

## HISTORY OF INDIA (1858 – 1947)

### PAPER 6.7

#### Unit – V (Topic – Partition of India)

The advent of the Labour Party under Clement Attlee as Prime Minister in Britain and Lord Pathwick Lawrance as Secretary of State for India in 1945 raised the hopes of the Indians. The Labour party had pledged itself to Indian independence more than once and its task was rendered easier by the solid support of public opinion behind it. Besides that, there were other weighty considerations. Despite her initial victory, Britain had lost her world-wide supremacy to USA and Russia. A grave economic crisis also gripped Britain immediately after the war. Moreover, the explosive situation in India was yet another consideration which guided the policy of the Labour Government in Britain.

In the elections to the central and provisional legislatures held in 1945-46, the Congress attained major success in the election securing a large No. of seats. The Muslim League's success was also spectacular compared to that in 1937 election.

Another major development in the contemporary Indian politics was the announcement made by the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, in which he expressed the desire of the British government to transfer the Power to Indian hands. It was also declared that a Cabinet Mission was soon to visit India to discuss the matter of transfer of Power with the Indian leaders. Accordingly, three members of the British Cabinet – Stafford Cripps, Lord Pathwick Lawrence and A.V. Alexander reached India in 1946. This mission is known as the 'Cabinet Mission'. Members of the Cabinet Mission studied the Indian situation and held numerous conferences with the Congress and the Muslim League.

The Congress and the Muslim League, however, could not put forward proposal mutually agreed upon by the two before the Cabinet Mission. Under the circumstances the members of the Cabinet Mission themselves prepared and announced their own proposal before the Indian political parties. The salient features of the proposal were: (1) Union of India was to be formed with the British occupied territories and the native States (2) The Provinces were to be left free to form groups with their own Executives and Legislatures (3) Three groups viz. the Hindu dominated area forming 'A', the Muslim dominated marked as 'B' and Bengal and Assam forming 'C' were to participate in the constitution making separately (4) The representatives of the provinces and native States were to constitute the constitution-making body for the Union Govt. (5) An Interim government was to be established.

Despite criticisms against the Cabinet Mission's proposals the Congress agreed to participate in the proposed Constituent Assembly and refused to join the Interim Govt. The

Muslim League, however, agreed to participate in both the bodies. In a situation like this Cabinet Mission left India, leaving the matter of the Interim govt. entirely to be settled amongst the political parties. Nehru-Jinnah talks on August, 15, 1946 for a last-minute solution of the issue of Interim Govt. having failed Jinnah called upon the Muslims to observe the so called 'Direct Action Day' on August 6, 1946.

The 'Direct Action Day' was indeed one of the darkest days in the history of India. In the name of making the Indian Muslims conscious about their vital role in politics there had been widespread killing of innocent people all over the country. Communal riots of an unprecedented scale broke out in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar, U.P. and other places. Meanwhile Lord Wavell, the then Governor-General and crown Representative in India, invited the Indian political parties to form the Interim Government.

While the communal riots continued unabated throughout the country, Lord Wavell persuaded the Congress, who had refused earlier, to form the Interim govt. On September, 2, 1946, an Interim Government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in. The League, however, preferred not to join the government. A month after, of course, being persuaded by Wavell, the League revised its opinion and joined the government.

The Next stage towards the Transfer of Power was the summoning of the constituent Assembly on December 19, 1947. The Constituent Assembly proceeded with the task of framing a Constitution for the country without the League members as they had refused to join it. In a situation like this Clement Atlee declared in a statement that the British government has decided to transfer power to the Indians by June, 1948.

The next step taken by the British government to expedite the process of Transfer of Power was the appointment of Lord Mountbatten to India as the Viceroy, replacing Lord Wavell. Lord Mountbatten assumed office on March, 27, 1947. Incidentally, Lord Mountbatten was the last Viceroy of British India. His consultation with the Indian leaders convinced Mountbatten that the Transfer of Power to a united India was impossible. Indeed, the Muslim League insisted on Pakistan, and though the Congress was not prepared to see India divided, it increasingly saw partition as the only alternative to the prolonged communal riot and civil war.

Lord Mountbatten now worked out a detailed plan for the Transfer of Power to the Indian people. The salient features of the Mountbatten Plan were as follows: (1) The Muslim dominated areas may be separated to form a Dominion. In that case such a Dominion would be constituted by a partition of Bengal and Punjab (2) A referendum in North-West Frontier Province would decide whether it would join Pakistan or not (3) Similarly, the people of Sylhet, in Assam, were also to give their verdict in a referendum whether they were willing to join the Muslim area in Bengal (4) A Boundary Commission was to define the boundaries of the Hindu

and Muslim provinces in Punjab and Bengal, (5) The British Parliament was to legislate an Act for the immediate Transfer of Power. (6) The representatives of the Muslim-dominated areas could form a separate Constitution making body or Constituent Assembly.

The Mountbatten Plan clearly indicated that India was to be free, but she was not to remain united. The Muslim League accepted the Mountbatten Plan as its demand for 'Pakistan' had been assured by it. The Congress also accepted it thinking that partition of the country was unavoidable under the circumstances. However, the Partition of Bengal and Punjab was effected by a commission under the chairmanship of Sir Cyril Radcliffe. Further, North-West Frontier Province and Sylhet were incorporated in the new born Pakistan as per the verdict of the people there.

**The Indian Independence Act:** The provisions of the Mountbatten Plan were embodied in the Indian Independence Act passed by the British Parliament in July, 1947. According to the provisions of the Act, the two Dominions – India and Pakistan were to emerge as independent countries on August 15, 1947, and the suzerainty of the British Crown was to lapse with effect from that date. The Act further provided that pending the adoption of a new Constitution both India and Pakistan were to be governed by the Constituent Assembly of the respective country.

On August 7, 1947, Jinnah left India for Karachi where he was elected the President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (August 11, 1947). Formerly Pakistan became an Independent state on and from August 14, 1947. It will be relevant here to note that after 24 years of its existence, the eastern part of Pakistan (East Pakistan) seceded from Pakistan to become an independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. However, on August 15, 1947 India celebrated her Independence Day after a long-drawn freedom struggle against the British rule. The Constituent Assembly that had been busy in framing a Constitution for India assumed the sovereign power from that day. Above is the story how India achieved her Independence and became a Sovereign State on August 15, 1947. In a memorable address to the midnight session of the Constituent Assembly (on the night of August 14) Jawaharlal Nehru gave expression to his feelings in the following words: "At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake of life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, suppressed, finds utterance....."

**The Republic of India (1950):** The Constituent Assembly began its work of drafting a republican constitution on December 9, 1947. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was the elected President of the Constituent Assembly appointed a Drafting Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. After three years of hard toil (December 9, 1947 – November 26, 1949) the drafting committee prepared the draft constitution. Formally, however, the Constitution of India came into force, that is to say, India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic, on and from January

26, 1950. The Constitution was inaugurated on that particular date purposely to perpetuate the memory of our fake Independence Day, that had continuously been celebrated on this day since the year 1930. It is mentionworthy here that by the 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, 1976. India has been declared to be a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic.

\*\*\*\*\*