

Causes of the partition of india



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Question: What was the most decisive turning point on the path that led to partition?

The partition of India of 1947 religiously divided the Indian subcontinent into the separate independent nations, India and Pakistan. This not only meant the end of the British Raj, but also the start of one of the greatest religious migrations of the 20th century, leading to a death toll ranging from 200, 000 to 2 million and the estimated displacement of 15 million ^[1]. In order to determine the turning point on the path that led to such a partition, this essay finds it necessary to explore the factors which deteriorated Hindu-Muslim relations, making the separation necessary. This essay believes that the 1936-7 elections was the most decisive turning point leading up to the partition as it drove up the popularity of separatism. The elections aggravated the significance of other turning points, to be explored as well, such as the formation of the Anglo-League Pact and the involvement of the British in Indian politics. The partition itself not only represented a literal geographical partition but also a figurative partition of Hindus and Muslims.

The results of the 1936-7 elections clearly led to a downward spiral in Hindu-Muslim relations, involving the Muslim League^[2] and the Indian National Congress^[3]. Not only did the elections mark the political parties' detachment from each other, but led to the parties' becoming political rivals. In its early years, the League's ideology was not separatist, with its members working to encourage good relations with other religious communities, as exemplified by its close work with the INC and by the fact that the party did not hold a meeting alone during the early 1920s. ^[4] The 1936-7 elections were a huge success for the INC, who won 716 of the 1, 585 seats in the <https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-the-partition-of-india/>

provincial legislatures. The League, however, received only 4.8% of the total Muslim vote and was unable to even secure seating in Muslim-majority regions. The blaring contrast between the outcomes of the elections for the two parties made it clear of the INC's abundance of support in comparison to the Muslim League. This led to feelings of resentment from members of the League, primarily from its leader, Jinnah. ^[5] They hence set out to cease cooperation with the League and declare the INC as their rival, invoking religion in their propaganda. By binding the parties to the religions they were associated, the propaganda only led the public to associate their conflict with a religious one. The propaganda the League pursued was one of misrepresentation and meant to frame the Hindus for threatening Muslims by their pursuit of economic and political power. During electoral campaigns, the League used phrases such as "Islam is in danger" to invite the Muslim Indians to see the INC as the nemesis of their religion who would use their position in Indian politics to further the rights of the Hindus at the expense of all other communities. ^[6] Separatist propaganda propounded the Two Nations Theory ^[7], and by the 1945-6 elections, the decision was not between INC and the Muslim League, but between Hindu and Muslim. ^[8] S. Suharwardy ^[9] noted the difference in the philosophy of the two religions, stating that the Hindus were prepared to reduce the positions of all other groups in society for their own benefit. ^[10] Malcolm Darling observed that the residences of the Punjab were poisoned by propaganda and the hatred it incited among the public, creating distrust where there was once harmony. ^[11] With the League winning all 30 seats in the Central Assembly and 427 of the 507 Muslim seats in the provisional legislatures during the 1945-6

elections, there was no doubt that the League's propaganda was effective and their ideology popular among the locals. Religion was now inseparable from politics, furthering the mistrust between Hindus and Muslims, which eventually manifested itself in violent events such as the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946, just a year before the partition. With Jinnah placing full blame on the Hindu's for the killings when H. S. Suhrawardy had been the initiator, the event not only led to various other acts of religious violence in the country but signified a point of no return to Hindu-Muslim relations. Therefore, due to the series of events which began with the 1936-7 elections, the relationship between the two religions became significantly more strained, making their separation all the more inevitable.

Another turning point which was considered was the formation of the Anglo-League Axis, though this essay concludes that this alliance was less significant as it simply played off of the consequences of the 1936-7 elections. The Anglo-League Axis was an unwritten arrangement, which sought to undermine the efforts of the INC to promote nationalism while further spreading the separatist politics of the League. The arrangement definitely benefited both parties, with the British being able to steer the Muslims away from nationalism and the League being provided with the support of the government. This result not only in the stagnant progress of the nationalist movement, but it made an INC-League alliance impossible and unattractive. Through cooperation, the League and the British were able to deal with the INC's protests for nationalism. Such cooperation was most evident between the government and Aga Khan III, who gained his position as president of the League due to his close relations with the government

[12] While he acted as a pawn for the British, the government provided him with money and weaponry. [13] Viceroy Minto expressed repeatedly his beliefs that a self-governing India would revert the country back to a land of savages, integrating clauses to suppress Hindus in every way in his reforms.

[14] A way in which he accomplished that was through the implementation of reforms which he knew were favourable to the Muslims, such as through the Muslim deputation of 1906. The British support of the League can be seen through the memoirs of Aga Khan, who wrote that Lord Minto's willingness to work with the League made the creation of Pakistan inevitable. [15] .

Cooperation also took place between Jinnah and Viceroy Linlithgow, whose secret letters contained promises that the future of India would be determined by Muslim wishes and that the League would be consulted regarding future decisions. [16] . Such a collaboration not only meant the proliferation of separatist ideology, but meant that any cooperation between the INC and the League would be unfavourable from the perspective of the Muslims. Attempts such as one made in 1944 by Gandhi, who approached Jinnah in hopes to settle their religious disputes, but were in vain due to Jinnah's knowledge that the power he enjoyed would be taken away if the League were to be associated with nationalism in any way. Jinnah knew he would gain nothing in negotiations with the INC, as acknowledged by Lord Halifax [17] , leaving there no chance of cooperation between the parties. By extension, Hindu-Muslim relations would suffer and worsen, and because of this the Anglo-League Axis was able to fast-track the partition following the outcomes of the 1936-7 elections.

It is also arguable that the beginning of British hand in Indian politics was a turning point in the path to the partition. Threatened by the Hindu's and their protests for nationalism, even before the government and the League began their cooperation, British Raj policy aimed at dividing Hindus and Muslims to further their interests. An example was the partition of Bengal, done to prevent the Muslims of Bengal from joining the cause of nationalism. When explaining the decision to the Muslims of the region, Viceroy Curzon assured that the partition was done for the benefit of Muslims. This was supported by the Anglo-Indian press, which focused on maintaining the rights and interests of Muslims against "Hindu pre-eminence".^[18] By presenting the Hindus as the enemy of the Muslims in order to quell nationalist efforts, as well as showing favouritism through actions such as providing Muslims with positions in government previously held by Hindus, the British won the allegiance of many Muslims and encouraged separatist thinking. However, this essay would argue that while the British efforts to induce separatism were noteworthy factors leading up to the partition, their actions simply fuelled the conflict already present as a result of the Muslim League's propaganda.

By the time of the 1947 partition of India, Hindu-Muslim relations had already been deteriorated significantly, making the partition inevitable. Despite the continuous deterioration of relations between the communities since the beginning of British influence in the subcontinent, the partition itself signified an everlasting dent in relations between them and the subsequent migration led to bloodshed in regions which had seen co-religious peace for centuries. This essay is firm in its belief that it was the 1936-7 elections, which sparked

fear in the Muslim League and encouraged them to pursue more radical ideologies, which signified a decisive turning point in history in the lead up to the partition. Other milestones simply exacerbated existing hatred and conflict and the partition became a by-product of built up tensions.

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[1] Talbot, I., & Singh, G. *The partition of India* . (Cambridge University Press, 2014)

[2] A political party with a Muslim-majority which fought for the rights of Indian Muslims.

[3] A political party with a Hindu-majority which fought for Indian nationalism.

[4] Kulkarni, V. B., *India and Pakistan: A survey of Hindu-Muslim relations* .
(Jaico Pub. House., 1973) , 212

[5] Kulkarni, *India and Pakistan*, 306-9

[6] Kulkarni, *India and Pakistan*, 316

[7] A concept spearheaded by Jinnah, calling for the creation of a separate nation for Muslims.

[8] Tendulkar, D. G., *Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Faith is a battle* ,(Popular Prakashan, 1967), 367

[9] The Premier of Bengal from 1946-7 and a member of the Muslim League

[10] Gwyer, M. L., & Appadorai, A., *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 1921-47* (Oxford, 1957), 570

[11] Darling, Malcolm. *At Freedom's Door* . (Oxford, 2011)

[12] Kulkarni, *India and Pakistan* , 208

[13] Khan, A., *The memoirs of Aga Khan: World enough and time* (Simon and Schuster, 1954)

[14] Gankovskij, J. V., & Gordon-Polonskaya, L. R., *A history of Pakistan*
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[15] Khan, A. *The memoirs of Aga Khan* , 94

[16] Linlithgow, V. A., *Speeches and statements by the Marquess of Linlithgow* (Bureau of Public Information, Government of India, 1945). 397-403

[17] A former viceroy of India under the British Embassy at Washington.

[18] Kulkarni, *India and Pakistan*, 188-9