

Cabinet Mission Plan – A detailed analysis of conflictive cooperation

Aadika Doctoral Scholar Department of History
Central University of Himachal Pradesh
Dr. Rajeev Kumar Assistant Professor Department of History
Central University of Himachal Pradesh*

Abstract

The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 stands as a critical juncture in the history of modern India, profoundly influencing the political landscape amidst the turmoil of the post-World War II era. The mission was introduced during a time of significant transition, both in the Indian subcontinent and in the United Kingdom, which was eager to expedite its departure from India. The plan sought to address the framework for India's independence, yet it became entangled in the deep-seated political unrest and divergent visions of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. While the British were intent on leaving, the Indian leadership was divided, particularly on the contentious issue of the creation of Pakistan, as advocated by the Muslim League.

The mission's recommendations, shaped by the prevailing conditions, lacked the clarity and comprehensiveness needed to resolve the political disputes effectively. This ambiguity, coupled with the conflicting priorities of the involved parties, led to the failure of the mission to establish a clear path for a united and independent India. The resultant indecisiveness and escalating tensions eventually culminated in the hurried partition of India during Lord Mountbatten's tenure, which left the subcontinent geographically and culturally divided, with lasting repercussions on national identity and political stability.

The analysis of the Cabinet Mission Plan reveals the complex interplay of conflicting agendas, the impact of global events like World War II, and the challenges of navigating a peaceful transition to independence. This period, marked by both cooperation and conflict, offers valuable insights for further research into the dynamics of decolonization and the formation of nation-states.

Background

The arrival of Cabinet Mission Plan was a major turnout in during the climax phase of the Indian freedom struggle. It was constituted by Clement Atlee, the then Prime Minister of United Kingdom. The members of CMP includes Lord Pethick-Lawrence (Secretary of State for India), Sir Stafford Cripps (President of the Board of Trade), and A.V. Alexander (First Lord of the Admiralty). The then Viceroy of India Lord Wavell also participated in some of the discussions. Objectives of the Cabinet Mission Plan as stated by the Authorities of the then British Government were as :

- 1.To plan out the process of the transfer of power to the Indian leadership & bring out the necessary format of power transfer without hampering the then political conditions.

2. To look into the fact of maintaining the United India & bring proposals comprehensively based on the discussions with the major leaders representing all sections & classes of Indian society, more especially the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League.
3. To form the Executive power center for India with the commonwealth till the constitution is passed by the Indian Constituent assembly.
4. To look for the methods of the formation of the Constitution Assembly, which could incorporate every section's voice of the Indian community so that a full fledged format for the formation of constitution, where each one gets their real & deserving place becomes possible.

This all in turn provides for the fundamental space to work in for the period after the World war II and ensure a better future in amidst the Political unrest in the Subcontinent. The british authorities along with the Indian leadership had to work in side along for attainment of the above mentioned targets for the betterment as expected.

Primary sources dealt and methodology

The methodology in this research is comprised with the dynamic overview and interpretation, that too above the trends of following generalist approach instated with a particular school of Historiography. It needs to have dynamic interconnectives and more advanced research methods with a wider area of hypothetical objectivity. The Research methodology is widely sustained with a critical approached analysis to the major writings & it have a interpretative module approach to the research in order to have a new view of the facts ,meetings & historical ideals. Without being sceptic. I'll be concerned with the ethical & value oriented parts of this research.

The documents in relate of the meetings of Cabinet Mission Plan members with the Indian leaders both from the Indian National Congress, Muslim League and others is treated as the primary source for the research and that is available in the National Archives of India and other central depository. State museums and archives also have the related contemporary documents and that too is the primary source. The drafts of the Cabinet Mission Plan in relate to the demands and dialogues of the leaders are treated as the primary source. Diaries and related letters of members of Cabinet Mission Plan along with the then viceroy lord Wavell and the next one Lord Mountbatten also serve as a fruitful primary source. Field work includes the interpretative analysis of the news in famous and credible newspapers of that time. It also deal with the documents from British national archive and related documents, letters, intent proposals and articles written by the the parties related. this all be available online/offline in the various universities and research centers of India and abroad.

This research brings out wide comprehensive and a more integrative study of the proposed theme. It is a core study of the theme using the primary sources and applying separate methodologies to the secondary sources and try to find out the different aspects of research trends in this field till date.

The study should be viewed through the historiographic channel of nationalist trends and is able to counter the arguments of other schools like Cambridge through a concrete integrative and more comprehensive interpretations. The proposed research widely acknowledge the impacts of these political happenings on the crafts of a nation and how it altered the boundaries, made arbitrary vivisections & left a million refugees in a dilemma of statelessness and confusion. Research also focuses on aligning the proposed theme with the then happenings of Geopolitical interchange, as we know that the world war had a severe impact on the fundamentals institutions of the World, the new era colonialism, the fall of mighty British and the rise of a new world order.

The Plans

The various rounds of meetings in Shimla of the members of this Mission with the prominent leaders both from the Indian National Congress and Muslim League had no concrete outcomes because of the distrust between the leadership of the two parties. On one side of the table, Indian National Congress was not ready for compromising the integrative Unity of India while the Muslim League was determined for the special attentions to the Minority Muslims and their demands were largely based on the separatist agendas, that were not comprehensively acceptable to any of the Nationalist leaders. Although the mission was focused on the discussions related to the Power transfer to the Indian Leadership but because of the differences in opinions of the Indian leaders, the mission finally diluted its agendas and largely made the groupings for the states and profound the formation of the united Constitution Assembly. The groupings was at no stake acceptable to the Indian National Congress because it shows the partition of the states. While the Muslim League was happy with the proposals of the Powerful province, Indian National Congress leadership was interested in having a powered Central Government. These mistrust finally led to the point, where the Mission finally fled back to United Kingdom without providing the concrete solution to the transfer of power to the Indian leadership & later this was carried out by the

new Viceroy Lord Mountbatten, who finally through his 3rd June Plan decided the fate of India with the announcement of the partition of India & two new sovereign states were on the globe from the 14th August 1947 and here this all reinstate to have a detailed overview to everything happened during that period. The formation of Executive Council for India as one of the objective of the Mission was achieved but soon with blazers of the flames of partition dismantled that political unity of State.

The mission made the proposals, after inconclusive dialogue with the Indian leadership, Congress opposed Jinnah's demand for a Pakistan, which he was demanding as comprising six

full provinces. The mission proposed a system for India with three tiers of governance : the provinces, provincial groupings and the centre. The centre's power was limited to Foreign affairs, Defence, Currency and Communications. The provinces were given all other powers and could establish three groups. Its main characteristic was the grouping of provinces and that too in a very complicated format. Two groups were to be constituted by the mainly- Muslim western and eastern provinces. The third group would comprise the mostly-Hindu areas in the south and the centre. Thus provinces such as United Provinces, Central Provinces and Berar, Bombay, Bihar, Orissa and Madras would make Group A. Group B would comprise Sind, Punjab, Northwest Frontier and Baluchistan. Bengal and Assam would make a Group C. Princely States will retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union.

Through the scheme, the British expected to maintain Indian unity, as both they and Congress wanted, and also to provide Jinnah the substance of Pakistan. The proposals almost satisfied Jinnah's insistence on a large Pakistan, which would avert the North-Eastern Pakistan without the mostly non-Muslim districts in Bengal and Punjab being partitioned away as per the forwarded demands. By holding the full provinces of Punjab and Bengal, Jinnah satisfied the provincial leaders who feared losing power if their provinces were divided. The presence of large Hindu minorities in Punjab and Bengal also provided a safeguard for the Muslim minorities remaining in the mostly-Hindu provinces.



Prominent leaders along with CMP members.

Image courtesy:- National Archive

The Substance of Partition

Mohammad Ali Jinnah expected believe in parity between Pakistan and India. He believed that provincial groupings could secure his demands of partition & formation of the Pakistan. He reiterated that Muslim India was a 'nation' with entitlement to central representations equal to those of Hindu India. Despite his expectations and demand for only two groups, the Muslim League's Council accepted the mission's proposals on 6 June 1946 after it had secured a guarantee from Wavell that the League would be placed in the interim government if the Congress did not accept the proposal. This was undoubtedly a win mode situation for the Muslim league.

Criticality for Indian National Congress

It was now on Congress that how they could have best dealt the situation. Under the pressure of then Political atmosphere, Indian National Congress accepted the proposals and understood them to be a repudiation of the demand for Pakistan, and its position was that the provinces should be allowed to stay out of groups that they did not want to join, in light of both NWFP and Assam being ruled by Congress governments. However, Jinnah differed and saw the grouping plan as mandatory. Another point of difference concerned the Congress position that a sovereign constituent assembly would not be bound to the plan. Jinnah insisted that it was binding once the plan was accepted. The groupings plan maintained India's unity, but the organisation's leadership, most of all Nehru, increasingly believed that the scheme would leave the centre without the strength to achieve the party's ambitions. Congress's socialist section led by Nehru desired a government able to industrialise the country and to eliminate poverty. These differences further aggravated & later it diluted various nationalist concepts and flamed the concept of Partition.

Nehru stated on 10 July 1946 that INC rejected the idea that the provinces would be obliged to join a group and stated that the Indian National Congress was neither bound nor committed to the plan. In effect, Nehru's speech squashed the mission's plan and the chance to keep India united. Jinnah interpreted the speech as another instance of treachery by the Congress. With Nehru's speech on groupings, the Muslim League rescinded its previous approval of the plan on 29 July.

Concerned by the diminishing British power, Wavell was eager to inaugurate an interim government. Disregarding Jinnah's vote, he authorised a cabinet in which Nehru was the interim prime minister. Sidelined and with his Pakistan of "groups" refused, Jinnah became distraught. To achieve Pakistan and impose on Congress that he could not be sidelined, he resorted to calling for his supporters to use "direct action" to demonstrate their support for Pakistan in the same manner as Gandhi's civil disobedience campaigns, but it led to rioting and massacres on religious grounds in some areas. Direct Action Day further increased Wavell's resolve to establish the interim government. On 2 September 1946, Nehru's cabinet was installed. These consequences diluted the things & Communal harmony gets compromised which in turn finally disturbed the unity of State.

British Viceroy dealing the flames of Communalism

Millions of Indian Muslim households flew black flags to protest the installation of the Congress government. Jinnah did not himself join the interim government but sent Liaquat Ali Khan into it to play a secondary role. Congress did not want to give him the important position of home minister and instead allowed him the post of finance minister. Liaquat Ali Khan infuriated Congress by using his role to prevent the functioning of Congress ministries. He demonstrated, under Jinnah's instructions, the impossibility of a single government for India.

Britain tried to revive the Cabinet Mission's scheme by sending Nehru, Jinnah and Wavell in December to meet Attlee, Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence. The inflexible arguments were enough to cause Nehru to return to India and announce that "we have now altogether stopped looking towards London". Meanwhile, Wavell commenced the Constituent Assembly, which the League boycotted. He anticipated that the League would enter it as it had joined the interim government. Instead, the Congress became more forceful and asked him to drop ministers from the Muslim League. Wavell also could not obtain a declaration from the British government that would articulate its goals.

In the context of the worsening situation, Wavell drew up a breakdown plan that provided for a gradual British exit, but his plan was considered fatalistic by the Cabinet. When he insisted on his plan, he was replaced with Lord Mountbatten.

Essence of cooperation While in Conflict

The situation while the cabinet Mission plan was in India was so worsened that the entire political atmosphere was disturbed. On one side the confliction was absolute between the Indian National Congress & Muslim league, while on the other side because of the condition of State, they were forced to continue the cooperation. Research throughout presented in the realm of this period overshadow the fact the cooperation and confliction both were inevitable then and Parties were forced to continue cooperation while at the verge of Confliction. The essence of gaining the freedom from the British authority was the primary target, at least obviously for the INC but on that part as the Muslim league was focused for the essence of groupings and so the concept of Partition, hence the geographical quest was on compromise. Different modules of historiography deals and present this phase as per their own convenience and procedural thoughts, they are applied with. The enhanced analysis can surely mark the fact that this all phase was more or less the confliction arisen because of the separatist demands of the Muslim League and the cooperation of the Indian National Congress as it was determined for a United India. But differing the points of ideologies, both obviously blame other for the rising political disturbances.



Nehru in the Constituent assembly as formed on the recommendations of the CMP.

Image Courtesy :- National Archive

Conclusion

The advent of Cabinet Mission Plan was a remarkable turnpoint in the history of Modern India. It not just likely framed the important fundamentals for the transformation of the then political indian system but also impacted the spirit of nation in terms of the conditions laid down by the mission, as per its focus point. The turmoil in the subcontinent was largely because of the fact that not just the subcontinent but also the United kingdom was in the phase of transition after the end of the WWII. The then political unrests and the Britain willingness to leave the subcontinent as soon as possible create the hazz in the political sphere and the leadership of both sides took decision in the due of political unrest blended with the WWII impacts, that in essence created huge ambiguity. The Mission was oriented with the focus of finding the solution for the framework of India's Independence but the then political leadership had huge differences in terms of the formats of Independence and especially in terms of the acceptance of the formation of 'Pakistan' as iterated by the Muslim League. So the conditionality pertaining to the then viable facts had impacted the role procedures and things to end the political unrests and gain independence ended with some major decisions that attains much debatibility in the coming course and different shades of historiographic interpretation concludes differently. In my course of research in this said topic and analysis of the available primary materials illustrates a lot about the fact of political negotiations that happended during the course of Cabinet Mission Plan and it is clearly foundable in the recommendations of the

Plan. The different wings playing their role during the period were more attentive to their set of agendas rather than the agendas we believe that they should have been to as per the Nationalist agendas. Britishers on one side were clear of leaving India while the two major wings of Indian political sphere of that time i.e. Indian National Congress and Muslim League were not coinciding with the agendas, especially in terms of the things in relation to the formation of Pakistan. So in turn the decisions of Plan were not that comprehensive that could have stated a way more clear outline for crafting the procedures and formats that could have applied in the Independence and this conflictiveness ended with the rush hours during the Mountbatten Period and ended with the Independence with Partition that eventually vivisected the geographic India continuing since ages of immortality and these arbitrary lines on mainland left masses in rush of identity and political unrests. The entire happenings suggest of the fact that confusions among the sections ended with the entire issues thereon and a non-sceptic overview can illustrate so in much research oriented way. The period of plan was the end of the WWII and it had impacted almost every intercontinental issue in one or the other way, so in order that happened in subcontinent too. Examining facts and materials can also enrich the further researches as possible and applied.

References

1. Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam. *India Wins Freedom*. Orient Blackswan, 1959.
2. Bandopadhyay, Shekhar. *From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India*. 2nd ed., Orient BlackSwan, 2014.
3. Chandra, Bipan. *History of Modern India*. Orient Blackswan, 2009.
4. Chandra, Bipan. *India's Struggle for Independence*. Penguin Books, 1988.
5. Grover, B. L., Mehta, Alka, and Yashpal. *A New Look at Modern Indian History: From 1707 to the Modern Times*. 33rd ed., S. Chand Publishing, 2023.
6. Menon, V. P. *The Transfer of Power in India*. Orient Blackswan, 1957.
7. Metcalf, Barbara, and Thomas Metcalf. *A Concise History of Modern India*. 3rd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2012.
8. Sarkar, Sumit. *A Critique of Colonial India*. Papyrus Publishing, 1985.
9. Singh, Braj Kishore. *The Indian National Congress & the Partition of India*. Sanjay Prakashan, 2006.
10. Talbot, Ian, and Gurharpal Singh. *The Partition of India*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
11. Tongo, Manish, Dora Thompson, and Mamta Chhabriya. *Miscarriage of Cabinet Mission Plan – 1946: Truncated India, Truncated Pakistan & Truncated Humanity*. Independent Publishing, 2018.
12. Wolpert, Stanley. *A New History of India*. 8th ed., Oxford University Press, 2009.