

PARTITION OF BENGAL

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Introduction

The decision to making **Partition of Bengal** ([Bengali](#): বঙ্গভঙ্গ) was pronounced in July 1905 by the then [Viceroy of India](#), [Lord Curzon](#). The partition took place on 16 October 1905 and separated the largely Muslim eastern areas from the largely Hindu western areas. The Hindus of West Bengal, who dominated Bengal's business and rural life, had complained that the division would make them a minority in a province that would incorporate the provinces of [Bihar and Orissa](#). Indians were outraged at what they recognized it as a "divide and rule" policy, where the colonizers turned the native population against itself in order to rule, even though, Curzon stressed it would produce administrative efficiency. The partition angered the Hindus and led the Muslims to form their own national organization on communal lines later. [Bengal](#), however, was reunited in 1911 in an effort to both appease the Bengali sentiment and have easier administration.

Background

The [provincial state of Bengal](#), which was then said as Bengal Presidency, had an area of 189,000 square miles and a population of nearly 8 [crores](#) (80 million). It included the [Hindi](#)-speaking regions of [Bihar](#), the [Odia](#)-speaking regions of [Odisha](#) as well as the [Assamese](#)-speaking region of [Assam](#), making it a huge administrative entity. Moreover, the capital [Calcutta](#) was the capital of the entire [British India](#). With the growing efforts of the [Indian National Congress](#), which one established even with the influence of the British, to secure the independence of [India](#), in which Bengali's mostly Hindus, [Lord Curzon](#) decided to address both these problems by partitioning [Bengal](#) into two entities, which would result in a Muslim-majority in the eastern half, and a Hindu-majority in the western half. This he hoped would reduce the administrative pressures as well as dividing the population on religious grounds, quelling the [Indian Independence Movement](#).

Partition

The government announced the idea for partition in January 1904. The idea was opposed by [Henry John Stedman Cotton](#), the then Chief Commissioner of Assam during the period of 1896–1902. The Partition of Bengal in 1905 was made on October 16 by Viceroy Curzon. The former province of Bengal was divided into two new provinces i.e., 'Bengal' (comprising western part of greater Bengal as well as the province of [Bihar and Orissa](#)) and 'Eastern Bengal and Assam' with [Dacca](#) (presently spelt as Dhaka) as the capital of the latter. Partition was arguably promoted for administrative reasons: The undivided Bengal was geographically as large as (the then) France and had a significantly larger population like the total size of population of contemporary (the then) France and Britain together. Curzon stated the eastern region was neglected and under-governed. By splitting the province, an improved administration could be established in the east, where subsequently, the population would benefit from new schools and employment opportunities.

The partition was generally supported by the Muslims of East Bengal, who did not have very good economic and educational strength and mostly from peasants' class. Their support was motivated by both their poor economic conditions in East Bengal, as well as the perceived dominance of the Hindu businessmen and landlords in West Bengal over the governance of Bengal. Most of the factories and mills in Bengal were established in and around Calcutta (now Kolkata), while many sources of raw materials for these factories were in East Bengal. Furthermore, most of the educational institutions of the Province were situated in Calcutta – including the lone university in Bengal i.e., Calcutta University. As a result of the partition, Dacca, the capital of East Bengal, saw an increase in investment in infrastructure in different sectors like education, economy, administration, etc. This included the construction of administrative buildings like the [Curzon Hall](#) and [High court](#), as well as the foundation of educational institutions in East Bengal and Assam. Mentionable, Curzon Hall was built with the objective of using as Town Hall of newly created province named East Bengal and Assam.

The opposition to the partition was led by the educated middle class of western Bengal. Bengali Hindus were at the forefront of political agitation for greater participation in the governance under British rule, and many suspected that the partition was designed to curtail Hindu demands for political representation. Following the partition, an anti-British movement formed in opposition to the Partition. This involved non-violent and violent protests, boycotts and even an assassination attempt against the Governor of the new province of West Bengal. As a result of partition, the population of Bengali Hindus of western side of Bengal stood only 35 percent as that portion of Bengal was created comprising Bangla speaking region of Western Bengal, Odisha speaking Odisha and Hindi speaking Bihar. But on the other side, i.e., in East Bengal, Bangali Muslims stood around 58 percent of total population. The meaning of it, in eastern area, Bengali Muslims became majorly and western side Bengali Hindus became minority. This was done with the objective that the Hindu Bengali would not be able to dominate in politics, who were demanding the representation of Indian people in British India, and in the process to become weaker in their voices against the British for nationalistic movement.

The opening years of the twentieth century were stormy. The political scenario was undergoing a change, and the British were beginning to feel a bit uneasy. Discontentment was brewing. Political discontent was growing due to the inability of the government to organize effective relief during the period of *plague* and *famine* (popularly said as *Cheeyattarer mannantar*) that happened during that period and that left huge number of people, mostly from rural areas dead. In order to stem the discontent, the British played the political trump card with great aplomb. For the first time, they used their ***divide-and-rule*** political game with great force. From 1870 onwards, the British started inciting the Hindus and the Muslims to form their own political parties to establish their distinct religious identities. That was perhaps, the beginning of the communalization of politics. The British not only encouraged the two communities to form political parties along religious lines, they took various constructive steps to create a situation whereby Hindus and Muslims would be forced to think in a way as if their religious identity is at peril. This effort culminated in the partition

of Bengal in 1905. West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar were on one side and the erstwhile east Bengal and Assam were on the other. The partition was made along communal lines. This partition provided an impetus to the religious divide and, as a result of that, All India Muslim League and All India Hindu Mahasabha were formally formed in 1906 and 1921(respectively). Both the organizations aimed at fanning communal passions.

The main reason for the Partition was not administrative rather purely political and to reduce the Bengali influence as they are the driving and striking force of creating a nationalistic movement in undivided Bengal. The Hindus were in a better position in terms of economic status, professional qualities etc., than the Muslims as the Muslims for their own fault did not attend the schools own and run by the British authorities. Muslims felt learning English as well as Bangla was the leaning of language of Kaffir (Kufri *Jabaan*). During the pre-Sepoy Mutiny period, section of Hindu traders greatly helped the British while their Muslim counterparts did not. The British were angry. With the spread of Western education Hindus were able to make substantial socio-economic progress, but the Muslims could not. A sense of deprivation crept in. Perhaps, the sense of deprivation was engineered. Muslims felt neglected and in the process they were heavily retreated in the society

When the discontentment grew in the beginning of this century, the British capitalized on this sense of deprivation. A feeling of inferiority was there. The British merely added fuel to fire. Suddenly both the communities became aware of their religious identities forgetting their ethnic identity as *Bangali*. The net result was the Partition of Bengal. The scars resulting from the partition of Bengal have never completely healed and can still be seen even today.

Partition: Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India decided to partition Bengal allegedly for administrative purposes, creating a new province of East Bengal and Assam, with a population of 31 million people and with its capital at Dhaka. The Brahmaputra and the Padma (the Ganges) rivers physically defined this first partition of Bengal. East Bengal prospered, Dhaka assumed its old status as capital and Chittagong became an important sea port.

Political crisis

Partition sparked an extremely major political crisis along religious lines. Mostly the Hindu resistance exploded as the [Indian National Congress](#) began the [Swadeshi movement](#) that included boycotting British goods and public institutions, meetings and processions, forming committees, propaganda through press, and diplomatic pressure. Hitherto untouched sections of Indian society participated in these movements, providing base for later movements. Richness of the movement extended to *culture*, *science* and *literature*. Masses were educated for a bolder form of politics and colonial hegemony was undermined. The Muslims in [East Bengal](#) hoped that a separate region would give them more control over education and employment, hence, they initially opposed those movements, but later they extended their support. [Rabindranath Tagore](#) wrote *Banglar Mati Banglar Jol* as a rallying cry for proponents of annulment of Partition. He had written the song of

‘Amar Sonar Bangla Ami Tomay Bhalobashi’ or *Jodi tore dak shuney keo na asey tabey ekla chalorey* in the pretext of partition of Bengal. Rabindranath extended his support against the division of Bengal as he understood that in the process the culture of Bengal would be divided; mother tongue of Bengali people would take different shape and getting weaker as a united force. Rabindranath did not want to divide the Bengal in the name of merely religious purpose, but rather Bengal would remain united in terms of their language and culture. Rabindranath died before 1947 and he did not see that Bengal ultimately divided again in 1947 but our national poet Nazrul opted for staying in Calcutta as he did not want to come to religious-based country like Pakistan where he would not have the scope for his practices of nourishment and love for music and culture. He is lucky enough to get his last bed in the land of independent Bangladesh, but he is equally unlucky to have his last bed in a split portion of greater and united Bengal.

Re-unification

Due to these huge political protests, the two parts of Bengal were reunited in 1911. But a new partition which divided the province on linguistic, rather than religious grounds followed, with the Hindi, Oriya and Assamese areas separated to form separate administrative units: [Bihar and Orissa Province](#) was created to the west and [Assam Province](#) to the east. The administrative capital of [British India](#) was moved from [Calcutta](#) to [New Delhi](#) as well with the objective of reducing all kinds of political attention and thrust from Calcutta. This attempt indicated that the objective of dividing Bengal by the British was to reduce power of Bengali people as Bengali altogether is much wittier and politically conscious. For that Indian politician Ramakrishna Gokhale once said: *What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow*. Bengalis were well ahead of other communities in case of their sharp thinking and understanding.

Aftermath

In 1909, separate electorates were established for Muslims and Hindus. Before this, many members of both communities had advocated national solidarity of all Bengalis. With separate electorates, distinctive political communities developed, with their own political agendas. Muslims, too, dominated the Legislature, due to their overall numerical strength of roughly twenty two to twenty eight million. Nationally, Hindus and Muslims began to demand the creation of two independent states, one to be formed in majority Hindu and one in majority Muslim areas.

In 1947, [Bengal](#) was [partitioned for the second time](#), solely on religious grounds, as part of the [Partition of India](#) following the formation of the nations [India](#) and [Pakistan](#). In 1955, [East Bengal lost its identity](#) and became known as [East Pakistan](#), and in 1971 became the independent state of [Bangladesh](#) after a successful [war of independence](#) against occupying Pakistani forces in the west.

Significance

The partition left a significant impact on the people of Bengal as well as the political scene of the Indian Subcontinent. This event also created a sense of political awareness among the Muslims of

East Bengal. To reduce the unhappiness of people of East Bengal, Lord Curzon declared that a university as a center of excellence would be established in Dacca and in the process [University of Dhaka](#) was established in 1921 and this was the first university in the eastern part of Bengal. The decision was severely criticized by some Hindu leaders in West Bengal. The most significant impact of this event was greater communal dissonance between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. Curzon Hall, built for use as the Town Hall for the newly created province, had been handed over to Dhaka University authority to accommodate the departments of Science faculty.

Two-nation theory

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The **two-nation theory** ([Bengali](#): দ্বিজাতি তত্ত্ব — *Deejati tattya*) is the ideology that the primary identity and unifying denominator of [Muslims](#) in the [South Asian subcontinent](#) is their [religion](#), rather than their [language](#) or [ethnicity](#), and therefore Indian [Hindus](#) and Muslims are two distinct [nations](#), regardless of ethnic or other commonalities. The two-nation theory was a founding

principle of the [Pakistan Movement](#) (i.e. the ideology of [Pakistan](#) as a Muslim [nation-state](#) in [South Asia](#)), and the [partition of India](#) in 1947.

The [ideology](#) that religion is the determining factor in defining the nationality of Indian Muslims was undertaken by [Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#), who termed it as the awakening of Muslims for the creation of Pakistan. It is also a source of inspiration to several [Hindu nationalist](#) organizations, with causes as varied as the redefinition of Indian Muslims as non-Indian foreigners and second-class citizens in India, the [expulsion of all Muslims](#) from [India](#), establishment of a legally Hindu state in India, prohibition of conversions to [Islam](#), and the promotion of [conversions or reconversions](#) of Indian Muslims to Hinduism.

There are varying interpretations of the two-nation theory, based on whether the two postulated nationalities can coexist in one territory or not, with radically different implications. One interpretation argued for sovereign autonomy, including the right to secede, for Muslim-majority areas of the Indian subcontinent, but without any transfer of populations (i.e. Hindus and Muslims would continue to live together). A different interpretation contends that Hindus and Muslims constitute "two distinct and frequently antagonistic ways of life, and that therefore they cannot coexist in one nation." In this version, a transfer of populations (i.e. the total removal of Hindus from Muslim-majority areas and the total removal of Muslims from Hindu-majority areas) is a desirable step towards a complete separation of two incompatible nations that "cannot coexist in a harmonious relationship".

Opposition to the theory has come from two sources. The first is the concept of a [single Indian nation](#), of which Hindus and Muslims are two intertwined communities. This is a founding principle of the modern, officially secular, [Republic of India](#). Our national poet Quazi Nazrul Islam's one song rightly reflected it while he wrote: '*Mora ekti brinte duti kusum- Hindu-Mussalman*' (We are two flowers in a same stalk - Hindu Mussalman). Even after the formation of Pakistan, debates on whether Muslims and Hindus are distinct nationalities or not continued in that country as well. The second source of opposition is the concept that while Indians are not one nation, neither are the Muslims or Hindus of the subcontinent, and it is instead the relatively homogeneous provincial units of the subcontinent which are true nations and deserving of sovereignty; this view has been presented by the Baloch, Sindhi, and Pashtun sub-nationalities of Pakistan.

In general, the British-run government and British commentators made "it a point of speaking of Indians as the people of India and avoid speaking of an Indian nation." This was cited as a key reason for British control of the country: since Indians were not a nation, they were not capable of national [self-government](#). While some Indian leaders insisted that Indians were one nation, others

agreed that Indians were not yet a nation but there was "no reason why in the course of time they should not grow into a nation.

Similar debates on national identity existed within India at the linguistic, provincial and religious levels. While some argued that Indian Muslims were one nation, others argued they were not. Some, such as [Liaquat Ali Khan](#) (later prime minister of Pakistan) argued that Indian Muslims were not yet a nation, but could be forged into one.

According to the [Pakistan studies](#) curriculum, [Muhammad bin Qasim](#) (695-715), a Saudi general and spice trader, is often referred to as the first Pakistani, who landed at Karachi in 712 AD, and heralding the Muslim rule in greater India. While Prakash K. Singh attributes the arrival of Muhammad bin Qasim as the first step towards the creation of Pakistan, [Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#) considered the [Pakistan movement](#) to have started when the first Muslim put a foot in the [Gateway of Islam](#).

Start of Muslim self-awakening and identity movement (19th century–1940s)

The movement for Muslim self-awakening and identity was started by the Muslim modernist and reformer [Syed Ahmad Khan](#) (1817–1898). Many Pakistanis describe him as the architect of the two-nation theory. However, the researcher Ziauddin Lahori, the author of seven books on Sir Syed, believes that it is incorrect to say that Sir Syed propounded the two-nation theory.

The poet philosopher [Muhammad Iqbal](#) (1877–1938) of integrated India provided the philosophical exposition of Pakistan in 1930, and [Barrister Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#) (1871–1948) translated it into the political reality of a nation-state in 1940 Lahore Conference. Allama Iqbal's presidential address to the [Muslim League](#) on December 29, 1930 is seen by some as the first exposition of the two-nation theory in support of what would ultimately become [Pakistan](#). Iqbal, however, wrote a song in favor of integrated India by saying '*Sara jahache achcha Hindusta hamara*' (The India is a greatest in the world). In any way Iqbal had given the philosophical foundation of Pakistan.

The Persian scholar, scientist and traveler [Al-Biruni](#) (973-1048) had observed, at the beginning of the eleventh century, that Hindus and Muslims differed in all matters and habits. On March 23, 1940, [Jinnah](#) made a speech in [Lahore](#) which was very similar to Al-Biruni's thesis in theme and tone. [Jinnah](#) stated that Hindus and Muslims belonged to two different religious philosophies, with different social customs and literature, with no intermarriage and based on conflicting ideas and concepts. Their outlook on life and of life was different and despite 1000 years of history, the relations between the Hindus and Muslims could not attain the level of cordiality.

In 1948, Jinnah said:

Islam has taught us this and I think you will agree with me, for whatever you may be and wherever you are, you are a Muslim. You belong to a nation now. You have carved out a territory, a vast territory, it is all yours; it does not belong to a Punjabi or a Sindhi or a Pathan or a Bengali, it is yours.

The [All-India Muslim League](#), in attempting to represent Indian Muslims, felt that the Muslims of the subcontinent were a distinct and separate nation from the Hindus. At first they demanded separate electorates, but when they came to the conclusion that Muslims would not be safe in a Hindu-dominated [India](#), they began to demand a separate state. The [League](#) demanded [self-determination](#) for Muslim-majority areas in the form of a sovereign state promising minorities equal rights and safeguards in these Muslim majority areas. Their promise was simply a flattery, as the minorities in Pakistan do not have equal rights and safeguard. Now the big question- did Jinnah envisage whether Hindus and minorities would be safe in Pakistan? Existence of only a few lac Hindus and Sikhs and other minorities in Pakistan now demonstrated that it was not a safe place, and with what objective he broke the greater India, but he did not maintain his own word in his synthetically created land.

Aspects of the theory

The theory asserted that India was not a nation. It also asserted that Indian Hindus and Indian Muslims were each a nation, despite great variations in language, culture and ethnicity within each of those groups. To counter critics who said that a community of radically varying ethnicities and languages who were territorially intertwined with other communities could not be a nation, the theory said that the concept of nation in the East was different from that in the West. In the East, religion was "a complete social order which affects all the activities in life" and "where the allegiance of people is divided on the basis of religion, the idea of territorial nationalism has never succeeded." The concept is flatly wrong, as Bengali is the race, either Hindus or Muslims, can coexist in a peaceful manner not only on the basis of religion, but on ethnicity, language and culture

It asserted that "a Muslim of one country has far more sympathies with a Muslim living in another country than with a non-Muslim living in the same country." Therefore, "the conception of Indian Muslims as a nation may not be ethnically correct, but socially it is correct."

Muhammad Iqbal had also championed the notion of pan-Islamic nationhood forgetting his past liberal approach, and strongly condemned the concept of a territory-based nation as anti-Islamic. He had stated the dissolution of ethnic nationalities into a unified Muslim society (or *millat*) as the

ultimate goal. 'Destroy the idols of color and blood ties, and merge into the Muslim society; Let no Turanians remain, neither Iranians, nor Afghans', he added.

Pakistan, or The Partition of India (1945)

In his 1945 book *Pakistan, or The Partition of India*, Indian statesman and Buddhist [Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar](#) wrote a sub-chapter titled "If Muslims truly and deeply desire Pakistan; their choice ought to be accepted". He asserted that, if the Muslims were bent on the creation of Pakistan, the demand should be conceded in the interest of the safety of India. He asks whether Muslims in the army could be trusted to defend India in the event of Muslims invading India or in the case of a Muslim rebellion. "Whom would the Indian Muslims in the army side with?" he questioned. According to him, the assumption that Hindus and Muslims could live under one state if they were distinct nations was but "an empty sermon, a mad project, to which no sane man would agree".

Justifications by Muslim leaders

[Muhammad Iqbal](#)'s statement explaining the attitude of Muslim delegates to the London round-table conference issued in December 1933 was a rejoinder to [Jawahar Lal Nehru](#)'s statement. Nehru, the then champion of Indian freedom struggle and later the prime minister of free India, had said that the attitude of the Muslim delegation was based on "reactionarism". Iqbal concluded his rejoinder with:

In conclusion, I must put a straight question to Pandit Jawahar Lal, how is India's problem to be solved if the majority community will neither concede the minimum safeguards necessary for the protection of a minority of 80 million people, nor accept the award of a third party; but continue to talk of a kind of nationalism which works out only to its own benefit? This position can admit of only two alternatives. Either the Indian majority community will have to accept for itself the permanent position of an agent of British imperialism in the East, or the country will have to be redistributed on a basis of religious, historical and cultural affinities so as to do away with the question of electorates and the communal problem in its present form.

In [Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#)'s All India Muslim League presidential address delivered in Lahore, on March 22, 1940, he explained:

It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to

revise our notions in time. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, [and litterateurs](#). They neither intermarry nor interdine together and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Mussalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and, likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built for the government of such a state.

In 1944, Jinnah said: We maintain and hold that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation. We are a nation of hundred million and what is more, we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of values and proportions, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and tradition, and aptitude and ambitions. In short, we have our own outlook on life and of life.

In an interview with the British journalist [Beverley Nichols](#), he said in 1943:

Islam is not only a religious doctrine but also a realistic code of conduct in terms of every day and everything important in life: our history, our laws and our jurisprudence. In all these things, our outlook is not only fundamentally different but also opposed to Hindus. There is nothing in life that links us together. Our names, clothes, food, festivals, and rituals, all are different. Our economic life, our educational ideas, treatment of women, attitude towards animals, and humanitarian considerations, all are very different.

In May 1947, he had an entirely different emphasis when he told [Mountbatten](#), who was in charge of British India's transition to independence:

Your Excellency doesn't understand that the Punjab is a nation. Bengal is a nation. A man is a Punjabi or a Bengali first before he is a Hindu or a Muslim. If you give us those provinces you must, under no condition, partition them. You will destroy their viability and cause endless bloodshed and trouble.

Mountbatten replied: Yes, of course. A man is not only a Punjabi or a Bengali before he is a Muslim or Hindu, but he is an Indian before all else. What you're saying is the perfect, absolute answer I've been looking for. You've presented me the arguments to keep India united.

Jinnah had miserably failed to reply against Mountbatten's argument. It is very contrasting that a man who wanted to piece apart of undivided India, but he wanted to maintain two states intact like Punjab and Bengal despite that two regions were full of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.

Savarkar's opposition to the formation of Pakistan

The [Hindu Maha Sabha](#) under the presidency of [Vinayak Damodar Savarkar](#), presented a stance of complete opposition to the formation of Pakistan. [Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar](#) summarises Savarkar's position, in his *Pakistan or The Partition of India* as follows,

Mr. Savarkar... insists that, although there are two nations in India, India shall not be divided into two parts, one for Muslims and the other for the Hindus; that the two nations shall dwell in one country and shall live under the mantle of one single constitution;... In the struggle for political power between the two nations the rule of the game which Mr. Savarkar prescribes is to be [one man one vote](#), be the man Hindu or Muslim. In his scheme a Muslim is to have no advantage which a Hindu does not have. Minority is to be no justification for privilege and majority is to be no ground for penalty. The State will guarantee the Muslims any defined measure of political power in the form of Muslim religion and Muslim culture. But the State will not guarantee secured seats in the Legislature or in the Administration and, if such guarantee is insisted upon by the Muslims, such guaranteed quota is not to exceed their proportion to the general population.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's opposition to the partition of India

[Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan](#), also known as "Frontier Gandhi" or "Sarhadi Gandhi", was not convinced by the two-nation theory and wanted a single united India as home for both Hindus and Muslims. He was from [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](#) province, in present-day [Pakistan](#). He believed that the partition would be harmful to the Muslims of the subcontinent. Post partition, Ghaffar Khan was a strong advocate of the [Pashtunistan](#) movement. Similarly, G M Syed of Sindh, who confusingly supported of creating Pakistan, raised movement later for creating a free Sindh, but failed.

Gandhi's View

The champion of India's freedom Mahatma [Gandhi](#) was against the division of India on the basis of religion. He once wrote: I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock.

Post-partition debate

Since the partition, the theory has been subjected to animated debates and different interpretations on several grounds. In his memoirs entitled *Pathway to Pakistan* (1961), [Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman](#), the first president of the [Pakistan Muslim League](#), approvingly quoted [Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy](#) as saying that the theory proved harmful to the Muslims of India. According to him, [Jinnah](#) bade farewell to it in his famous speech of August 11, 1947. In his August 11, 1947 speech, [Jinnah](#) had spoken of composite Pakistani nationalism, effectively negating the faith-based nationalism that he had advocated in his speech of March 22, 1940. In his August 11 speech, he said that non-Muslims would be equal citizens of Pakistan and that there would be no discrimination against them. "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state."

The theory has faced scepticism because Muslims did not entirely separate from Hindus and about one-third of all Muslims continued to live in post-partition India as Indian citizens alongside a much larger Hindu majority. The [subsequent partition of Pakistan itself](#) into the present-day nations of Pakistan and [Bangladesh](#) was cited as proof both that Muslims did not constitute one nation and that religion was not a defining factor for nationhood.

Some historians have claimed that the theory was a creation of a few Muslim intellectuals. Prominent Pakistani politician [Altaf Hussain](#) of [Muttahida Qaumi Movement](#) (MQM) believes history has proved the two-nation theory wrong. He contended, "The idea of Pakistan was dead at its inception, when the majority of Muslims (in Muslim-minority areas of India) chose to stay back after partition, a truism reiterated in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971". Canadian writer [Tarek Fatah](#) termed the two-nation theory as "absurd".

Ethnic and provincial groups in Pakistan

Several ethnic and provincial leaders in Pakistan also began to use the term "nation" to describe their provinces and argued that their very existence was threatened by the concept of amalgamation into a Pakistani nation on the basis that Muslims were one nation. It has also been alleged that the idea that Islam is the basis of nationhood embroils Pakistan too deeply in the affairs of other predominantly Muslim states and regions, prevents the emergence of a unique sense of Pakistani nationhood that is independent of reference to India, and encourages the growth of a fundamentalist culture in the country.

Also, because partition divided Indian Muslims into three groups (of roughly 150 million people each in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) instead of forming a single community inside a united India that would have numbered about 450 million people in 2010 and potentially exercised great influence over the entire subcontinent, the two-nation theory is sometimes alleged to have ultimately weakened the position of Muslims on the subcontinent and resulted in large-scale territorial shrinkage or skewing for cultural aspects that became associated with Muslims (e.g., the decline of [Urdu language](#) in India).

This criticism has received a mixed response in Pakistan. A poll conducted by [Gallup Pakistan](#) in 2011 shows that an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis hold the view that separation from India was justified in 1947. Pakistani commentators have contended that two nations did not necessarily imply two states, and the fact that Bangladesh did not merge into India after separating from Pakistan supports the two nation theory.

Others have stated that the theory is still valid despite the still-extant Muslim minority in India, and asserted variously that Indian Muslims have been "Hinduised" (i.e., lost much of their Muslim identity due to assimilation into [Hindu culture](#)), or that they are treated as an excluded or alien group by an allegedly Hindu-dominated India. Factors such as lower literacy and education levels among Indian Muslims as compared to Indian Hindus, longstanding cultural differences, and outbreaks of religious violence in [India](#) are cited. However, they did not specify for what the minority population especially Hindus have been reduced to very low of less than two percent.

Pan-Islamic identity

The emergence of a sense of identity that is pan-Islamic rather than Pakistani has been defended as consistent with the founding ideology of Pakistan and the concept that "Islam itself is a nationality," while the commonly-held notion of "nationality, to Muslims, is like idol worship." While some have emphasized that promoting the primacy of a pan-Islamic identity (over all other identities) is essential to maintaining a distinctiveness from India and preventing national "collapse", others have argued that the Two Nation Theory has served its purpose in "midwifing" Pakistan into existence and should now be discarded to allow Pakistan to emerge as a normal nation-state.

Prominent political commentator [Irfan Husain](#), in his column in [Dawn](#), observed that it has now become an "impossible and exceedingly boring task of defending a defunct theory". However some Pakistanis, including a retired Pakistani brigadier, Shaukat Qadir, believe that the theory could only be disproved with the reunification of independent [Bangladesh](#), and [Republic of India](#).

According to [Sharif al Mujahid](#), arguably the preeminent authority on [Jinnah](#) in Pakistan, the two-nation theory was relevant only in the pre-1947 sub-continental context. He is of the opinion that the creation of Pakistan rendered it obsolete because the two nations had transformed themselves into Indian and Pakistani nations. The columnist Muqtida Mansoor has quoted [Farooq Sattar](#), a prominent leader of the [MQM](#), as saying that his party did not accept the two-nation theory. "Even if there was such a theory, it has sunk in the [Bay of Bengal](#)." Emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 on the basis of language and culture, not on religion had proved it.

Post-partition perspectives in India

In post-independence India, the two-nation theory has helped advance the cause of groups seeking to identify a "Hindu national culture" as the core identification of an Indian. This allows the acknowledgement of the common ethnicity of Hindus and Muslims while requiring that all adopt a Hindu identity in order to be truly Indian. From the [Hindu nationalist](#) perspective, this concedes the ethnic reality that Indian Muslims are "flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood" but still presses for an officially-recognized equation of national and religious identity, i.e., that "an Indian is a Hindu."

The theory has provided evidence to the allegation that Indian Muslims "cannot be loyal citizens of India" or any other non-Muslim nation, and is "always capable and ready to perform traitorous acts". Constitutionally, India rejects the two-nation theory and regards Indian Muslims as equal citizens. From the official Indian perspective, the partition is regarded as a tactical necessity to rid the subcontinent of British rule rather than denoting acceptance of the theory.

1940 Lahore Resolution

Prepared by Dr. Sudhangshu Sekhar Roy

The **Lahore Resolution** ([Bengali](#): লাহোর প্রস্তাব), also known as the **Pakistan Resolution** was a formal political statement adopted by the [All-India Muslim League](#) on the occasion of its three-day general session in [Lahore](#) on March 22–24, 1940. It called for the creation of '**independent states**' for Muslims in north-western and eastern [British India](#). The constituent units of these states were to be *autonomous* and *sovereign*. The resolution was presented by [A. K. Fazlul Huq](#), the then [Prime Minister of Bengal](#). It was later interpreted as a demand for a separate and single Muslim state called [Pakistan](#).

Although the name "Pakistan" had been proposed by Choudhury Rahmat Ali, a student of Oxford, in his Pakistan Declaration in 1933, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and other leaders had kept firm their belief in Hindu-Muslim unity. However, the volatile political climate gave the idea stronger backing.

Khan Abdul Wali Khan of North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), presently Khaiberpakhtunia, - and many others - attributes the authorship of the Resolution to Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan. Sir Sikandar Hayat's Unionist Party had swept the elections in Punjab and provided support to Jinnah at the urging of Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan resulting in the Sikander-Jinnah pact. Sir Sikandar convinced his class fellow Fazlul Haq, the then premier of Bengal, to support Jinnah as well. Sikandar supported the British in the Second World War at the request of Sir Winston Churchill after all of India's political parties had refused. The British promised dominion status to India after the war. After his suspicious death, other players moved in. Sikandar did not envisage partition of his beloved Punjab. When he learnt of the intended partition of Punjab he rejected this outright. Due to civil unrest it was decided that Sir Fazlul Haq would present the resolution. The resolution text unanimously rejected the concept of a united India on the grounds of growing inter-communal violence and recommended the creation of an independent Muslim state. According to Stanley Wolpert, this was the moment when Jinnah, the former ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, totally transformed himself into Pakistan's great leader.

After the presentation of the annual report by Liaquat Ali Khan, the resolution was moved in the general session by A.K. Fazlul Huq, the chief minister of undivided Bengal, and was seconded by Choudhury Khaliquzzaman who explained his views on the causes which led to the demand for partition. Subsequently, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan from Punjab, Mohammad Abdul Ghafoor Hazarvi from North-West Frontier Province, Sir Abdullah Haroon from Sindh, Qazi Esa from Baluchistan, and other leaders announced their support.

The statement

23 March, 1940: Newspapers printed news about Lahore Resolution, demanding division of India.

The Lahore resolution was actually adopted on March 24, but officially in Pakistan March 23 is considered the date of its adoption. In 1941, it became part of the Muslim League's constitution. In 1946, it formed the basis for the decision of Muslim League to struggle for one state for the Muslims. The statement declared:

No constitutional plan would be workable or acceptable to the Muslims unless geographical contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary.

Additionally, it stated:

Those adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards shall be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in the units and in the regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights of the minorities.

Most importantly, to convince smaller provinces such as Sindh to join, it provided a guarantee:

That geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern Zones of (British) India should be grouped to constitute 'independent states' in which the constituent units should be *autonomous* and *sovereign*.

Interpretation

There remains a debate on whether the resolution envisaged two sovereign states in the eastern and western parts of British India. Abdul Hashim, the then president of the Bengal Muslim League interpreted the text as a demand for two separate countries. In 1946, Prime Minister Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy of Bengal, a member of the All India Muslim League, mooted the United Bengal proposal with the support of Muslim and Hindu leaders, as well as the Governor of Bengal. However, it was opposed by Lord Mountbatten, the last Governor General of British India the Muslim League, the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha.

Pakistan resolution in the Sindh Assembly

The Sindh assembly was the first British Indian legislature to pass the resolution in favour of Pakistan. G. M. Syed, an influential Sindhi activist, revolutionary and Sufi and later one of the important leaders in the forefront of the Sindh independence movement, joined the Muslim League in 1938 and presented the Pakistan resolution in the Sindh Assembly. A key motivating factor was the promise of "autonomy and sovereignty for constituent units".

This text was buried under the Minar-e-Pakistan during its building in the Ayub regime. In this session the political situation was analyzed in detail and Muslim demanded a separate homeland only to maintain their identification and to safeguard their rights. Pakistan resolution was the landmark in the history of Muslim of South-Asia. It determined for the Muslims a true goal and their homeland in north-east and north-west. The acceptance of the Pakistan resolution accelerated the pace of freedom movement. It gave new energy and courage to the Muslims who gathered around Jinnah for struggle for freedom.

Lahore Resolution was the first formal resolution adopted by the Muslim league which adapted the demand for Pakistan as a separate State for the Muslim majority living in the western side

Overall it can be said that the Lahore Resolution carried the germs of the communal difference which formally took the shape of a new state made on the basis of religious differences leading to the creation of a new independent state of Pakistan.

Impact of Lahore Resolution

Impact of Lahore Resolution passed on 23rd March mainly highlighted the reaction of Indian National Congress as well as the British Empire. Both rejected the proposal of a separate state from the very beginning.

Impact of Lahore Resolution was mainly felt with the high level criticism made by Indian Congress, Hindu Mahasabha and Sikh leaders as well as Bengali Hindus and a significant portion of Bengali Muslims. There had been number of allegations over the demand for new state of Pakistan made by Jinnah. The Lahore resolution came at a time when the Indian politics was going through a period of political stalemate. All the league leaders were engaged their own local politics. As far as Jinnah's position was concerned the congress had ignored its relevance during its Patna and Ramgarh session and even Linlithgow was tired of Jinnah's political thrills and suggested Jinnah to find some constructive methods for political settlement in India.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah's demand for the state of Pakistan was heavily rejected and condemned by the Indian National Congress, Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikhs. The demand for Pakistan directly affected the entire Indian union of India particularly the states which were claimed to be divided within two nations.

The most prominent among them was the state of Punjab which had half of its population living in west Punjab to be divided towards Pakistan, and Bengal with a huge number of people staying in east Bengal.

The state of Bengal had a majority of Muslim population living in West Bengal. Hence, it was heavily condemned by the Sikhs who would have to surrender their place of holy land at Lahore to Muslim domination. Indian leader Rajagopalachari condemned the resolution as a mischief mainly intended to threaten India of the consequent destruction to be followed on.

Hindu Mahasabha rejected the resolution by claiming that it was a step closer towards a civil war within two nations on the basis of religion. While the British kept silent on the issue as it would serve to their policy of divide and rule, Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru declared that it had nothing to do with mad proposals of Muslim League.

In spite of its mass rejection and condemnation the resolution remained at the crux of Muslim politics which did not demoralize Jinnah who fought for it till the end. As for the reaction of the

Muslims from the Muslim majority region the idea of division was not confirmed expression of political aspiration of a strong Muslim communal nationality from below.

Nevertheless the evidences never rejected the fact that the Lahore Resolution had changed the political complexion of the Indian subcontinent. The political ramifications at the provincial level marked the fact that the resolution could not be rejected or ignored for long. It further changed the political complexion of Punjab who was forced to have an unpredictable future in front of them. Moreover the status of the Sikhs also came under doubt where the Sikhs were in minority.

All this bring us to believe that the Lahore resolution was the first resolution which had the vision for a new nation of Pakistan .This gave some respite to Jinnah to create a strong hold in Indian politics. As for the nationalist leaders in India it only began a new episode of conflict which lasted till the end, and certainly it continues even today throughout the subcontinent.