

Rabia Umar*

Britain and the Partition of the Punjab: A Study in Governance

The period of British arrival, occupation and rule in India has been a controversial subject with scholars and historians of South Asia. It has raised varied opinions in the past years and decades. The 'benefactor' version is very popular with a large number of colonial historians but the other side also makes up a critical part of the debate. Be it an artless and simple approach, yet invaders and intruders can hardly be the prophets of change or progress. The East India Company receiving a Royal Charter in 1600 was by any definition a trading venture, and by far only a commercial enterprise that gained a strong base in India and was able to dominate the colonizers' race. In the end game the trespassers eventually reigned supreme and got hold of the land they had come merely to use as an economic foothold.

As time passed they took advantage of a weakening Mughal Empire, the warring principalities and thus began subjugating land by the power of artillery.¹ One after the other the European competitors were defeated, and the Company began establishing outposts in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Trading interests soon came to be replaced by greater ambitions of conquests and annexations. Nineteenth century dawned upon India as yet another invader attempted to seize its land and riches and this jewel of the East once again fell a prey to the onslaught. Will Durant called the occupation a "calamity and a crime".² Comparing it with Muslim domination he regarded it beneficial for the Indians as;

those invaders came to stay, and their descendants call India their home; what they took in taxes and tribute they spent in India, developing its industries and resources, adorning its literature and art. If the British had done likewise, India would to-day be a flourishing nation. But the present plunder has gone on beyond bearing; year by year it is destroying one of the greatest and gentlest peoples of history.³

Such a view also points to the fact that the purpose and resolve of the British in India was not their focus on governance but on amassing wealth for an economy that needed this boost critically from the colonies. India presented itself as one such lucrative outpost not to be wasted in futility. From the time a Charter was granted to the Company till the rebellion of 1857, it was a continuous process of strengthening the rule. The Raj had been established and till the onset of the freedom struggle it was an overt story of governance and a covert one of "bleeding it (India) to death".⁴ The narrative of the British finds some support in their achievement of setting up of an army, a western style bureaucracy and enhancing the transport sector, mainly the Railways. To discuss why and how these areas flourished and how they were developed to the advantage of the British would digress from the main argument of this study. The fact is that the British saw the state of the declining Mughals, used the scenario to their advantage and embarked upon a spree of extraction and exploitation, of the people, the land and the resources. Very soon the situation was in their hands and control; the internal feuds of the princes and their wavering loyalties to the state paved the way for the British. The Mughal court was gone in no time and a foreign company became the masters. One of the Company's officials John Sullivan observed in the 1840's: "The little court disappears, trade languishes the capital decays the people are impoverished the Englishman flourishes, and acts like a sponge, drawing up riches from the banks of the Ganges, and squeezing them down up the banks of the Thames."⁵

The War of 1857 proved a failed attempt on the part of the Indians. By this time the clutches of British foreign rule were deep in the Indian soil. Their governors and other officials had established a network of power structure all over India with little or no indigenous representation, except for the *nawabs* who had changed loyalties seeing the tide turning. The years from 1857-47 were a formative phase in the evolution of Indian nationalism and identity. Stripped of their rights, identity and privileges, a collision with the rulers was inevitable. The entire period is marked with British promises to grant some form of self-government to the Indians to keep them placated. The attempts were mostly half-hearted and made only to conciliate the Indians, especially in times of some dire crisis or challenge such as the two World Wars. One thing had become clear; Britain as Lal Lajput Rai quoted a loyal Englishman H. M. Hyndman, was by no means preparing India for self-government.⁶ This farce was now an open secret. From August Offer 1940 to the Cabinet Mission Plan 1946, a number of cordiality endeavors much in the nature of constitutional developments failed to get the Indians on board. Unable

* Dr Rabia Umar, Associate Professor, Department of History, QAU, Islamabad

to gauge the awakened Indian spirit, most attempts proved ineffectual and by 1940's the freedom of India was not an illusion anymore.

The Indian subcontinent was partitioned in 1947. Two sovereign states emerged out of the colonial empire. As the struggle for freedom ended the British handed over the reigns of power to the governments of the two countries and withdrew. It was a momentous event and a historic moment for millions, yet the outcome was a colossal human tragedy that left a vast region and a massive population in a trail of blood and tears. Almost fifteen million were uprooted and on the roads in search of a new home. The leaders of political parties and their followers of differing religious and political orientation have been endlessly blamed for the massacres of 1947, and rightly so for many reasons. On the ground it were the masses who let loose a surge of violence on the opposing community and in most cases their leaders though cognizant of their intentions and doings, did virtually nothing much to halt the fury. It was the act of migration that basically opened up avenues of ruthless episodes of attacks on the hapless migrants with leaders making no or little effort to stop that migration, safeguard their people or ensure a smooth and peaceful passage of refugee caravans on foot or trains. The fact that they were unaware of the eventuality of migration and its accompanying violence cannot be swallowed. Nevertheless, above all these factors and instruments, the rulers of the subcontinent were the British and for all mundane and practical purposes, the power, administration and authority was theirs, till the very final hour.

The British in India from arrival to departure consumed the energies and resources of the soil to their best advantage. Much has been written in praise of their administrative acumen, romanticizing their incursion, leading to the gradual strengthening of their rule, their strategies of penetration and their tactics to control the subcontinent. But the emptiness of their claims became clear as the Indians rose to retrieve their rights and lost glory. The burden of the white man with the self proclaimed civilizing mission was exposed as soon as they were called upon to preside over their departure. A British sea-captain is quoted in novelist Amitav Gosh's *Sea of Poppies*, "(W)hen we kill people, we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue, I promise you, that will never be forgiven by History."⁷ The days of Partition were to lay open the lofty assertions of governance gone wayward and a task mismanaged, largely left undone.

The present debate revolves around the role of the British and their competence to deal with the situation as Partition drew close. Not only that but the Raj also involved issues of connivance, culpability, accountability and a painful story of betrayal. It smeared not only the dawn of independence but equally tarnished the reputation of a reign, whose one time claim was the sun never setting on its empire. The hurried commotion in which it departed and the complete chaos and confusion it left the subcontinent in, speaks volumes of the unpreparedness of the authorities. The chronicle goes back to almost a century of direct British rule, yet the actual days of Partition of India need to be focused on, with relevant connections and linkages with the past. The preliminary nexus of this study is the end of Wavell's Viceroyalty amid a cloud of failings that made his appointment lose its credibility in the higher echelons of power in London. As wartime selection he stayed for fewer years (1943-47) than a normal appointment to the post did. Churchill, the British Prime Minister wanted a "dull administrator", one "who would avoid stirring things up"⁸ in India more than they needed to be. Yet he turned out to be a more farsighted administrator than his successor, Lord Louis Mountbatten, one who thought of independence and Partition in a more organized and humane manner. He had realized much earlier that it was "now too late to leave India in good order".⁹ His only shortcoming being that he suffered from a "shameful lack of support"¹⁰ from his political masters in London. He was vocal about British dishonesty and dearth of interest in Indian affairs. His candid remark "Cabinet's lack of imagination in dealing with India is sometimes astonishing",¹¹ could not have bagged him much adoration from Westminster.

Competence of the British forces to control the Partition disturbances remains a questionable matter. In almost a hundred years of their experience of ruling India directly, many events point to the fact very clearly how their interest was confined to their own expansion and command of the region instead of the furtherance of the Indians. Many instances point to a direct incompetence to grasp or comprehend the situation at hand. Their commercial interests as highlighted by the East India Company's arrival in the garb of traders was a story of the past when on November 1, 1858 the Queen's proclamation hailed by many as "the Magna Charta of India" announced the official end of the Sepoy Mutiny and the formal opening of the British Raj.¹² A new era had set in after a much competitive and resilient struggle, which history remembers as a case of nothing but simple plundering. India might not be at its zenith when the British came and occupied phase by phase the vast civilization, yet it was by

noF means a primitive or barren land.¹³ A vast domain that stretched from Kabul to Bengal, and from Kashmir in the north to Karnataka in the south,¹⁴ it was the pride of the East. The riches of the Mughal Empire had lured the white man to the shores of India but when they left, it was a forlorn tale of devastation and ruin. British officials too often pursued reforms with a sense of cultural superiority and a thinly veiled abhorrence for the local population.¹⁵ The narrative of civilizing the state of Indians and using their resources to advance their growth, runs as hollow as their rule. The aura of optimism and cultural sanguinity, which the Raj thought it bequeathed to India, was in fact a dead claim that lay bare as soon as their control and authority reached its end. The promise of self-rule, the constitutional and legal decrees promulgated and the economic projects originated did add to the comfort of the land but were initiated for and by the masters to make their rule stable, legitimate and justified. One spree of violence in the stormy days of Partition exposed the ineffectuality and futility of the Raj.

The British after a long period of commercial ventures, local infighting and state governance were ultimately forced to relinquish power. For a very long period 'Divide and Rule' was adopted as a policy and incessantly worked upon to intensify the cleavage between Hindus and Muslims, the two major religious groups of India. It presaged disaster for India as communities living in mutual respect and tolerance for centuries were seen disregarding concerns of basic human values. Mass genocide and human carnage became the norm in the circumstances,¹⁶ yet a total failure of authority to control the situation dawned on all the major stake players, as days passed. To what extent were the British capable enough to deal with the Indian holocaust has raised numerous doubts. As long as they were churning profits, all was well; as soon as real authority had to be wielded and responsibility shouldered, the level of competence began to be uncovered. With the failure of Cabinet Mission Plan, it seemed the government had run out of ideas.¹⁷ It was a sad state of affairs where the divided opinions of either leaving Indians to their fate or standing tall to defend their honour and integrity, had the British in a quandary.¹⁸ It was the latter option that weighed heavy implying that the final decision would be giving up without being in a position to secure the future for the Indians.¹⁹ The biggest failure seems to be the inability of the British to come to any united decision among them, or to create any such unity among the Indians to come to some form of unanimous or conclusive agreement. Wavell's removal in the hope of sending a more sanguine and charismatic Viceroy in the person of Lord Louis Mountbatten hardly improved matters. The latter chosen in the hope of giving a new vigour and way to the deadlock, proved an impulsive choice and by antedating Partition from June 1948 to August 1947, shoved India into the nastiest disaster. Unable to do much about keeping the unity of India intact, Mountbatten heralded the worst course of events in the shape of Partition massacres. The borders of the two new countries lay undecided till the very end. This led to virtually a crime against humanity leading to approximately two million deaths.

The story of undecided borders is one unique aspect of the division of India, seemingly relegated to far below, in the priority list of the administrators, just like an after thought. A man named Cyril Radcliffe arrived in India on July 8, 1947 with the task of creating boundaries of a country he had never visited before. With no experience of any such job he was to preside over a Commission that comprised among others, two Muslim and two Hindu judges, both sides expected to act communally in the given volatile circumstances. They interpreted their role quite clearly from the onset that clearly bordered on nonchalance;

We did not volunteer for this task. We were drafted into it. You must realize that we cannot possibly be associated with any decisions you may make on the question of dividing the provinces. It is not simply that our careers would be harmed. Our very lives would not be worth a scrap of paper if we were involved in decisions where the division of territory is disputed. We will help you all we can with advice. But they will be your decisions, and yours alone.²⁰

This amply reflects how difficult and sensitive the matter was, and how casually and callously it was handled. The date India got freedom, a majority of people in the dissected lands did not know what country they belonged to. The confusion thus created by the rulers, heralded an era of gloom, bloodshed and unprecedented violence. To top it all, Mountbatten instructed the British army to "avoid any operational situations unless British lives were at stake."²¹ The resultant chaos was a British making and also British recklessness.

The documents given to Radcliffe were mainly from the time of Wavell, the same that the former Viceroy had fruitlessly used for his Operation Breakdown.²² This by no means suggested any detailed demarcation, only sketchy lists of districts and waterways. The entire episode in a way epitomizes one of the greatest failures of the British Raj. With a plethora of maps, and a few pencils, he

dissected the subcontinent. As it seems the five weeks given to him to complete the task could have been five months or even years, but Radcliffe's Awards and decisions would have met with similar disaster given the complexity and vastness of the job. It was little more than a surgical operation of a land he had no idea of, politically, culturally, socially or geographically. A landmass of 175,000 sq. miles, with a population of 88 million was to be partitioned, it seemed as if with a mere penknife. The abandonment of a task not fully completed²³ was what the British unashamedly did, despite being the self-proclaimed liberators of India and its inhabitants all along. The violence that attended upon Partition clearly showed the extent to which they had prepared India for *any* kind of self-rule. Incompetence was not only highlighted but it essentially smeared the British presence in India. Dalton the Chancellor of Exchequer writes, "If you are in a place where you are not wanted, and where you have not got the force, or perhaps the will, to squash those who do not want you, the only thing to do is to come out."²⁴

The paradigm of connivance is an equally grave matter of concern. The violence stories of the division of the Punjab say much to prove that the British were not mere spectators in the milieu of Partition. And there also exist "strange parallels between the violence which began and sustained British rule in India, and the violence which ended it."²⁵ Both the police and the military have been found to take sides and exacerbate the ongoing tension. Major General Pete Rees, the Commander of the Punjab Boundary Force had come to realize that 'class' based units were not trustworthy, a hard pill to swallow for a professional officer of the Indian Army.²⁶ In Bhawalpur, he was aware that the Nawab's State forces were "actively working with the mobs but now even his own battalions were siding according to communal affiliations."²⁷ Evan Jenkins, the Governor of Punjab himself told Auchinleck the Commander in Chief of the Army that his force was now partisan and could no longer be trusted.²⁸ Both parts of the Punjab witnessed equally harrowing scenes of looting, arson and killing. Sampuran Singh, India's Deputy High Commissioner in Lahore cabled Delhi regarding situation in West Pakistan, on 27 August, "50 thousand Hindus and Sikhs are daily butchered by the military and the Police here. No High Commissioner can save them. All Hindus and Sikhs in West Punjab will be finished."²⁹ In the East the Sikhs were on a similar anti-Muslim rampage, forcing thousands to abandon their homes and take refuge in makeshift camps, as the authorities stared as mere onlookers. August proved to be the worst month in terms of communal violence and any force could not contain that. Brigadier Thimayya, Rees's senior Indian adviser could not hold back the fear that "raids had been led by men in uniform."³⁰ Independence day was not different. A gurdwara burnt in Lahore killed twenty-two guards and worshippers alive, whereas a large picket of Muslim military police nearby "did not intervene."³¹ Such episodes were many and reflected the complete collapse of authority. Indian interest seemed to be of no concern to the retreating power. In all this "what was really unforgiveable was not partition itself, but the failure to prepare for the consequences of partition",³² and indeed of the governance they had been so proud of for the last two centuries.

The supreme authority in India, the Viceroy himself, had earlier dismissed the issue of mass transfer of population, as Partition drew closer. When asked of such a possibility at a conference on 4th June his reply was tantamount to a negative.³³ The violence that accompanied mass exodus in the coming months, as Punjab literally started to move, was no one else's fault than the top British leadership. The Punjab Boundary Force was a measly effort to control the massacres and was barely enough for the two districts of Lahore and Amritsar; in the Punjab there were twenty-nine districts in all.³⁴ But for the naïve statement of the Viceroy that also echoed the official stance, the casualties might have been lessened. Near to reliable statistics point to seven million Muslims migrating westward, and four and a half million Hindus and Sikhs eastward across the huge expanse of the Punjab, thrown right into the clutches of unprecedented misery and despair. Yet another blunder came in the shape of antedating Partition from June 1948 to August 1947. Again it was the creation of Lord Mountbatten.³⁵ The Punjab after the March violence was seething with discontent. To bring the date ten months early was a decision fraught with risks, with very less time to arrange and implement Partition of the subcontinent. Yet the British throwing all caution to the winds went ahead and led to a complete breakdown of authority. Control was forsaken and communal feelings enraged involving a conflagration of the Punjab. The speed with which the Viceroy wanted to move made him blind to the consequences involved in such hasty winding up of the Raj. Independent India was thus "born prematurely, without definite borders, waiting for its umbilical cord in the wings to be categorically clipped after two days."³⁶

The issue of betrayal raises even more concerns of culpability. To begin with Prime Minister Attlee's historic statement of February 1947, hailed as the portent of independence was in fact 'an abdication of responsibility'.³⁷ Without any tangible plan, a feasible roadmap or powerful force, a

subcontinent was being divided. With the apparent motive of granting self-rule or freedom, it was a ploy to preside over a retreat and a withdrawal that should not betray a hasty flight, rather a graceful departure, conferring freedom to the Indians. Next in line of the royal betrayal were the Princely states, left without many options in the final Partition Plan. The Indian Independence Bill provided that 'Lapse of Paramountcy' would be effective at the exact moment India became independent.³⁸ There were 562 States in all and some like Travancore, Bhopal and Hyderabad wanted independence but this option could not be exercised. The nearness of the Viceroy with the Congress high command particularly Nehru has left a wanton mark on the entire proceedings of the appropriation of the States. The annexation of the state of Kashmir for one, in which the Pandit was the main culprit, stands today as an evil reminder of connivance with the British.³⁹ For the Congress it was a sensitive issue and more a matter of prestige. The Muslim League was the chief sufferer of this collusion. Mountbatten destroyed the cause, and among many incorrect steps, made Kashmir a lasting disgrace and tragedy.⁴⁰ Hyderabad and Junagarh also became problematic subjects, eventually going over to India, reflecting geographical but not demographic considerations. Sardar Patel was from Junagarh, and this amounted to another act of exerting the authorities to help it side with and join India. In most cases the Partition Council's decisions were ignored and the British, safeguarding their own interests, stood conveniently aside, mostly with tacit considerations. It was the lack of decision on the part of the rulers regarding the Princely states that "added immensely to the confused interpretation of Indian and Pakistani statehood and ultimately, to the scale of partition violence."⁴¹

The Sikh community in the Punjab portrayed a remarkable case of absolute desertion that flared up communal violence once Partition was announced. Being a major community in the Punjab, they were brazenly ignored and least compensated for the loss of their agricultural lands and holy places. The latter was a particularly sore point and gave them much reason to protest and take up arms. The Sikh leaders made it clear that they would resort to violence "if the award went against the interests of their community",⁴² as they saw it coming. In the Punjab none had any doubt that the Sikhs were spearheading the attacks.⁴³ They knew their prized possessions would be divided. For the greater part of early 1940's the Sikhs of the Punjab believed that Pakistan would not materialize.⁴⁴ However, as time passed and the demand for Partition grew in weight and potential, they began to see the prospect of division more practically and clearly. As the date drew close, the Sikhs sent;

... a steady stream of Sikh dignitaries had begged Mountbatten and Jenkins to carve out a Sikh homeland. They wanted the borders of the Punjab redrawn, with its western edge given to Pakistan, an eastern sliver attached to India's United Provinces, and the remainder left, as home to at least 80% of the Sikh community, as well as most of Sikhism's holiest shrines and the rich canal lands cultivated by Sikh farmers.⁴⁵

The Sikh leaders not only insisted on these demands but also warned that if they were not met they would murder officials, cut railway and telephone lines, and also destroy canal head-works.⁴⁶ However, their pleas fell on deaf ears and the British left the Sikhs in the lurch, divided and angered beyond any hope of reconciliation. Their reaction could have been anticipated, as their plans were not hollow threats. In case of Partition and migration their intentions were clear, and so were Governor Jenkins continued implorations to the Viceroy. They were not only armed but very organized. Reporting on May 31, 1947 he writes to Mountbatten, that his administration in Lahore and Amritsar had been "defeated by incendiarism", comparing these two cities to "London during the Blitz."⁴⁷ The Sikhs according to him, were the aggressors with preparations to loot, raid and kill and were in possession of bombs and firearms in many rural areas of East Punjab.⁴⁸ All this was not heeded thus throwing the Punjab in a major genocidal splurge. The Civil war in the Punjab might have been minimized if the Sikh community were given some semblance of acceptance and their demands heeded. 'Sikhistan' as they believed could have solved their problem by exchanging the five million Sikhs in Pakistan with Muslims in India.⁴⁹ By ignoring them the British let the Punjab fall into an orgy of untold misery and violence in which all communities were scalded and irretrievably wounded.

The present deliberation on the governance of the British will remain incomplete without a comment on the infamous '*divide et impera*', already touched upon briefly. To rule, divide and conquer the enemy is an age-old political dictum used as a tool by authoritarian governments to achieve their ends. The British knew its meaning and impact well to foster their Raj in the subcontinent. The word Raj embodies a certain kind of "authoritarian high-mindedness," tracing the "British belief in the inferiority of Indian society."⁵⁰ Having seen its apex it was to decline and by the time the turn of the last Viceroy came after almost two centuries of rule, "the Raj was dead."⁵¹ But during this period the British did not leave any opportunity to widen the communal cleavage. The cultural, religious and social

differences, later systematically manipulated into political, of the varied communal presence provided them with ample opportunity to apply the dictum of 'divide and rule' and gain whatever benefits they could. A foreign rule, more so a colonial power is always on the look out for such measures. It came handy and the British deployed all their manipulative skills at it. Not only this, the British has been alleged to spearhead violence in certain cases.

Mountbatten had to get Nehru to intervene after a leading politician, Pandit Kunzru, made a public statement that the worst killings had been deliberately inspired and encouraged by a British officer. Master Tara Singh went even further. He was reported in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 6 September as saying that there were 'hundreds of cases' in which British officers had ordered innocent civilians to be gunned down.⁵²

There is no doubt in the fact that the British, to use Penderel Moon's term, left the Indians to 'stew in their own juice'.⁵³ Their political vision in India was based on a peculiar form of power.⁵⁴ The anarchy and chaos, which accompanied Partition and independence, however, could have been averted or at least its intensity minimized. India had become victim to a curse that the British seemed to have cast over all their colonies. Seeley was right when he said, "We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half of the world in a fit of absence of mind."⁵⁵

Finally, with the British knowing that the new states were in their early stages of birth and not strong enough to deal with the multitudinous issues of administration thrust upon them, did not act as a responsible agency that could overlook the affairs of migration and refugee re-settlement in particular. This was particularly true of the Punjab. No arrangements were made nor any relief accorded to the miserable human flocks that moved across the borders of India and Pakistan. The PBF as mentioned earlier was hardly capable, equipped or sufficient to control matters.

The onus was on the South Asian leadership to take control and in the detached colonial mind, Partition violence was perceived as *their* problem, a highly dubious perception considering the fact that the nascent governments had not yet begun to function and that, when they did, they would be understaffed, under-resourced and sometimes operating from under the canvas.⁵⁶

The imperial authority had virtually ceased to exist in central Punjab, which could have been effective to some extent in maintaining civil order;⁵⁷ a deliberate *nonchalance* aggravated the situation. It does cast a profound shadow of incompetence when a few British soldiers left behind, realized how thinly the Raj had been spread in its military capacity over the subcontinent;⁵⁸ when the need arose there were none to hold order in the most devastated regions. In fact, "the British left India a society of extremes."⁵⁹ To them only two choices existed, coercion or retreat: the first not being a possibility anymore without a sustained commitment to continue imperial power by the Labour government in London.⁶⁰ The other option they did exercise and planned the infamous exit, leading to unprecedented Punjab violence. It was allowed to escalate "because the British regime's priority before 15 August was to organize the safe retreat of soldiers and officers to ports and then on ships home."⁶¹

Such an approach was bound to lead the freedom struggle of the Indians to a catastrophic culmination. In particular no economic preparation was made with the result that Partition opened up a vista of unknown and unforeseen problems for the new states. It is not far from truth that the British had done nothing to prepare Indians over the long term that they ruled,⁶² clear from what Mountbatten's said to Attlee on November 17, 1947, that he had never supposed 'the Indians could achieve self-government without the risk of further grave communal disasters.'⁶³ Nothing is more telling of how Mountbatten is known to be an accomplice in the ultimate disaster that the Punjab suffered, "accused of precipitating, or at least exacerbating the carnage".⁶⁴ Lord Wavell was very much aware of the British policy and dishonesty. As early as October 1944, he writes in his Journal;

I have found HMG's attitude to India was negligent, hostile and contemptuous to a degree I had not anticipated... Still the more one sees of the political problems and of the Indians, the more one realizes that there are very dark days ahead for India, unless more wisdom and goodwill are shown, and I think they will have to begin from the top, from Whitehall.⁶⁵

This goodwill was not to come and India was left to fare for itself in its most crucial hour. The same chaos was inherited by the two subsequent nation states.

Independence was achieved but the cost was substantial and the British retreated, bequeathing liberation to a vast subcontinent from which, till now, they had only benefitted and gained momentarily. The Imperial authorities were seemingly no more interested in India, and hence the hurried and very pretentious scuttle. Their interest lay more in celebrations of an event they were presiding over, than its

actual peaceful culmination. On August 9, Mountbatten suppressed announcement of frontiers so as not to spoil the fanfare, and thus exacerbated the suffering of millions.⁶⁶

By August 1946 the “British officials made their final retreat from almost every corner of the Raj.”⁶⁷ The British failure to govern in the best interests of the Indians, to rule fairly and justly over one-fifth of humanity, to give a genuine plan of self-government, to fulfill the promise of freedom and to demarcate India into two contented parts remains an ongoing story of grief and misery for the two contiguous neighbours of South Asia. British power in India “was driven by short term visceral passions and did not have a systematic vision of peace and stability nor a way of working able to produce order”, creating only chaos.⁶⁸ Mass transfer was ignored as a possibility. On 4 June, 1947, Lord Mountbatten replied to a question at a press conference;

Personally, I don't see it. There are many physical and practical difficulties involved. Some measure of transfer will come about in a natural way. That is to say I have a feeling that people who have just crossed the boundary will transfer themselves. Perhaps Governments will take steps to transfer populations.⁶⁹

It was the “fuzzy thinking on this critical question” that became the prime flaw in the Partition Plan.⁷⁰ If the Viceroy is unable to see what was coming and escapes from a reality of two million deaths and twenty million displaced,⁷¹ crossing over the new borders, the blame is not to be looked elsewhere. When asked if he had ignored the warnings that the ‘Punjab was going to erupt’ he denied that this was the case.⁷² Whereas Jenkin's forewarnings point to a completely different version. His letters and fortnightly reports to Mountbatten, as mentioned earlier, are full of disastrous consequences, particularly as far as Sikh planning was concerned in the Punjab. There are all in all twenty-three ‘predictions, reports and warnings’ that the Viceroy received and ignored.⁷³

Even today in the 21st century the memories of Partition continue to impact thousands of immigrants and their families as ‘outsiders’.⁷⁴ The historical baggage of colonial rule and Partition madness continues to haunt generations on both sides of the border, and the imperial burden lies heavy on shoulders that conveniently shrugged off the responsibility at that time. “It is difficult to imagine another episode in history in which the outcome is so at odds with professed aims.”⁷⁵ The unrelenting and persistent animosity that flares up at the slightest pretext between India and Pakistan, is evidence enough of a job done defectively. The loss of interest in the destiny of India has become a classic case of British imprudence that led to a flawed Partition. Independence and its celebrations became for the two nations a story of unspoken misery and prolonged trial, much of which the departing British left upon them to control and handle all by themselves.

¹ Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British did to India*, London: Penguin Books, 2017, 1-

² Will Durant, *The Case for India*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930, 55.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, 2.

⁶ Lal Lajput Rai, *Unhappy India*, Calcutta, Banna Publications and Co., 1928, 350.

⁷ Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, xxvii.

⁸ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown: The British Betrayal of India*, Haryana: Penguin Viking, 2016, 179.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Penderel Moon, ed., *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, London: Oxford University Press, 1997, 49.

¹² Talboys Wheeler, *Nations of the World : India and the Frontier States of Afghanistan, Nipal and Burma*, vol. 2, New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1899 756.

¹³ Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ David Gilmour, *The British in India: Three Centuries of Ambition and Experience*. London: Penguin Books, 2018, 523.

¹⁶ In this context the Fortnightly Reports of Punjab Governor Evan Jenkins to the Viceroy Lord Mountbatten provide the most authentic evidence as cited in the last two volumes by Penderel Moon and Nicholas Mansergh, eds., *Transfer of Power*, (Vols. XI and XII) London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1984,

¹⁷ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 217.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ CAB128/8, CM 104, (46) 3: 'India: Constitutional Position': Cabinet Conclusions (Confidential Annex). Part 1.

²⁰ Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of British Raj*, 195-196.

²¹ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered: Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016, 475.

²² Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, 'Wavell's Breakdown Plan, 1945-1947: An Appraisal' *Journal of Punjab Studies*, volume 16 Number 2, University of California, USA, spring 2009.

²³ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 234.

²⁴ Dalton diary, 24 February 1947, reprinted in H. Dalton, *High Tide and After: Memoirs, 1945-60*, London: 1962, 211.

²⁵ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered*, 474.

²⁶ Barney White Spunner, *Partition: The Story of Indian Independence and the Creation of Pakistan*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2017, 243.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 253.

²⁹ Sampuran Singh to Patel, 27 August 1947, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, 10 vols., eds., Durga Das and Vallabhai Patel, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1971-72, 4:256.

³⁰ Rees Papers, SxMs 16, 25 August 1947.

³¹ Barney White-Spunner, *Partition*, 233-234.

³² Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 231.

³³ Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961, 25.

³⁴ Ibid., 95.

³⁵ Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Mountbatten's Response to the Communal Riots in the Punjab, 20 March to 15 August 1947: An Overview" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society / First View Article / August 2016*, pp 1 – 24

³⁶ Chinmay Tumble, *India Moving: A History of Migration*, Haryana, Penguin Viking, 2018, 169.

³⁷ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 232.

³⁸ Ibid., 235-236

³⁹ Philips Talbot, *An American Witness to India's Partition*, New Delhi: Sage, 2007, 345.

⁴⁰ Shahid Hamid, *Disastrous Twilight*, London: Leo Cooper, 1986, 265.

⁴¹ Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, London: Yale University Press, 2007, 98.

⁴² Paul R. Brass, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946-47: Means, Methods and Purposes", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5(1), 71, 2003, 81.

⁴³ Nisid Hajari, *Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition*, London: Penguin Viking, 2015, 155.

⁴⁴ Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*. 36.

⁴⁵ Nisid Hajari, *Midnight's Fury*, 120-121.

⁴⁶ Giani Katar Singh told this to the Punjab Governor, Evan Jenkins on July 10, 1947, in Nisid Hajri, *Midnight's Fury*, 121.

⁴⁷ Penderel Moon and Nicholas Mansergh, eds., *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between India and Pakistan, 1942-47*, Jenkins to Mountbatten, May 31, 1947, Vol. XI, London: Her Majesty's Office, 1947, 23-27.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Jenkins to Mountbatten, July 30, 1947, 425-427.

⁴⁹ Lionel Carter, ed., *Punjab Politics: Governor's Fortnightly Reports and other Key Documents*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2007, 2:146.

⁵⁰ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered*, 480.

⁵¹ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 225.

⁵² Barney White-Spunner, *Partition: The Story of Indian Independence and the Creation of Pakistan 1947*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017, 270.

⁵³ Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*, 93.

⁵⁴ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered*, 481.

⁵⁵ John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures*, New York: Macmillan, 1894, 17.

⁵⁶ Yasmin Khan, *Partition*, 103.

⁵⁷ Paul R. Brass, "The Partition and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946-47: Means, Methods, and Purposes", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5(1), 91, 2003.

⁵⁸ Barney White-Spunner, *Partition*, 344.

⁵⁹ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered*, 478.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁶² Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 257.

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⁶⁴ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 257.

⁶⁵ Penderel Moon, *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, London: Oxford University Press, 1997, 93.

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⁶⁷ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered*, 465.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 481.

⁶⁹ "Britain Means to Quit, Declares Lord Mountbatten", *Times Of India*, 5 June, 1947.

⁷⁰ Yasmin Khan, *Partition*, 100.

⁷¹ The numbers have varied from 200,000 to 300,000 for the displaced and over a million for killed. For details see Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 45-46.

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⁷³ Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994, 112.

⁷⁴ Chinmay Tumble, *India Moving*, 180.

⁷⁵ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 258.