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## Punjab Politicians, Third June Plan and Partition of Punjab

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### **Abstract:**

*The present paper discusses 'Punjab Politicians, Third June Plan and Partition of Punjab'. Lord Mountbatten was last viceroy of India and took the responsibility of partition of British India and also to send British troops back to England. Mountbatten developed a strong relationship with the Indian princes who were said to have considerable confidence in him and persuaded most of them to accede to the new states of India and Pakistan. Mountbatten arrived in India in March, 1947, and noted that all parties in the Punjab were seriously preparing for civil war and of these by far the most serious are the Sikhs. Mountbatten consulted the matter of partition with the leaders of many communities and political parties. He said that there can be no question of coercing any large areas in which one community has a majority to live against their will under a Government in which another community has a majority and partition is only alternative for this coercion. Muslim League demanded partition of India and Congress demanded the partition of certain provinces. Congress and Muslim League were not willing to leave a substantial area in which their community had a majority under the Government of the other. Lord Mountbatten opposed the partition of India and partition of provinces.*

**Keywords:** Partition, community, dominion, parties, transfer.

### **1. Introduction**

Muslim League demanded the partition of India and the Indian National Congress demanded the partition of certain provinces. Neither Congress nor Muslim League were willing to leave a substantial area in which their community had a majority under the Government of the other. So the solution was partition of India. Mountbatten opposed the partition of India as well as partition of provinces. He felt that Indian consciousness had transcended communal differences. In Punjab and Bengal evoked a loyalty to their province. 'Mountbatten left the question of partition with the people of India. He ascertained the people of Punjab, Bengal and Assam (Sylhet district) that Boundaries between the Muslim majority areas and the remaining areas, settled by boundary commission will not be identical as provisionally adopted'. Sikh community formed about an eighth of the population of Punjab. They were so distributed that partition of Punjab, which they desired, could split them. Mountbatten assured that Sikhs will be represented in the boundary commission to avoid their split. This plan has been carried out with a good will but the whole plan may not be perfect. Mountbatten felt that once it was decided in what way to transfer power, the transfer should take place as soon it possible. If we waited until a constitutional set up for all India, we have to wait for a long time. If partition were decided, if handed over power before the constituent Assemblies finished their work, we should leave the country without a constitution. 'The twofold purpose of the plan now put forward was to make possible the maximum degree of harmony and cooperation between the Indian political parties in order that the partition of India, if decided upon, might involve as little loss and suffering as possible'.

### **2. Third June Plan or Mountbatten Plan**

Lord Mountbatten reached Delhi on March 22, 1947 and was sworn in as Viceroy and Governor-General of India on March 24. Immediately after the swearing-in ceremony, he made a short speech, in which he stressed the need for reaching a solution within the next few months. A recording of the Viceroy's message to the Indian people was broadcast on June 3, 1947. It was introduced by British Prime Minister Mr Attlee. Lord Mountbatten prepared a detailed plan for the transfer of power from British to the Indian people. He reached India in the end of March 1947 and consulted this matter with the representatives and leaders of many communities and political parties. He was very grateful to them for advice they had given him. Mountbatten hoped that unified system (communications, defense, postal services and currency, an absence of tariffs and Custom Barriers and the basis for an integrated and political economy) of India would not be affected by communal forces as it had been administered as a single entity for more than hundred years. Mountbatten urged the political party leaders to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 16, 1946. He opined that the plan meet the interests of all communities of India. The Viceroy regretted for not being any agreement on Cabinet Mission Plan or on any other plan that could preserve the unity of India. He said that 'there can be no question of coercing any large areas in which one

community has a majority to live against their will under a Government in which another community has a majority and partition is only alternative for this coercion'.

Mountbatten gladly announced that His Majesty's Government have accepted the proposal to transfer power to Governments of British India each having Dominion status as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made within the next few months and already have prepared legislation for introduction in Parliament this session. So the special function of the India office will no longer have to be carried out. Other machinery will be set up to conduct future relations between His Majesty's Government and India. Mountbatten emphasized that this legislation will not impose any restriction on the power of India as a whole or of the two new states if partition take place, to decide in the future their relationship to each other and to other member states of the British Commonwealth. Now arrangement could be made for transfer of power many months earlier than we thought and let the Indian people themselves to decide for their future - the declared policy of His Majesty's Government. By this legislation Indian Dominion got unlimited powers. Mountbatten did not mention about the Indian States as new decisions of His Majesty's Government were concerned with the transfer of power in British India. He said, 'every person must effort for peaceful and orderly transfer of power. This is no time for bickering, much less for the continuation in any shape or form of the disorders and lawlessness of the past few months. Any kind of violence will not be tolerated. All of us are agreed on that'. Mountbatten assured that decision of Indian people will be implemented. British officials will surely help in implementing the decision. He conveyed His Majesty's as well as his Government's message of good wishes for future. Mountbatten showed his faith in the future of India and felt proud to be at this moment. He wished for maintaining peaceful and friendly spirit of the Gandhi-Jinnah appeal. Lord Mountbatten was responsible for the break-neck speed at which the whole process of transfer of power was carried out, but this left many anomalies in arranging partition details and failed to prevent the Punjab massacre. On the whole one tends to agree with Penderel Moon's statement that Mountbatten's claim to great merit for the manner of our departure from Indian rings somewhat hollow.

Lord Mountbatten returned to England to apprise his government of the Indian situation. The British Government agreed that if the Indians so desired, they should divide India. For the Punjab and Bengal, the procedure recommended was that their respective legislatures be divided into two groups: one representing Muslim majority districts, and the other the rest of the province. Each group would vote for or against partition. If any one group voted for partition, a commission would be appointed to draw the line of demarcation. Lord Mountbatten placed the plan for voting on partition before the Indian leaders. In an introductory speech, he made special reference to the partition of the Sikhs, whose future (according to Mountbatten) had been of the great concern to the members of the British Parliament. The viceroy affirmed that he had questioned Sikh leaders many times whether they really wanted a partition of the Punjab which would inevitably split their population into two and had been assured by every one of them that he would rather have the Punjab divided than live in Pakistan. Nehru and Patel had accepted the proposals on behalf of the Congress because they did not want the Pakistan issue to delay independence any further. They certainly did not want to inherit a country in the throes of civil war. Moreover, Patel harboured doubts about the survival of Pakistan. Gandhi agreed with a heavy heart to the vivisection of the subcontinent, as it repudiated his lifetime works and aims. He called partition 'wooden loaf'. Jinnah was also unhappy. He had been claiming the whole of Bengal and the Punjab for Pakistan, but all the received from the 3rd June Plan was a 'moth-eaten' Pakistan. Both regions were to be partitioned, the exact lines of demarcation to be drawn up by a boundary commission under the chairmanship of Sir Cyril Radcliffe. A Punjab Boundary Force was able to be established to maintain law and order during Partition.

### **3. Punjab Politician's Discontent**

According to Mountbatten plan announced on June 3, 1947, Punjab was divided into East and West Punjab. Assemblies of both the Punjabs met separately and decided that East Punjab would join India and West Punjab would join Pakistan. A Punjab Boundary Commission was appointed in which judges represented from all the three communities. It was to demarcate 'the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims'. The Sikh reaction to the plan and their temper can be gauged from the Giving his impression about Mountbatten's interview with the Sikh representatives on April 18, 1947, Lord Mountbatten in his personal report: I Had my interview last Friday with the Sikhs represented by Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Baldev Singh. Any hope that I entertained of being able avoid the partition of the Punjab, if Pakistan is forced on us was shattered at this meeting, all three Sikhs made it quite clear that they would fight to the last man if put under Muslim domination.

Sikh leaders were in constant consultation with each other. The Akali Dal working committee met in Delhi on June 2, 1947. The meeting was attended by Gyani Kartar Singh (president), Master Tara Singh, Amar Singh Dosanjh, Pritam Singh Gojran, Mangal Singh Gill, Swaran Singh, Ujjal Singh, and Baldev Singh. Baldev Singh reported on his talks. The leaders resolved to press for a partition of the Punjab but to maintain the integrity of the community by demanding that the boundary be drawn at the Chenab. Giani Kartar Singh, the president of the Shiromani Akali Dal informed in 1947 to Sir Evan Jenkins, the Governor of the British Punjab that Akali Dal had not approved the partition plan and Baldev Singh gave consent to the plan without consulting them. The Sikhs agitated for the inclusion of Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, in East Punjab. To stress of their point of view, they observed July 8, 1947, as Nankana Sahib Day. The national division in the partition plan had almost equally divided the Sikhs in the East and West Punjab. No considerations had been made for Nankana Sahib in West Punjab. The partition plan was not comprehensive as it lacked depth of understanding of the vital problems of Punjab. When the scattered Sikh communities of West Punjab were attacked by Muslim tribesmen in March 1947, the British found themselves helplessly isolated. By the time they rushed in troops, it was too late to prevent a massacre which set off a chain reaction of retaliatory killings, wrenching the region out of British control. Events in the Punjab overtook the constitutional deliberations in New Delhi and accelerated the British departure from India.

The Punjab Muslim League leaders were under express orders from the League Council to avoid any negotiations which might undermine the Pakistan demand. Jinnah was not prepared to risk this in order to secure peace in the Punjab. Its problems could only be

solved by 'a political detente at the Center'. Mountbatten believed that in the circumstances the best policy was to secure the all-India leaderships' agreement to the Partition. This was finally obtained on June 3, 1947. Nehru and Patel had accepted the proposals on behalf of the Congress because they did not want the Pakistan issue to delay independence any further. They certainly did not want to inherit a country in the throes of civil war. Moreover, Patel harbored doubts about the survival of Pakistan. Mahatma Gandhi agreed with a heavy heart to the 'vivisection' of the subcontinent, as it repudiated his lifetime works and aims. He called partition a 'wooden loaf'. Jinnah was also unhappy. He had been claiming the whole of Bengal and the Punjab for Pakistan.

#### 4. Conclusion

Third June Plan sought to effect an early transfer of power on the basis of Dominion Status to two successor states, India and Pakistan. Congress was willing to accept Dominion Status for a while because it felt it must assume full power immediately and meet boldly the explosive situation in the country. As Nehru put it, Murder stalks the streets and the most amazing cruelties are indulged in by both the individual and the mob. Besides Dominion Status gave breathing time to the new administration as British officers and civil service officials could stay on for a while and let Indians settle in easier into their new positions of authority. For Britain, Dominion Status offered a chance of keeping India in the Commonwealth, even if temporarily, a prize not to be spurned. Though Jinnah offered to bring Pakistan into the Commonwealth, a greater store was laid by India's membership of the Commonwealth, as India's economic strength and defense potential were deemed sounder and Britain had a greater value of trade and investment there.

Mountbatten believed that in the circumstances the best policy was to secure the all-India leadership agreement to the partition. This was finally obtained on June 3, 1947. At a press conference on 4 June, Mountbatten dramatically brought forward the date of transfer of power to 15 August 1947. Mosley Leonard and more recently Y. Krishan have called this an ill-judged decision which contributed to the communal massacres which accompanied partition. The course of events in the Punjab following the publication of the plan for the transfer of power in fact fully justified Mountbatten's decision to press on as quickly as possible. When partition took place, rivers of blood flowed in large parts of the country. Innocent men, women and children were massacred. The Indian Army was divided and nothing could be done to stop the murder of innocent Hindus and Muslims. The Congress and the Muslim League agreed to the proposals in principle. Accepted by Congress, Muslim League and Sikh leaders on June 2, 1947 and was announced on the next day, this became the basis of the India Independence Act which was ratified by British Parliament and Crown on July 18 and implemented on August 15, 1947.

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