 'communities' based on religious identity and attach political representation to them."

The renowned history "The Great Partition," written by British scholar Yasmin Khan, declares that the Partition "stands testament to the follies of empire, which rupture community evolution, distort historical trajectories, and force violent state formation from societies that would otherwise have taken different—and unknowable—paths."

However, other analyses note that Partition was essentially a situational development and did not necessarily result from a divide-and-rule strategy. It might still have been prevented as late as 1940. Some earlier research, like that of the British historian Patrick French in "Liberty or Death," demonstrates how much of the period's politics came down to a clash of personalities, especially between Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, and Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the two most prominent leaders of the Hindu-dominated Congress Party. Jinnah presided over the Muslim League.

All three individuals were lawyers who had at least some of their education in England and were anglophones. Gandhi and Jinnah were both from Gujarat. They might have been close allies in the past. However, by the beginning of the 1940s, their relationship had become so venomous that they could hardly be convinced to sit together.

Amid the upheaval caused by the Second World War, Hindus and Muslims started to turn against one another. As the Japanese occupied Singapore and Rangoon and marched swiftly through Burma into India in 1942, the Congress Party launched the Quit India Movement, a campaign of civil disobedience, and its leaders, including Gandhi and Nehru, were detained. While they were detained, Jinnah, who had presented himself as a devoted supporter of the British, gained support as the most effective defense of Muslim interests against Hindu hegemony. By the time the war was over and the leaders of the Congress Party were set free, Gandhi had referred to Jinnah as a "maniac" and "an evil genius," and Nehru thought Jinnah was "an obvious example of the utter lack of the civilized mind."

After then, fighting between Muslims and Hindus on the streets got worse. People fled mixed-race areas or were compelled to leave them and sought solace in ghettos that were becoming more segregated. Political figures at the local and regional levels frequently heightened tensions. The cruel Muslim League Chief Minister of Bengal, H. S. Suhrawardy, incited rioters against his Hindu population with inflammatory speeches in Calcutta and claimed in print that "bloodshed and unrest are not necessarily wicked in itself if resorted to a worthy cause."

The leaders of the Congress Party, who had first opposed Partition, grew to see it as the only option to get rid of the troublesome Jinnah and his Muslim League as the riots expanded to other towns and the number of casualties increased. Nehru stated in a speech from April 1947, "I want that those who stand in our way should go their own way." The British started to accelerate their evacuation strategy after realizing they had lost all remaining control. British Prime Minister Clement Atlee declared in front of Parliament on the afternoon of February 20, 1947, that British sovereignty will terminate "not later than June 1948." By that time, if Nehru and Jinnah could agree, control would be given to "some sort of central government for British India." If they did not, they would transfer power "in such other manner as may seem most logical and in the best interests of the Indian people."

Independence and the Violence that followed.⁷

On the evening of August 14, 1947, Mountbatten and his wife sat down to see "My Favorite Brunette" with Bob Hope in the Viceroy's House in New Delhi. Nehru stood up to deliver his most well-known address at India's Constituent Assembly, which was a short distance away at the foot of Raisina Hill. We had a tryst with destiny long ago, he exclaimed. "India will awake to life and freedom at the stroke of midnight when the world sleeps."

However, the nightmare was already well underway outside New Delhi's well-guarded neighborhoods. The following evening, as the last of the British officials in Lahore, left for the train station, they had to navigate through streets covered in corpses. They observed the railroad employees hosing off bloody puddles on the platforms. A Muslim mob had slaughtered several Hindus trying to escape the city as they waited for a train hours earlier. Punjab was on fire, with flames shooting up from village after village, the officials could see as the Bombay Express departed Lahore and started traveling south.

One of the greatest human tragedies of the twentieth century was what followed, particularly in Punjab, where violence was most concentrated. Foot caravans of poor people fleeing the violence stretched for more than 50 kilometers,

⁶<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>

⁷<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>

according to Nisid Hajari. Peasants were being slaughtered like lambs by mounted rebels when they emerged from the tall crops that flanked the road as they trudged along wearily. Special refugee trains were repeatedly ambushed despite being completely packed when they left. They far too frequently crossed the border in eerie silence with blood dripping from their carriage doors.

The geographical makeup of South Asia irrevocably changed within a short period. Karachi, the first capital of Pakistan, had a Hindu population of 47.6% in 1941. The majority religion in Delhi, the capital of independent India, was Islam. By the end of the decade, two hundred thousand Muslims had been evicted from Delhi and practically all of Karachi's Hindu population had left. Seventy years later, the changes that were made in a matter of months are still evident.

CONCLUSION

In 1947, British India was divided into the nations of Pakistan and India. The British Raj, sometimes known as British rule, over the Indian subcontinent came to an end with this partition. The Two-Nation Theory put out by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, which was based on religious differences, had a role in the split. India primarily became a Hindu nation, while Pakistan became a Muslim nation. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a Muslim, was a key figure in the Partition and later served as Pakistan's first Governor-General. However, because the Indians had little time to prepare for the split, there was border violence as a result, and there is controversy over who was to blame.