

Miscarriage of Cabinet Mission Plan 1946

Truncated India, Truncated Pakistan and Truncated Humanity

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Abstract

From evolutionary to revolutionary, from conciliatory to belligerent, from co-operation to non cooperation, India's freedom for struggle had unpredictable oscillations. Once jewel in the crown of British Empire became an Achilles hill. The insurmountable challenges from domestic and international arena made British Empire take a somber decision to Divide and Quit. This paper highlights the British cabinet mission to India and how it ended in a fiasco ultimately collapsing the bridge between the two communities leaving the scope open for perennial skirmishes.

In India during *post-war 1945*, the the penultimate scene of the political drama and sense of abnegation of what was once a precious jewel in the crown of British catapulted the political euphoria to the front. The state actors in the domestic power struggle were the Congress and the League. However, the non state actors like the then president of America and INA founder Subhash Chandra Bose and others too had tightened their grip over the political maneuverability. The state actors, mainly Indian National Congress and Muslim League had sensed the proximity of freedom.

One classic example will prove the point as to how British regime in India was by and large a reactionary and not precautionary. In November 1945, the British Commander-in-Chief took the fateful decision which was tantamount to a political suicide of committing to trial three officers of Subhash Bose's Indian National Army-a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh-before a military court at Red Fort, Delhi. This trial served as a facilitator to unite all warring sections of Indian society which created a huge tidal wave of anti British sentiments in India.

Before the authorities could wake up to the fact that the men in the dock had become national heroes, INA was all in mood and preparation to flex its muscle against British empire by effecting mutiny which had a portent danger of cascading effect where ever Indian army personnel fighting along with allied forces against the axis power. This fear psychosis of Mutiny with in INA proved to be an Achilles hills for the British rulers.

Close on the heels of general elections, the Congress and the Muslim league systematically exploited the issue of trial of INA officers belonging to multi religion back ground. This was reflected in the ensuing elections, in which the Congress captured practically all the general seats, while the League took most of the Muslim ones. This was a point in the history where the world had witnessed a minuscule organization Muslim League assuming a shape of gigantic force to reckon with. Further this has substantiated Jinnah's claim that the leagues' importunate demand for separate statehood was backed by majority of Muslims.

The ongoing World War II, aggression of Japan and axis forces, dwindling British economy, augmented the trouble of British Empire in India. To further add to the trouble both the major warring religious communities Hindu and Muslim were unyielding. Progressive political empowerment of their leaders over the period of time by British Government seemed to have been proving costly to the British Empire, in fact it was a counterproductive boomerang effect which started making the firm rooted British Empire in India shaky at almost all fronts.

In the meanwhile, with the ouster of the Conservative Party from office in Britain, The House of Commons in London considering the overall situation of perennial deadlock in India formed a firm opinion that India was no longer a jewel in the crown but proving to be the crown with bullets. The various factors depicted in the above paragraph formed a snowballing effect which landed British authorities in the House of Commons to a commitment to relieve her from the "White man's burden". Winston Churchill the strongest proponent of imperialism lost the electoral battle in the year 1945. With the ouster of Conservative party, the Labor party assumed the office with Sir Richard Clement Atlee as its Prime minister. Now Jinnah's prospect of getting Pakistan "on a platter" faded. He knew, the labor government in Britain would not countenance his demand for separate statehood to Pakistan in its prevailing state of mind, and he was now uncertain whether he would be able to get even a "moth-eaten" Pakistan. It was mentioned in the election manifesto of Labor party that if voted to power they would give independence to India.

The Cabinet Mission dispatched by Attlee landed in Delhi towards the end of March 1946. The Cabinet Mission's plan envisaged a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States dealing with foreign affairs, defense and communications and having the power to raise the finances required for these subjects.

The cabinet Mission was comprised of three Cabinet Ministers of England

1. Sir Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State for India.
2. Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade,
3. V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty

The solution offered by the Cabinet Mission Plan of 16th May 1946, had among other items the following chief ones.

1. There should be one union of India, embracing British, India and the princely states, which should deal with foreign affairs, defense and communications and have the power to raise finances required for those three areas of government activity.
2. All other areas of policy would be delegated to the provinces.
3. The princely states would retain all powers other than those ceded to the union.
4. Three sections or groups should be constituted by the provinces. Group A should include the Hindu-majority provinces of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Orissa. Section B should include Muslim-majority provinces of the northwest: Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Sind (Sindh). Group C should include the Muslim majority provinces of the northeast: Bengal and Assam.

In a nutshell cabinet mission envisaged a loose federation with a weak centre.

The Congress, in a resolution of May 24, 1946 declared that it was not agreeable to the proposals since it believed that an independent India “must necessarily have a strong central authority capable of representing the nation with power and dignity in the councils of the world”

To cut a long story short the congress was not in favor of parity of power with Muslim at the centre where as the League wanted more and more devolution of power outside the centre. Interestingly, Jinnah had always insisted for the phenomenon of “steel frame” meaning there by Muslim and Hindu majority will get insulated within the steel frame. With the demonstration of convenient defense and aggressiveness from the Congress and the League the Cabinet proposal of May 16th had a still birth.

On 16th June, hoping against hope, the Cabinet Mission came out with specific proposals for the formation of an interim government at the centre and setting up a constituent assembly to devise a constitution for a self-governing India. That was the signal for another round of tortuous bargaining. The Congress asked for the right to appoint a Muslim of its choice to the interim Cabinet to establish its claim to represent all communities in the country. The Viceroy, however, assured Jinnah that he did not countenance the demand.

Predictably, the Congress Working Committee thereupon turned down the scheme for an interim government, while at the same time signifying its willingness to participate in the deliberations of the constitution-making body. Jinnah's response was not any the less surprising. He was wholly agreeable to the League's joining an interim cabinet; but he chose to be studiously non-committal in the plan for a constituent assembly.

The Congress-League tussle came to a head when Nehru took over the Congress president ship from Azad on 6th July. In one of his first pronouncements on assuming office, he declared: "We

are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided for the moment to go into the Constituent Assembly." Nehru had for long been Jinnah's bete noire. At this particular moment, he was understandably more distasteful to the League champion than ever before. It was Nehru, as Congress President, that the Viceroy would call upon to form an interim government, a prospect that Jinnah was bound to regard with annoyance and deep suspicion. He lost no time, therefore, in condemning Nehru's statement of 6th July as "a complete repudiation of the basic form upon which the long-term scheme rests." From this posture of hostility it was but a short step to the startling volte face of Jinnah. Some three weeks later when he prevailed upon the Council of the Muslim League in Bombay to withdraw acceptance of the Cabinet Mission plan in its entirety and to call for observance of 16th August as "Direct Action Day." Interestingly this was the only organized call given by Muslim League in the entire tenure of India's struggle for freedom which caused widespread holocaust in which more than 10000 people in Calcutta alone were killed in a single day, in a ghastly communal blood path. This bizarre incidence of unbridled mass murder also known as "The great Calcutta killings" and "The night of long knives"

Finally amidst acrimony and tiresome deadlock emanating from what was once described as sick society the prime minister of Britain Mr. Sir Richard Clement Atlee announced that the British government will grant independence to India with Partition not later than June 1948. Mountbatten as new Vice Roy of India was deputed to affect the transfer of power with partition within the stipulated time frame. It was said that, if Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins to be believed, Jinnah was suffering from lung ailment he had few months left for him to see the dream which he nurtured for life time and fought for it vehemently come true. He was eager to see the writing on the wall.

By 1946, the British Government was rather quite eager to exit out of India and was unwilling to have the negotiations delayed for even a couple of years. Jinnah who was against the partition of Bengal and Punjab was pressed upon by Lord Mountbatten to accept it or else lose Pakistan altogether. In the end the Pakistan that Jinnah got was far from the vision of his dreams but a moth-eaten Pakistan". The non-Muslim majority areas in the Punjab and in Bengal along with Assam (except Sylhet) decided to join India.

While both India and Pakistan gained their independence they paid an unimaginable price for it. The extent of loss of life and violence surpassed the fears of the people. About 1 million people were killed and more than 75,000 women were raped and more than 10 million people were displaced.

Conclusion

To conclude the cabinet Mission was an intellectual strategic battle in futile which born out of hardcore ambitions churning out of religious sentiments and hatred developed over the period of time. Both the warring parties including non state actors tried with surgical precision to resolve the deadlock however as history tells many a times they joined the drawing table to find

out an amicable solutions but had to abandon it without a solution in sight. In the process many hearts got lacerated, many lives sacrificed, and ultimately when border commission came to united India with the sole purpose of dividing this nation in to two namely India and Pakistan there came a lingering “two nation theory” came to a full circle. Whatever may be the snowballing effects and accumulated causes and events responsible for this at the end what everyone has got was a truncated India, truncated Pakistan and truncated humanity.

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