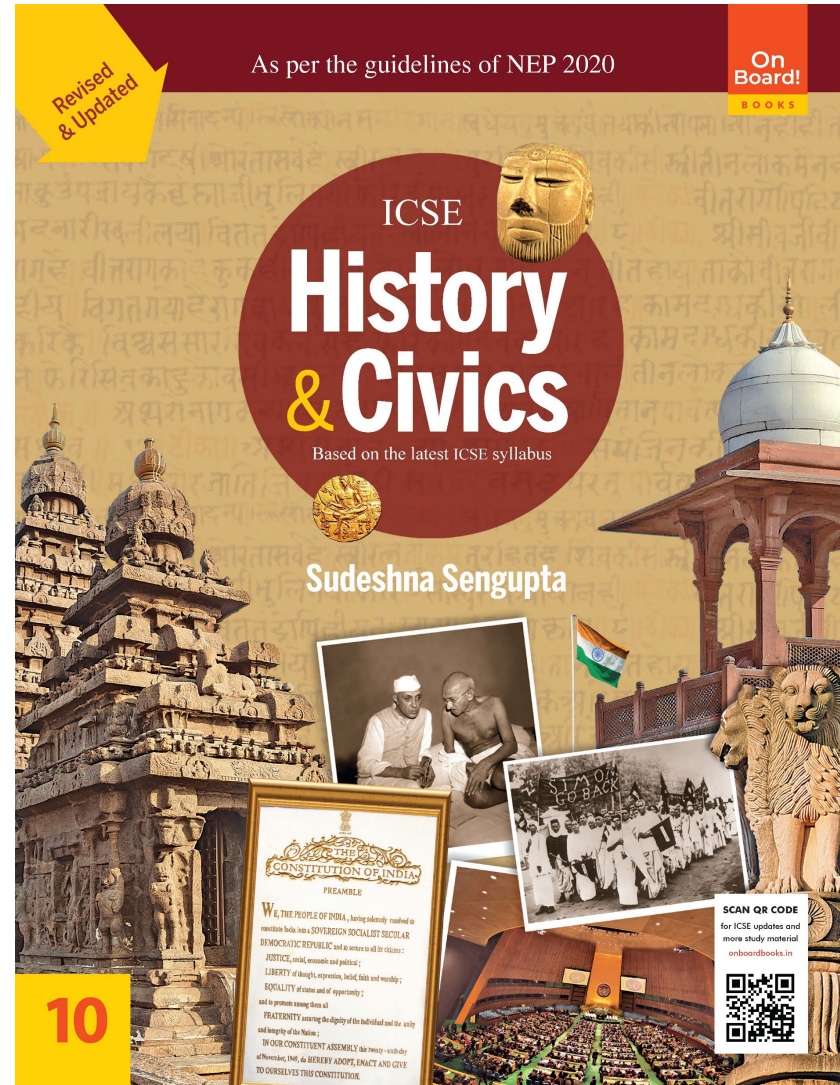


# On Board!

**BOOKS**

# ICSE History and Civics 10



# Section B: History

# Chapter 9 Independence and the Partition of India

- THE WAVELL PLAN
- BRITISH ELECTIONS
- GENERAL ELECTIONS
- THE CABINET MISSION
- Proposals
- FORMATION OF THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT
- Direct Action
- Muslim League and the interim government
- Attlee's declaration
- THE MOUNTBATTEN PLAN
- Acceptance of the Partition of India
- THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE ACT (1947)

# Chapter 9 Independence and the Partition of India

The Second World War saw India grappling with famine, inflation, hoarding and scarcity. It also witnessed large-scale arrests of Congress leaders, which rendered a death blow to the Quit India Movement. Whatever little resistance was offered in some regions, was quelled with a heavy hand. However, the mood of the people of India was far from being defeatist.

## THE WAVELL PLAN

Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India, wanted to end the political deadlock that had arisen because of the League's demand. In 1945, Lord Wavell, convened a conference of different political leaders at Simla to unfold the Wavell Plan, wherein the following proposals were made:

- The Viceroy's Executive Council would be reconstructed.
- Hindus and Muslims would be represented at par on the Viceroy's Council.
- India would be given Dominion Status in the long run.
- The constitution of India would be drafted by the Indians themselves.
- The Governor General would retain the veto power.

Rift between the Muslim League and the Congress with regard to the right of inclusion of Hindus and Muslims in the Executive Council made the Wavell Plan inoperative.

## BRITISH ELECTIONS

For the first time, the British government officially declared the independence of India as their immediate goal. Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced elections to the central and provincial legislatures in 1945–46. It was further announced that the newly elected representatives would work out a new free self-governing constitution for British India.

## GENERAL ELECTIONS

Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were held and the results showed the overwhelming success of the Congress. The Muslim League won the reserved Muslim seats. The Congress and the Muslim League were the only two parties that dominated the elections.

### THE CABINET MISSION

The Cabinet Mission, comprising Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and AV Alexander, formed to work along with the Viceroy and Indian Leaders for the procedure relating to constitutional issues, had the following objectives.

- To set up the machinery for writing a constitution for free India.
- To make arrangements for the formation of an interim government.

The purpose was to effect a compromise between the major groups for an early transfer of power.

### Proposals

The Congress and the League were unable to present a united scheme. It was decided that an interim government may be set up at once to carry on the administration of British India until such time as a new constitution can be brought into being. With reference to the demand for a fully sovereign State of Pakistan as demanded by the Muslim League, the Cabinet Mission pointed out that, 'the setting up of a separate sovereign State of Pakistan would not solve the communal problem because of a pre-dominant non-Muslim population.

## Final proposals

- There would be a Federal Union of India, embracing both British India and the states, which would deal with three important subjects namely, foreign affairs, defence and communications.
- All subjects other than the above mentioned and all residuary powers would be given to the provinces.
- The Union would have an executive and a legislature constituted from British India and states' representatives.
- The provinces would be free to form groups and each group would function like a Regional Union.
- The Cabinet Mission proposed that the Constituent Assembly would consist of 385 members, of whom 292 would be representatives from the provinces and 93 would represent the Indian states.
- An interim government would be formed at the centre.
- India would have the choice to remain with the British Commonwealth or secede from it.
- A treaty between the Constituent Assembly and the United Kingdom would be worked out to enable a smooth transfer of power.

The Congress accepted the plan. The Muslim League passed a resolution accepting the Cabinet Mission proposals though the demand for Pakistan was not mentioned. The provision of grouping the provinces on religious lines had the makings of Pakistan in it.

## FORMATION OF THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

On 16 June 1946, the Viceroy issued a statement proposing to set up an interim government of fourteen members. There would be six members belonging to the Congress, which would include a Scheduled Caste member, five from the Muslim League, one Sikh, one Indian Christian and one Parsi. The Congress was in a commanding position in the Constituent Assembly and Jinnah was nervous. The Muslim League refused to join the interim government and decided to resort to direct action for creating Pakistan.

### Direct Action

16 August 1946 was the day when the Muslim League planned peaceful protests all over India to voice the Muslim demand for a separate State. Brutal communal violence ensued in Calcutta and a great portion of the city was on fire. Direct Action riots in Calcutta soon spread throughout the country. The British government remained unmoved. Similar incidents were reported in Delhi, Lahore, Amritsar and Multan. The Viceroy invited Nehru to form the interim government. As the President of the interim government, Nehru assumed office on 2 September 1946.

### Muslim League and the interim government

The new government began its work. The representatives of the League refused to accept Nehru's leadership or the concept of collective responsibility. As described, 'it consisted of a Congress bloc and a Muslim bloc, each functioning under separate leadership'. The Congress leaders demanded that the Muslim League ministers should quit the government. With the prospect of a civil war looming large over India, the Secretary of State tried for an agreement between the two major parties.



## Attlee's declaration

British Prime Minister Clement Attlee came up with a momentous declaration. On 20 February 1947, he decided to fix a definite date for British to leave India whereafter the responsibility for the administration would fall upon the Indians themselves. Prime Minister Attlee announced the appointment of Viscount Mountbatten as the Viceroy in succession to Lord Wavell. Attlee said that Mountbatten 'will be entrusted with the task of transferring to Indian hands responsibility for the government of British India in a manner that will best ensure the future happiness and prosperity of India.' This declaration was absolute and unconditional.

### THE MOUNTBATTEN PLAN

When Lord Mountbatten came to India as the Viceroy in March 1947, the situation was very tense. The Viceroy held a conference attended by prominent leaders to announce his plans.

- The partition of Bengal and the Punjab was proposed.
- The Legislative Assembly of Sindh would take its own decision.
- With regard to the NWFP, a referendum would be held to choose between the existing Constituent Assembly and a new one.
- If Bengal had to be partitioned, a referendum would be held.
- The princely states would have the freedom to associate themselves with either of the Dominions or to remain independent.
- There would also be a Boundary Commission to demarcate the boundaries of the two Dominions if and when partition would take place.
- In the new plan, the India Office would be abolished.
- The Dominions would have the freedom to decide whether they would like to remain within the British Commonwealth or be independent. It was decided that transfer of power would be effected by 15 August 1947.

## Acceptance of the Partition of India

The Congress Working Committee met and approved of the new plan announced by the Viceroy. Partition was accepted as a necessary evil. It was believed that a smaller India with a strong centre would be more powerful than a larger India with a weak federation and a weaker centre. The rigidity of the Muslim League and the growing communal problems made partition appear as the only solution. The choice the country had to make was 'partition or constant battles'.

### THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE ACT (1947)

The British government, in consultation with the Viceroy, prepared a draft of the Indian Independence Bill. Main provisions of the Indian Independence Act are summarized as follows:

- Two independent Dominions, known respectively as India and Pakistan, were to be set up as from 15 August 1947.
- The territories of the two Dominions were defined clearly.
- The boundaries were to be decided by the Boundary Commission.
- For each of the new Dominions, there was to be a Governor General who would be appointed by His Majesty.
- The legislatures of each of the Dominions would have full power to make laws for that Dominion.
- With effect from 15 August 1947, His Majesty's Government would cease to have any responsibility for the Government of British India.
- The Constituent Assembly of each Dominion would exercise the powers of the Central Legislature.
- The Governor General had the power to make the Indian Independence Act operational.
- Provision was made for the division of the Indian Army between the new Dominions.

Jinnah was sworn in as the Governor General of Pakistan. Formally, Pakistan became an independent state on 14 August 1947. The Constituent Assembly of the Indian Union met in Delhi on the night of 14 August 1947. The new Cabinet headed by Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister was sworn in at midnight, 15 August 1947. But this era of independence witnessed unparalleled communal hatred. India had to pay a heavy price for its freedom. There was carnage as refugees crossed borders. Tragedies were witnessed in different parts of the country.

C Rajagopalachari was sworn in as the first and the only Indian Governor General on 20 June 1948. On 26 January 1950, Dr Rajendra Prasad became the first President of the Indian Republic. The Constituent Assembly became the Parliament of India under the provisions of the new Constitution until the first general elections which were concluded in 1952. The journey of a new democracy called India had begun.

## To Remember

**Background** – The Second World War saw the idea of Pakistan gaining ground, efforts were made for reconciliation between the League and the Congress, but in vain.

**The Wavell Plan** – It aimed at ending the political deadlock between the Congress and the League, among the many provisions was the provision of equal representation of the Hindus and the Muslims in the Viceroy's Executive Council. The League's rigid stand made the Plan inoperative.

**The Cabinet Mission** – The Cabinet Mission aimed at setting up a machinery for drawing up the constitution for free India, proposed a Federal Union wherein important subjects vested with the Union, residuary powers with the provinces, the provinces were divided into three groups, it also proposed the formation of an interim government.

**Formation of the interim government** – Fourteen member government, Jinnah refused to accept the terms, Nehru assumed office on 2 September 1946, Muslim League declared it as a Day of Mourning.

**Direct action day** – 16 August 1946 was the day of direct action, carnage on the streets of Calcutta, communal riots spread to other parts of the country.

**Muslim League and the interim government** – The Muslim League agreed to join the interim government, it refused to accept Nehru's leadership, no progress on any front, Rajendra Prasad elected the President of the Constituent Assembly.

**Attlee's Declaration** – Definite day for the British to leave India was announced, Lord Mountbatten was appointed as the new Viceroy.

**The Mountbatten Plan** – Mountbatten realized that Partition of India was inevitable, as per his plan Bengal and Punjab were to be partitioned, Sindh, Baluchistan and Sylhet to decide by a referendum, princely states were given freedom of choice, A Boundary Commission was to be set up, India Office was abolished, Dominions free to remain within or leave the Commonwealth.

**Acceptance of the partition of India** – Partition was accepted as a necessary evil, communal problems at a peak, East Bengal, West Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan. Sylhet and the NWFP all in favour of Pakistan.

**The Indian Independence Act, 1947** – The Act created two independent Dominions, His Majesty's Government had no responsibility or say in any matter, Jinnah became the Governor General of Pakistan, Jawaharlal Nehru became the Prime Minister of independent India.

**Thank You**