

# The Impact of Congress–Muslim League Rivalry on the Partition of India

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## Abstract

Despite the emergence of two independent countries, India and Pakistan, the Partition of India is still regarded as one of the most significant and sad moments in contemporary South Asian history. This essay examines how the political competition between the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress significantly influenced the events leading up to partition. At first, these groups worked together to oppose British colonial control and to advance Indian political representation. But over time, political division and mistrust grew as a result of various national visions, opposing leadership philosophies, and ideological disagreements. The Muslim League, especially under Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership, stressed the defense of Muslim political identity and interests, whereas the Congress promoted a united, secular India. A significant change in Indian politics was brought about by the development of the Two-Nation Theory and the League's call for a distinct Muslim state. In addition, the two parties' differences grew as a result of the failure of important constitutional talks like the Cabinet Mission Plan. Tensions between communities were exacerbated by British colonial practices, which were frequently defined by a divide and conquer tactic. This paper contends that the contest between the Congress and the Muslim League developed into a larger struggle over identity, representation, and sovereignty rather than just a political battle. Partition became more and more probable as communal violence increased in the 1940s and government leaders failed to come to an agreement. In the end, persistent political rivalry and ideological differences between the two leading nationalist groups contributed to the formation of India and Pakistan in addition to colonial disengagement.

**Keywords:** Partition of India, Indian National Congress, All-India Muslim League, communalism, nationalism, colonial politics, Pakistan Movement, British India

## Introduction

An important turning point in world history was the end of British colonial control in India in 1947, which led to the Partition of India and the creation of two independent states, India and Pakistan. However, there was extraordinary violence, widespread relocation, and long-standing communal conflicts during this shift from colonial subjugation to independence. Under British administration, a lengthy and intricate sequence of political, social, and ideological transformations took place over several decades, culminating in the subcontinent's partition.

The changing and increasingly tense relationship between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League was at the center of this historical process. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these two political groups came to reflect Indian political ambitions. Congress and the Muslim League had a similar goal in their early stages: to oppose British rule and ensure that Indians had more political rights and self-governance. Periods of cooperation were made possible by this common objective, most notably during the 1916 Lucknow Pact, which represented Hindu-Muslim solidarity and group political action against British control.

But this togetherness turned out to be brittle and fleeting. Disparities in political agendas, ideologies, and representation strategies emerged over time. Under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress progressively promoted a vision of a secular, democratic, and unified India that went beyond religious differences. On the other hand, the political marginalization of Muslims in a country with a plurality of Hindus alarmed the Muslim League, especially under Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership. Election experiences, constitutional changes, and the larger framework of communal politics—which was partially fostered by British administrative policies—all influenced these worries. Uncertainty between the two organizations was further exacerbated by the establishment of distinct electorates, the results of provincial elections, and the failure of several constitutional negotiations. The League started to express the notion that Muslims constituted a separate nation with their own political and cultural identity as political rivalry grew more intense. The desire for a separate state was the result of this ideological transformation, which drastically changed the course of the Indian national movement.

Thus, the events leading up to partition were significantly shaped by the Congress-Muslim League relationship's progressive shift from cooperation to hostility. Comprehending this dynamic relationship is crucial to understanding the reasons behind partition as well as its long-lasting effects on South Asia's political and social environment.

### **Formation and Early Cooperation**

An noteworthy stage in the evolution of contemporary Indian nationalism was the rise of organized political movements in colonial India. In order to express the political goals of Indians living under British control, the Indian National Congress was founded. The Congress, which advocated for constitutional reforms, more Indian participation in administration, and ultimately self-rule, progressively broadened its base from educated elites to embrace a larger segment of society. While pursuing gradual political changes, its early leadership placed a strong emphasis on cooperation, moderation, and communication with the British government.

Muslim leaders' increasing awareness of the need to protect their political rights in a quickly shifting political environment had an impact on the creation of the All-India Muslim League. The Muslim League was founded in Dhaka in 1906 with the dual goals of advancing allegiance to the British administration and defending Muslim rights, especially in relation to representative institutions. Concerns among certain Muslim elites over possible underrepresentation in a political system that would be dominated by the Hindu majority were also reflected in the League's formation.

The Congress and the Muslim League found common ground in their opposition to some aspects of British colonial policy, while having different roots and immediate goals. As both groups started to call for constitutional changes and increased Indian autonomy in the early 20th century, their interests

gradually came together. Changing political circumstances, such as the effects of World War I and growing discontent with colonial rule, had a major impact on this convergence.

The Lucknow Pact was a turning point in this stage of collaboration. Due to their united presentation of a set of demands to the British government, this agreement constituted a rare instance of unity between the two organizations. The agreement called for more Indian participation in legislative councils and acknowledged the British-introduced idea of separate electorates for Muslims. Crucially, it showed that both sides were prepared to make concessions and take into account one another's worries in order to forward the greater objective of political progress.

Many people consider the time around the Lucknow Pact to be the pinnacle of Hindu-Muslim harmony in the national movement. The strategic significance of putting up a united front against colonial rule was acknowledged by the leaders of both groups. In order to achieve self-governance, communal divisions were momentarily put aside during this phase, which also demonstrated a broader attitude of collaboration.

However, because it was based on negotiated concessions rather than firmly held ideological beliefs, this unity was intrinsically brittle. The Muslim League persisted in emphasizing community-specific objectives whereas the Congress aimed to represent all Indians. Although these fundamental disagreements would subsequently come to light, collaboration between the two groups was essential in bolstering the nationalist movement and influencing the call for constitutional changes during this early stage.

### **Emergence of Political Differences**

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League's tenuous alliance started to deteriorate as their core political and ideological disagreements were more apparent. Although these groups had previously worked together to seek constitutional changes, their perspectives on India's future were becoming more and more different. The idea of a single, secular country where all communities would live together under a democratic system was promoted by the Congress. The Muslim League, on the other hand, became increasingly concerned with defending Muslim identity, culture, and political representation, particularly in the face of alleged majoritarian domination.

The British policy of creating distinct electorates, which was codified under the Morley-Minto Reforms, was a major contributing reason to this disparity. By enabling Muslims to choose their own representatives, this system strengthened community identities in the political arena. Separate electorates were once seen as a safety net, but as they institutionalized religious differences in government, they progressively widened divides. Instead of promoting unity, this program eventually led to a sense of political division among groups.

After the 1937 Indian provincial elections, the widening gap became increasingly apparent. The Congress established cabinets in a number of provinces and saw considerable political success in these elections. However, the Muslim League's performance was subpar, and it was unable to gain broad support among Muslim voters in many areas. This result was a watershed because it caused the League to seriously question its political viability and the future of Muslim participation in a Congress-dominated democracy.

By highlighting the dangers of political marginalization, the Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, started to reorganize and increase its appeal among Muslims. Mistrust was further heightened by the Congress's refusal to establish coalition administrations with the League in some regions.

Consequently, the previously cooperative relationship became more and more competitive and combative.

These events signaled a pivotal stage in the nationalist movement, during which political disputes developed into more profound ideological and communal divisions. The growing divide between the Muslim League and Congress during this time set the stage for later calls for distinct political structures, which in turn fueled the demand for division.

### **Rise of the Two-Nation Theory**

According to Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership, the All-India Muslim League underwent a significant political transformation in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The League developed the Two-Nation Theory during this time, which maintained that Muslims and Hindus were separate countries with unique political, social, and cultural identities rather than just religious groups. Growing worries about Muslim political marginalization in a democratic society where a numerical majority could result in political power gave rise to this notion.

Jinnah, who had before promoted Hindu-Muslim unity, increasingly established himself as the major champion for Muslim political interests. He underlined that in order to guarantee their security and autonomy, Muslims needed a distinct political structure in addition to constitutional protections. The 1937 provincial elections and the League's alleged exclusion from power-sharing agreements served to further solidify this ideological change.

The Lahore Resolution, which was approved at the League's annual meeting in 1940, was a significant turning point in the evolution of this concept. In the areas of northwest and eastern India where Muslims predominate, the resolution advocated for the establishment of "autonomous states." The language was still a little unclear, but it was unmistakably different from previous calls for minority protections in a unified India.

Thus, the Indian national movement underwent a sea change with the Lahore Resolution. It drastically changed the course of Indian politics and deepened the rift with the Indian National Congress by changing the Muslim League's goal from obtaining political protections to wanting a separate nation.

### **Failure of Constitutional Negotiations**

The British government made a number of attempts to mediate disputes between the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress as political tensions grew. The Cabinet Mission Plan and the Cripps Mission were two of the most important. These efforts sought to provide a framework for a peaceful handover of power and to ensure Indian cooperation during World War II.

In addition to permitting provinces to choose not to join a future Indian union, the Cripps Mission of 1942 promised dominion status following the war. However, the idea was rejected by both Congress and the Muslim League. Congress objected to the delay in providing full independence, while the League was unhappy with the lack of explicit guarantees for a separate Muslim state.

The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, which called for a united India with a federal framework and substantial regional autonomy, was a more thorough attempt. Despite being initially agreed upon by both sides, disputes about the allocation of authority quickly surfaced. The League demanded the greatest amount of autonomy for areas with a majority of Muslims, while Congress supported a powerful central administration.

Negotiations broke down as a result of these divergent viewpoints, which increased mistrust and increased the likelihood of split.

### **Role of British Policies**

The widening rift between the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress was largely caused by the policies of the British colonial government. The "divide and rule" program, which promoted the politicization of religious identities in order to preserve colonial authority over India, was a crucial component of British strategy. The British government progressively undermined the prospect of a cohesive nationalist movement by acknowledging and promoting communal divisions.

The creation of distinct electorates through reforms like the Morley-Minto Reforms was one of the most significant initiatives. By enabling Muslims to vote exclusively for Muslim candidates, this system established communal representation and integrated religious identity into the political system. This eventually led to the idea that Muslims and Hindus belonged to different political groups with different objectives.

The Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935, among other inconsistent constitutional reforms, were also implemented by the British, but they were unable to establish a stable and inclusive political framework. Uncertainty was brought about by these changing policies, which also increased rivalry amongst political parties vying for influence and representation.

Britain's diminished political and economic standing following World War II compelled it to quicken the decolonization process. There was less time for substantive political negotiations between rival parties as a result of the swift withdrawal from India. As tensions between the Congress and the Muslim League grew, the British increasingly considered division as a viable approach to prevent large-scale civil strife. Thus, colonial policies and their timing were crucial in determining how the subcontinent was eventually divided.

### **Partition and Its Consequences**

The Indian Independence Act of 1947 was formally passed as a result of growing political tensions between the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. With the passage of this law, British colonial control came to an end, and India and Pakistan became independent dominions.

One of the biggest and most horrific mass migrations in human history was brought on by the division. Due to religious identification, millions of individuals were compelled to relocate across recently drawn borders, which led to massive displacement, insecurity, and a humanitarian disaster. Many areas saw widespread sectarian violence, especially in Punjab and Bengal, which resulted in a high death toll and permanent socioeconomic damage. Communities that had lived together for centuries were abruptly split apart, which led to intense distrust and animosity that lasted long after independence.

These events were largely shaped by the political competition between the Muslim League and Congress. The acceptance of partition as the ultimate answer was strongly influenced by their incapacity to come to a long-term political agreement, rising communal tensions, and the failure of constitutional negotiations.

Partition's effects persisted long after 1947. South Asia's political geography was altered, future diplomatic ties between India and Pakistan were impacted, and the region's politics and society are still defined by the conflict, memory, and identity it left behind.

**Conclusion**

The result of a protracted and intricate historical process influenced by political, social, and ideological advancements during colonial administration is the Partition of India. The growing antagonism between the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress was one of the main causes of this incident. What started out as collaborative efforts to amend the constitution eventually turned into fierce political rivalry and an unbridgeable ideological gap.

The two organizations' differences over representation, governance, and national identity grew more pronounced over time. Under Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership, the Muslim League progressively pushed for the recognition of Muslims as a distinct political community with unique rights and goals, while the Congress envisioned a united, secular India. Reaching a consensus became more challenging due to these divergent ideas of national identity.

Conflicts were further heightened by the failure of important discussions and British colonial practices that strengthened communal divisions. Political compromise was less likely in the 1940s as mistrust increased and intercommunal violence increased. In the end, partition proved to be the ultimate political solution to a colonial regime that was becoming more and more fragmented and insecure.

The competition between the Congress and the Muslim League was a major element in determining the route of India's division, while there were other contributing reasons as well. Comprehending this struggle is crucial to understanding the reasons behind partition as well as its long-term effects on South Asia's political and social structure.

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