

# [Did british policies lead to the partition of india?](https://assignbuster.com/did-british-policies-lead-to-the-partition-of-india/)

### Did British Policies lead to the Partition of India?

On the 14th of August 1947 the new Islamic republican state of Pakistan was created, and on the following day, India was granted freedom and independence from colonial rule after 350 years. A number of British policies were introduced which led to deep communal conflict resulting in need for partition. This essay will explore the British policies implemented in India in a period of political consciousness and how it could have led to the partition as well as the roles of Jinnah, the Muslim League, Gandhi and the National Congress.

There has been much debate among historians when looking at the reasons behind the creation of Pakistan and the need for partition. A number of British policies granted Muslims their own political representation; however a combination of communal conflicts and the alienation of the Muslims impacted on the decision for partition. The basis of the theory is that there was a want for a separate nationhood due to the failure to reach autonomy with India. The British adopted divide and rule policy which can be seen led to the partition of India.

A number events leading up to the Partition resulted in Muslims wanting a separate nation. A call for non participation of Muslims in congress had turned Muslim anti nationalist, and by the 1880s, British imperial policy in India led many Muslims to this view, resulting in the creation of the Muslim League. The British once favoured the National Congress and they were given more power; however, ‘ Intransigence of the National Congress drew the government closer to the League and made them realise the importance of Jinnah as the spokesman for Indian Muslims'[1]. Moreover the Partition of Bengal provided separatist thought for Muslims. In 1892 the Indian Councils Act was introduced, this allowed Indians to participate in local and provincial government. This is the first sign of Indians political need to govern the country.

In 1916 the Lucknow Pact was introduced, in which the Muslim League and National Congress came together with the mutual goal to gain authority to run the government in India. The British government faced a lot of pressure following this pact. The following three clauses are distinctive; the first states that there shall be self-government in India. The second states that Muslims should be given one-third representation in the central government. And finally that there should be separate electorates for all the communities until a community demanded for joint electorates[2]. This was the only time both political parties worked together in unity. This pact was important as the Indian National Congress was able to see the Muslim League as a political party who was in need of their own electorate and they recognised the need for the Muslims to have their own political representation. The Lucknow Pact was seen to be a result of the Morley-Minto reforms, introduced in 1909, and they were seen as a ‘ major constitutional advance'[3] as they were able to spot the imperfection in the British government in India. However, the tribune of Lahore described the reforms as a ‘ complete failure'[4] and thus another reason for the creation of the Lucknow Pact was to gain more representation of Indian people in India. The Lucknow pact was seen as a consequence of separatism by the historian Jalal[5]. As the government rejected the idea tensions grew larger. Thus tension between Muslims and Hindus was relived for a short while. However some had large objection and opposition towards the pact believing it was ‘ a hopeful augury for the future'[6], and the all Indian Mahasabha led a crusade against the Lucknow Pact due to the ‘ evilness of the reforms'[7]. It is important to note that not all Muslims had common political demands, but a growing consciousness of political affairs. Thus, the Lucknow Pact is an important point in history as it marked the huge need to take authority away from British rule; however, it led to more tension between the Muslims and Hindus. India was able to gain more political advances due to their loyalty and war effort, however it was not as much as they anticipated.

In 1919, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were introduced by the British Government in India to introduce self-governing institutions, which later formed the basis of the Government of India Act of 1919. However, the Indian nationalists believed these reforms did not go far enough and the Central League found it difficult to accommodate the rising power of the provincial Muslims in the Muslim majority areas, and this was reinforced by the political opportunities under the Montford Reforms of 1919[8]. By 1919, the British government passed the Rowlatt Acts. These acts allowed the government to place people thought of being involved in terrorism in prison without a trial. It was clear that Mahatma Gandhi was very wary of the act, believing this went against civil liberties. It was seen to be going against the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. This led to protests against the act, creating animosity against the British. Tension was highest in the state of Punjab where the Amritsar massacre took place; ten thousand people had gathered and British Indian troops armed surrounded the area, locking these people in, and without using armed weapons, thousands died. It was believed this was done for fear of a revolt. This created even more tension and frustration towards the British. These acts are of great importance as they led to a separate political group for the Muslims. They were now recognised independently from the Indian political groups which can be seen as an important development in the idea of partition.

When looking at Gandhi's involvement with the Swadeshi movement in the 1920s, we are able to see the development of an Indian communal consciousness. It is important as the need to achieve independence from the British rule evolved from this movement. During a period of mass nationalism the nation was brought together by this movement however, it exacerbated religious tension and alienation. Ghandi established the Swadeshi movement of which was to achieve home rule. The aim was to make India's economy self sufficient without the help of Britain and its goods. Ghandi created a different type of Swadeshi politics by using the production and consumption of khadi, hand woven cloth[9]. As cloth in India was seen as power and authority, they used the khadi as symbol of the nation's basics. In order to inspire new modes of consumption and a breakaway from colonial mode of consumption, the Swadeshi movement provided exhibitions and lantern slide shows encouraging these new modes. During colonial rule, British maps were shown more to Indians then to the British, the map played significance to the establishment of colonial power it was obvious then that Indian nationalist refigured the colonial map for their own purposes.[10] The Swadeshi movement intended to challenge colonial authority and Gandhi was able to reach out to both rural and urban Indians.

A common object such as khadi was now transformed into a symbol of the Indian community and this was successful because of its ‘ long standing cultural meaning'[11]. However, Gandhi used religious language to express his views, using Hindu symbols, which initially alienated many of the Muslims as they were aimed at the Hindu majority. There were also exhibitions which showed how the British robbed India of its economic and political self-suffiency[12] . The Amritsar Massacre was shown through a lantern slide show in order to highlight how colonial rule used their power to abuse the people of India and to help people identify the problems that occurred in Punjab. ‘ Indians were bound together because of their vulnerability to an illegitimate foreign regime'. [13] The formation of this movement enabled a growing consciousness of self rule, which ultimately led to the partition due to religious differences.

The emergence of the Khilafat Movement which was led by the two Ali brotherwas a political campaign by Muslims born in 1919. As a result of the Khilafat Movement, in 1920 many Muslims believed Hinduism was now a symbol for political mobilisation and soon enough there was a divide[14]. The anti British nature of the movement were the basis of a short Hindu-Muslim alliance.[15]

The 1937 provincial election was an overwhelming success for the Congress. The weakness of the Muslim League was shown, as the Congress won 6 out of 11 provinces of non-Muslim constituencies. The National Congress refusing to form coalition with the League and attempting to win mass Muslim votes through their upper classes, was a party of attack on Muslim culture this forced Congress on centre. Quit India movement led to a clear field for the League, genesis of partition and Pakistan by 1942 became clear. [16]

Many historians believe the introduction of the Lahore Resolution in 1940 was the pin point of the need for partition. This was based on the need for greater Muslim autonomy, maybe not for a separate nationhood but indeed a separate state. In this year, Jinnah made it clear he wanted a separate nationhood. However, it was the Lahore Resolution which created the need for divide. According to Asim Roy, it was not the League, but the Congress that chose to ‘ run its knife along mother India'.[17] In an orthodox view, Roy believed that the resolution, adopted by the annual session of the League at Lahore in March 1949, was the first official pronouncement of the Pakistan or Partition demand by the party.[18]. According to revisionist view is, Lahore was not meant to be the demand for Pakistan but was seen as tactful move. Roy believed the combination Jinnah's declining influence in the congress, which later led to his resignation in 1920, and the rise of Gandhi and his popularised politics as well as the adoption of the Lahore Resolution, all led to Jinnah and the League's objectives to ensure a secure and legitimate place for Muslims in the changing world of India[19]. ‘ The Lahore Resolution, based on the principle of a separate Muslim nationhood, communalised politics and destroyed the rationale and basis of intercommunal politics'.[20] The need for a separate nationhood would bring about many complications and indeed a divide between religions. The Government of India Act of 1935 was the ultimate Leagues objective, on the basis of the large League representation of the centre this provided for a federal government in India which gave autonomy to the provinces.

In 1942, the Cripps Mission was an attempt by the British government to secure Indian cooperation for their efforts which they made in World War II. Cripps' mission lies in miscalculations and problems which the new central government bought with ‘ major party representation and major responsibility'[21] Cripps causes his own problems. Gandhi saw British panic and collapse. Gandhi was able to see Jinnah's influence for Pakistan after the Lahore agreement had grown. Gandhi saw the Cripps declaration as an open invitation for Muslims to create Pakistan. And begged Cripps not to publicise the declaration as it would put pressure on the Congress[22]

The Hindu Mahasabha told Cripps the problems of majority rule and distrust for Muslims and thus rejected it. Cripps mission was attempting to prevent a split in the British war cabinet [23] which sent out an ambassador to India without their agreement; this was seen to be a failure without the support of the Indians. When a letter was formed Cripps new he failed as the Congress leader wanted dictatorship and absolute power thus showing how strong the existing order was. A quit India movement began soon after. After the Cripps mission it showed how strong British raj was but now was unable to survive due to Cripps mission. This causes more tension among Indians and need for power. This can be seen to be another instrument in creating the partition. By 1945, the new Labour Government in Britain decides India is strategically indefensible and begins to prepare for Indian independence.

The Cabinet Mission came from all that was denied by the Cripps mission to Jinnah. The British Cabinet Mission arrived in 1946 to India to negotiate the transfer of power, but it led to a stalemate due to disagreement for Muslims future of Pakistan. This led to intense communal clashes in Calcutta. By August 1947 the partition was finally agreed upon after months of disagreement and Pakistan was created.

To conclude, it is evident that the partition of India was formed not due to religious difference but to the combination of British policies implemented in India as well as communal differences. A number of different acts allowed more political rights to Muslims which led to the idea of partition and the need for their own self government. The alienation of Muslims in the National Congress which led to the establishment of the Muslim League resulted in tension and the need for separatism. The number of movements in India during the 1900s had a common interest that was to have the right to self government however; this led to the need for partition and for Muslims to have their separate nationhood. I believe partition was not on the agenda for many Muslims prior 1940s however due to the two nation theory and communal tensions, partition seemed to be the only solution. This can be seen as an effect of the British policies which enabled more political thought.

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