

Pakistan Movement (1940–1947): From Lahore Resolution to the Creation of Pakistan

Introduction

The period **1940–1947** represents the final and decisive phase of the Pakistan Movement. During these seven years, the demand for Muslim political safeguards transformed into a clear demand for a separate homeland. The **Lahore Resolution of 23 March 1940** provided the political foundation, while the **Cripps Mission, Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, Simla Conference, Elections of 1945–46, Cabinet Mission Plan, Direct Action Day, and the 3 June Plan** shaped the final constitutional struggle. The failure of Congress and the Muslim League to agree on a common constitutional framework ultimately convinced the British Government that partition was the most practical solution. Pakistan emerged as an independent state on **14 August 1947**.

1. Lahore Resolution (1940)

Background

The political experience of the Congress Ministries (1937–1939) strengthened Muslim political consciousness.

Muslim League leaders increasingly argued that:

- Muslims were a separate nation.
- Congress could not represent all Indians.
- Majority rule could threaten Muslim political interests.
- Muslims required an independent constitutional arrangement.

Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah increasingly emphasized the **Two-Nation Theory**.

Lahore Session

The annual session of the **All-India Muslim League** was held at **Minto Park, Lahore**, from **22–24 March 1940**.

The historic resolution was presented by **A.K. Fazlul Huq**, the Premier of Bengal.

It was adopted on **23 March 1940**.

Main Features

The Resolution declared that:

- No constitutional plan would be acceptable to Muslims unless Muslim-majority areas were grouped into independent political units.

- Muslim-majority areas in the **north-western and eastern zones of India** should be constituted into autonomous and sovereign units.
- Constituent units should enjoy autonomy.
- Adequate safeguards should be provided for minorities.

Importance

The Lahore Resolution transformed Muslim political demands from constitutional safeguards into a demand for separate political units.

It became the political foundation of the Pakistan Movement.

2. World War II and the Pakistan Movement

The Second World War began in **September 1939**.

The British Government declared India a participant in the war without consulting Indian political parties.

Congress opposed this decision and demanded a clear commitment to Indian independence.

The Muslim League adopted a more cautious strategy and cooperated conditionally with the British.

Political Impact

The war created an opportunity for Jinnah to strengthen the Muslim League.

The British increasingly recognized that:

No constitutional settlement could be achieved without Muslim League cooperation.

3. August Offer (1940)

The British Government issued the **August Offer** in August 1940 under Viceroy **Lord Linlithgow**.

Main Proposals

- Expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council.
- Greater Indian participation in governance.
- Establishment of a War Advisory Council.
- Promise of constitutional negotiations after the war.
- Assurance that no future constitution would be imposed without minority consent.

Muslim League's Reaction

The League welcomed the principle that Muslim consent was essential.

However, it did not regard the offer as sufficient to establish Pakistan.

Significance

The August Offer indirectly strengthened the Muslim League's constitutional position because the British acknowledged the importance of minority consent.

4. Cripps Mission (1942)

Background

By 1942, Britain was facing serious military pressure from Japan during World War II.

The British Government sent **Sir Stafford Cripps** to India in March 1942 to secure Indian political cooperation.

Main Proposals

The Cripps proposals offered:

- Dominion Status after the war.
- An elected Constituent Assembly.
- Provincial representation.
- Provinces could choose not to join the proposed Indian Union.
- Protection of minorities.

Muslim League's Reaction

The League rejected the proposals because:

- Pakistan was not explicitly accepted.
- The proposed arrangement did not clearly recognize Muslims as a separate nation.
- The mechanism for creating separate Muslim states was inadequate.

Congress Reaction

Congress also rejected the proposals.

Congress objected to:

- Dominion Status being postponed until after the war.
- Provincial right to opt out of the Union.
- Continued British control over defence during the war.

Significance

The failure of the Cripps Mission demonstrated the widening gap between Congress and the Muslim League.

5. Gandhi-Jinnah Talks (1944)

In **September 1944**, Gandhi and Jinnah held negotiations in Bombay.

Main Issue

The central issue was the future of India's constitutional structure.

Jinnah's Position

Jinnah demanded recognition of Muslims as a separate nation and acceptance of the principle of Pakistan.

Gandhi's Position

Gandhi was unwilling to accept the League's interpretation of the Two-Nation Theory and opposed partition before independence.

Result

The talks failed.

Significance

The failure demonstrated that the Congress-League constitutional conflict could not be solved through personal negotiations between Gandhi and Jinnah.

6. Wavell Plan (1945)

The new Viceroy, **Lord Wavell**, proposed a constitutional arrangement in June 1945.

Main Features

- Reconstitution of the Viceroy's Executive Council.
- Equal representation of caste Hindus and Muslims.
- All members except the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief would be Indians.
- Muslim members were to be nominated by the Muslim League.

7. Simla Conference (1945)

The **Simla Conference** was held in June–July 1945 to discuss the Wavell Plan.

Major Dispute

The central disagreement was:

Who had the authority to nominate Muslim representatives?

Jinnah argued that the Muslim League was the sole representative organization of Indian Muslims.

Congress rejected this claim.

Failure

The conference ended without agreement.

Importance

The Simla Conference strengthened Jinnah's claim that the Muslim League was the principal political representative of Indian Muslims.

8. Elections of 1945–46

The elections were a decisive political test.

Muslim League Performance

The Muslim League achieved a remarkable victory in Muslim constituencies.

It won approximately:

- **90% of Muslim seats** at the provincial level.
- Almost all Muslim seats in the Central Legislative Assembly.

Significance

The elections demonstrated that:

The Muslim League had become the dominant political organization representing Muslim political aspirations.

This dramatically strengthened Jinnah's bargaining position with both Congress and the British Government.

9. Cabinet Mission Plan (1946)

The British Government sent a three-member delegation to India in **March 1946**.

Members included:

- Lord Pethick-Lawrence

- Sir Stafford Cripps
- A.V. Alexander

The mission aimed to devise a constitutional settlement and transfer power to Indian leaders

Main Features of Cabinet Mission Plan

1. Union of India

A loose Indian Union would deal with:

- Defence
- Foreign Affairs
- Communications

2. Provincial Groups

Provinces would be grouped into three sections:

Group A

Mostly Hindu-majority provinces.

Group B

Muslim-majority north-western provinces:

- Punjab
- NWFP
- Sindh
- British Balochistan

Group C

Muslim-majority Bengal and Assam grouping.

3. Constituent Assembly

A Constituent Assembly would draft the constitution.

4. Interim Government

An interim government would be established before the final transfer of power.

Muslim League's Reaction

Initially, the Muslim League accepted the plan because the grouping scheme provided substantial autonomy to Muslim-majority areas.

However, the League later withdrew its acceptance after disagreements regarding interpretation and implementation.

Congress Reaction

Congress accepted participation in the Constituent Assembly but rejected the compulsory nature of provincial grouping.

This disagreement destroyed the possibility of implementing the plan.

10. Direct Action Day — 16 August 1946

After the Cabinet Mission Plan broke down, the Muslim League called for **Direct Action Day** on **16 August 1946** to demonstrate Muslim determination.

Major communal violence occurred, particularly in **Calcutta**.

The violence spread to other parts of India.

Political Impact

The violence demonstrated the growing inability of Congress and the Muslim League to coexist within a single political framework.

It strengthened the British realization that a constitutional settlement without partition might lead to prolonged communal conflict.

11. Interim Government (1946)

An interim government was formed under the leadership of **Jawaharlal Nehru**.

The Muslim League initially refused to participate but later joined.

However, cooperation remained extremely difficult.

Congress and League representatives disagreed over:

- Decision-making.
- Ministries.
- Constitutional policy.
- Future political structure.

The interim government failed to create genuine political cooperation.

12. Attlee's Declaration (20 February 1947)

British Prime Minister **Clement Attlee** announced in February 1947 that Britain intended to transfer power in India.

He stated that British rule would end by **June 1948**.

Lord Wavell was replaced by **Lord Mountbatten** as Viceroy.

13. Lord Mountbatten and the 3 June Plan

Lord Mountbatten arrived in India in **March 1947**.

He quickly concluded that a united India was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

The **3 June Plan (1947)** provided for the partition of British India.

Main Features of the 3 June Plan

1. Partition

British India would be divided into:

- India
- Pakistan

2. Punjab

The Punjab Legislative Assembly would vote on partition.

If partition was approved, separate arrangements would be made for Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority areas.

3. Bengal

Bengal would also be divided if its legislature voted for partition.

4. NWFP Referendum

A referendum would determine whether NWFP would join:

- India
- Pakistan

The referendum resulted in a vote in favour of Pakistan.

5. Sylhet Referendum

A referendum was held in Sylhet.

The majority voted to join East Bengal, which became part of Pakistan.

6. Boundary Commission

A Boundary Commission headed by **Sir Cyril Radcliffe** was established to determine the boundaries between India and Pakistan.

14. Indian Independence Act (1947)

The British Parliament passed the **Indian Independence Act** in July 1947.

Main Features

- British India would be divided into two independent Dominions.
- India and Pakistan would become independent.
- British sovereignty over the princely states would end.
- Each Dominion would have its own Constituent Assembly.
- The British Parliament would no longer legislate for India and Pakistan.
- Power would be transferred in August 1947.

15. Creation of Pakistan

Pakistan emerged as an independent state in **August 1947**.

The new country consisted primarily of:

Western Wing

- Punjab
- Sindh
- NWFP
- Balochistan

Eastern Wing

- East Bengal

Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah became the **first Governor-General of Pakistan**.

Liaquat Ali Khan became the first Prime Minister.

Major Factors Behind the Creation of Pakistan

The creation of Pakistan was the result of several interconnected factors.

1. Two-Nation Theory

The ideological foundation of the Pakistan Movement.

2. Muslim Political Identity

Muslims increasingly viewed themselves as a separate political nation.

3. Failure of Hindu-Muslim Constitutional Compromise

Repeated attempts at constitutional cooperation failed.

4. Congress Ministries (1937–39)

The period strengthened Muslim fears of majority domination.

5. Leadership of Jinnah

Jinnah transformed the Muslim League into a powerful mass political organization.

6. Lahore Resolution

Provided the formal political framework for Muslim self-determination.

7. Muslim League's Electoral Victory

The 1945–46 elections demonstrated the League's mass support among Muslims.

8. Failure of Cabinet Mission Plan

The final major attempt to preserve Indian unity failed.

9. Communal Violence

Violence in 1946–47 made a united constitutional settlement increasingly difficult.

10. British Economic and Political Weakness

After World War II, Britain faced:

- Economic difficulties.
- Political pressure.
- Rising anti-colonial movements.

Britain increasingly wanted a rapid transfer of power.

Chronological Timeline: 1940–1947

Year/Date

Event

Year/Date	Event
23 March 1940	Lahore Resolution
1940	August Offer
1942	Cripps Mission
1944	Gandhi-Jinnah Talks
1945	Wavell Plan
June–July 1945	Simla Conference
1945–46	General Elections
March 1946	Cabinet Mission
16 August 1946	Direct Action Day
1946	Interim Government
20 February 1947	Attlee Declaration
March 1947	Mountbatten becomes Viceroy
3 June 1947	3 June Plan
July 1947	Indian Independence Act
14 August 1947	Pakistan becomes independent
15 August 1947	India becomes independent

Constitutional Evolution: 1940–1947

The entire period can be understood through this sequence:

Lahore Resolution (1940)



August Offer (1940)



Cripps Mission (1942)



Gandhi-Jinnah Talks (1944)



Wavell Plan & Simla Conference (1945)



Elections (1945–46)



Cabinet Mission Plan (1946)



Direct Action Day (1946)



Attlee Declaration (1947)



3 June Plan (1947)

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Indian Independence Act (1947)

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PAKISTAN — 14 AUGUST 1947

Role of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Jinnah's leadership was central to the success of the Pakistan Movement.

Constitutional Leadership

He consistently demanded constitutional recognition of Muslim nationhood.

Political Organization

He transformed the Muslim League from an elite organization into a mass political movement.

Negotiations

He represented Muslim interests in negotiations with:

- British Government.
- Congress.
- Gandhi.
- Wavell.
- Mountbatten.

Electoral Victory

Under his leadership, the Muslim League achieved a decisive victory in the 1945–46 elections.

Final Settlement

Jinnah accepted partition as the practical solution to the constitutional deadlock.

His leadership transformed the Muslim demand from constitutional safeguards into the establishment of an independent state.

Critical Evaluation

The period 1940–1947 represents the most dramatic phase of the Pakistan Movement. The Lahore Resolution gave the movement a clear political direction, while subsequent constitutional negotiations repeatedly failed because Congress and the Muslim League could not agree on the distribution of political power. The Cripps Mission, Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, Simla Conference, and Cabinet Mission Plan all attempted to preserve some

form of Indian unity but failed to resolve the fundamental question of Muslim political sovereignty. The Muslim League's decisive electoral victory in 1945–46 demonstrated its mass support among Muslims and strengthened Jinnah's claim to speak for them. Communal violence and political instability further convinced the British that a rapid transfer of power was necessary. The 3 June Plan ultimately provided the framework for partition, leading to the establishment of Pakistan in August 1947.

Conclusion

The period from **1940 to 1947** represents the culmination of decades of Muslim political struggle in British India. The Lahore Resolution transformed Muslim political aspirations into a clear demand for autonomous political units, while the failure of the Cripps Mission, Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, Simla Conference, and Cabinet Mission demonstrated the impossibility of reaching a mutually acceptable constitutional settlement within a united India. The decisive Muslim League victory in the 1945–46 elections strengthened Jinnah's claim to represent Indian Muslims, while communal violence made coexistence increasingly difficult. Finally, the Attlee Declaration, Mountbatten Plan, and Indian Independence Act provided the constitutional mechanism for partition. Under the determined leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Muslim League succeeded in converting the demand for Muslim political security into the creation of an independent state. Thus, **14 August 1947** marked the culmination of the constitutional, political, and ideological struggle that had developed over several decades.