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# *Mountbatten's Response to the Communal Riots in the Punjab, 20 March to 15 August 1947:*

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## *An Overview*

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### **Abstract**

*Mountbatten once said, "I sincerely hope that His Majesty's Government will support me should this eventuality arise. But I feel that if we can blot out 10,000 fanatics in the first round we may stop four hundred million people from being involved in war".<sup>1</sup> Despite his strong commitment and prompt responses to the communal riots, Mountbatten's inability to prevent the massacres, especially brutal and widespread in the Punjab, and in the rest of the country in general, invited criticism of his role as the last leader of British India. It is important, therefore, to analyze the dynamics of the communal violence in the Punjab and Mountbatten's response to it. This paper attempts to understand Mountbatten's reading of Punjab's communal problem and his efforts to deal with it. It also analyzes the measures he took to curb and eradicate violence which resulted from that. Hence, this study fills an important gap in our existing historical literature and helps in revising prevailing views about Mountbatten's real role in dealing with the communal riots in the Punjab.*

### **Introduction**

Under the viceroyalty of Lord Mountbatten, the British transferred power to India and Pakistan in 1947, a move that was followed by bloodshed and catastrophe, especially, in the Punjab, on a wide scale. But the violence and the turmoil that occurred during the partition of British India was actually the result of many factors. Though in some cases the carnage was spontaneous, often it was executed by well-trained and well-prepared militant organisations with clear objectives. The three main communities—Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs—all applied terror, fear, and violence as instruments to win the war of succession in the Punjab; however, in that process, the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people were lost and millions were forced to migrate. Though much of Northern India suffered from communal riots, the province of the Punjab in particular became a battleground with a level of bloodshed which the modern history of South Asia had not witnessed previously.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Viceroy's Conference Report Number Forty-Six, Viceroy's Personal Report No 6, MBI/D283/6.

<sup>2</sup>More than two million people were killed, and almost fifteen million were forced to migrate from their homes. However, there is no exact estimate of the number of people killed in India at the time of partition but it ranges from 200,000 to three million. For details see: Ishtiaq Ahmad, *Punjab Partitioned, Bloodied And Cleansed* (Karachi, 2012), p. xxxvii; P. Moon, *Divide and Quit* (London, 1960), p. 283; L. Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj* (London, 1962), p. 279.

Hence, partition and its violence left an enduring legacy of hatred between India and Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> There were clear indications that on the eve of the final transfer of power there would be a civil war but very few in India or in the United Kingdom had appraised its true dimensions. Immediately after the 3 June announcement regarding the termination of British paramountcy in India, the situation began to turn ugly and very soon it became so wild and violent that some critics have called it ‘genocide’, while others have labelled it ‘ethnic cleansing’. No wonder Mountbatten’s period as the Viceroy of India also came under criticism regarding his failure to ‘nip [this] evil in the bud’. And it was alleged by critics that he failed to arrest the main Sikh leadership who, it was claimed, were not only instigating people to commit violence but also hatching conspiracies against the Muslim leadership. Another belief is that delay in the announcement of the Radcliffe Award caused uncertainty and thereby intensified the fighting. All these points are valid but equally they all merit a deeper examination. Therefore, this paper will try to answer these questions so as to permit an analysis of Mountbatten’s true role in all those happenings. It will, hopefully, help fill not only an important gap in our existing historical literature, but will also revise the general perception about Mountbatten’s role in the communal riots in the Punjab.

In recent years many historians and political scientists, including Ian Talbot,<sup>4</sup> Gyanendra Pandey,<sup>5</sup> Paul Brass,<sup>6</sup> Donald Horowitz,<sup>7</sup> and others, have written on violence and the human aspects of partition. Their observations about the violence, on whether it was spontaneous or planned, or whether it fell into the category of ‘genocide’<sup>8</sup> and ‘ethnic cleansing’,<sup>9</sup> have contributed greatly to our understanding of the history of violence before and after the partition of India. Other historians such as Pippa Virdee<sup>10</sup> and Ian Copland<sup>11</sup> have shed light on the communal history of the Princely States of the Punjab. Similarly, much has been written about Mountbatten’s role in the partition of India, but his response to regional political developments, especially in the Punjab, has not yet received appropriate attention from the historians. Writings on Mountbatten, while discussing the British policy, have not delved deeper into his role in the communal outbreaks in the Punjab. Hence, there is a clear

<sup>3</sup>It is a common understanding in the world that it is the state which plays an important role in eradicating the violence in the society but the British authorities remained incapable of stamping out the communal riots in the Punjab during the transfer of power. No wonder, the British government, including its last Viceroy in India, Mountbatten, were held responsible for it. For details see Anders Bjorn Hansen, *Partition and Genocide Manifestation of Violence in Punjab: 1937–1947* (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 195–197.

<sup>4</sup>Ian Talbot, (ed.), *Deadly Embrace Religion, Politics, and Violence in India and Pakistan 1947–2002* (Karachi, 2007); Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, (eds.) *The Partition of India* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition, Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle, 2003).

<sup>7</sup>Horowitz has described the “attack on refugee trains as organized genocide”. Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, 2001).

<sup>8</sup>Anders Bjorn Hansen, *Partition and Genocide Manifestation of Violence in Punjab: 1937–1947* (New Delhi, 2002) pp. 195–197.

<sup>9</sup>Ian Copland, ‘The Master and the Maharajas: The Sikh Princes and the East Punjab Massacres of 1947’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 36,3(2002), pp. 657–704.

<sup>10</sup>Pippa Virdee, ‘Partition and the Absence of Communal Violence in Malerkotla’, in Ian Talbot, (ed.), *The Deadly Embrace, Religion, Politics and Violence in India and Pakistan 1947–2002* (Karachi, 2007), pp. 16–35.

<sup>11</sup>Ian Copland, ‘The Integration of the Princely States: A Bloodless Revolution?’, *South Asia*, Vol. XVIII, 1995, pp. 131–115; ‘The Master and the Maharajas: The Sikh princes and the East Punjab Massacres of 1947’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 36,3(2002), pp. 657–704.

gap in the existing historical literature.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, biographies of Lord Mountbatten and other writings on his period have overlooked his approach towards communal disturbances in the Punjab.<sup>13</sup>

Existing writings on Mountbatten are clearly divided into two opposing camps. One group comprises mostly Pakistani historians—like Latif Ahmad Sherwani<sup>14</sup>, Sher Muhammad Garewal, Ishtiaq Ahmed<sup>15</sup>, and Akbar S. Ahmad,<sup>16</sup> along with a few from the West such as Stanley Wolpert<sup>17</sup> and Leonard Mosley<sup>18</sup>— are highly critical. They all suggest that Mountbatten's decision in favour of the early termination of the British Raj directly caused bloodshed and the resultant mass migration.<sup>19</sup> Other critics, meanwhile, believe that the delay in the announcement of the Radcliffe Award, until 17 August, resulted in uncertainty that further intensified the ongoing violence. On the other hand, a second group of historians—mostly western historians like Philip Ziegler,<sup>20</sup> H.V. Hudson,<sup>21</sup> Alan Campbell-Johnson and Ian Talbot<sup>22</sup>— maintain that Mountbatten had limited resources to deal with the rising tide of communal violence.<sup>23</sup>

As this paper will go on to demonstrate, though Mountbatten had to deal with overall Indian affairs, he did express great concern for the rising communal problem in the Punjab. The following discussion therefore will challenge the argument presented by his critics, such as Wolpert and Akbar S. Ahmed, that he did not show any intent or made any effort to suppress the growing communal riots. The reality was quite different. Despite his limited resources, Lord Mountbatten managed to restrict the activities of terrorist organisations to a manageable level in the period from March–August 1947 and thus was successful in transferring power to the people of South Asia without as much bloodshed as compared to the 'holocaust' that occurred after 15 August 1947. Critics could argue that if Mountbatten had dealt with the situation better before independence, then all hell would not have

<sup>12</sup>Urvashi Butalia's well-received book throws light on the suffering of the women, especially the Sikh women, in the hands of men. The author, however, ignores the other side of the picture as the Muslim women also had to face a similar treatment from the non-Muslims. Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence. Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>13</sup>For details see: Philip Ziegler *Mountbatten: The Official Biography*, (London, 1985); H.V. Hudson, *The Great Divide: Britain, India and Pakistan* (Karachi, 1985).

<sup>14</sup>Latif Ahmed Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten* (Karachi, 1986).

<sup>15</sup>Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab Blooded, Partitioned and Cleansed* (Karachi, 2012), p. 537.

<sup>16</sup>Akbar S. Ahmad believes that the "raw deal" that Pakistan received stemmed in fact from the Edwina-Nehru-Mountbatten "triangle". Akbar S. Ahmad, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity, The Search for Saladin* (London, 1997).

<sup>17</sup>Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India*. (Karachi, 2010).

<sup>18</sup>Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of British Raj in India* (London, 1961).

<sup>19</sup>Mountbatten is also alleged to have influenced the process of boundary demarcation in Punjab, thereby giving India land access to Kashmir. Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, (Lahore, reprint 2009), pp. 213–218.

<sup>20</sup>Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London, 1985).

<sup>21</sup>H.V. Hudson, *The Great Divide: Britain, India and Pakistan* (Karachi, 1985).

<sup>22</sup>The western historians like Philip Ziegler *Mountbatten: The Official Biography*, (London, 1985), H.V. Hudson, *The Great Divide: Britain, India and Pakistan*, (Karachi, 1985) Alan Campbell-Johnson and Ian Talbot, maintain that Mountbatten had limited resources to deal with the rising tide of communal violence. Mountbatten could only check terrorist activities of the organised groups with the help of the police and the army but there were signs of division visible in the Punjab police, and the army which were making his job more difficult.

<sup>23</sup>W. H. Morris-Jones, 'Thirty-Six Years Later: The Mixed Legacies of Mountbatten's Transfer of Power', *International Affairs* 59(4) (Autumn 1983), pp. 621–628; 'Dividing the Jewel: Mountbatten and the Transfer of Power to India and Pakistan', *Pacific Affairs* 58(4) (Winter 1985–6), pp. 653–662.

broken loose immediately afterwards. But another way of viewing this is that individuals and groups bent on violence only moved into full gear after 15 August precisely because British restraints on their activities had been removed.<sup>24</sup> Hence, this paper will shed light on how and why Mountbatten's concern and earlier all-out efforts to prevent violence among the communities in the Punjab ultimately failed. It is an important case study because after a lapse of 68 years one can revisit Mountbatten's response to the communal riots in Punjab and this study attempts to analyze it after a close study of Mountbatten Papers, Jinnah Papers, Muslim League papers, Jenkins Papers, and other primary sources.<sup>25</sup>

### Background

At the time of Mountbatten's arrival in March 1947, the whole country was in a most unsettled state—including the Hindu-majority United Provinces (U.P.), which was being run by a Congress provincial ministry.<sup>26</sup> The previous August had seen a cycle of communal killings spreading across North India following the so-called 'Great Calcutta Killings'.<sup>27</sup> Initially, the Punjab had been unaffected, but in the wake of the resignation of Khizr Tiwana on 2 March, following a sustained Muslim League campaign against him, violence had broken out in this province as well.<sup>28</sup> Giving an appraisal about the political condition of the Punjab, its Governor Jenkins told Mountbatten that the province was heading towards a civil war owing to the military preparations of local communities, particularly the Sikhs.<sup>29</sup>

Nehru, also making same analysis, regarded the situation as very dangerous and disturbing. He believed that it was principally due to a struggle between two fairly equally balanced parties to assume power over the whole province by June 1948. He ruled out any chance of a coalition ministry, since the parties mistrusted one another so profoundly.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, he suggested an immediate partition of the Punjab with or without the partition of India.<sup>31</sup> Not

<sup>24</sup>This article is based on a range of primary sources including the Jenkins papers of the final British Governor of the Punjab held in the British Library, the Rees Papers, which relate to the Punjab Boundary Force and the Khizar Tiwana Papers, and Alan Campbell-Johnson Papers. Both of the last two are held at the University of Southampton and provide insights from the final Prime Minister of the United Punjab and from Mountbatten's influential press attaché. My interpretation is chiefly derived however from a close reading of the Mountbatten Papers at the University of Southampton.

<sup>25</sup>Record of Viceroy's Interview with Gandhi No 19, Meeting with Gandhi on 31 March 1947. MBI/D283/1

<sup>26</sup>As Yasmin Khan has observed, "From 1946 different types of brutality were starting to occur in UP. These types of violence could clearly be crudely characterised as random stabbings and street fights, train attacks, and pogroms". Yasmin Khan, 'Out of Control? Partition Violence and the State in Uttar Pradesh', in Ian Talbot, (ed.), *Deadly Embrace Religion, Politics, and Violence in India and Pakistan 1947–2002* (Karachi, 2007), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup>Gopi Chand to Tiwana, 11 February 1947, Papers of Lieutenant Colonel Nawab Sir Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana, University of Southampton, MS210/10.

<sup>28</sup>Regarding situation in the Punjab, *Hindustan Times* wrote on 9 March 1947, "The political deadlock on the Punjab is no accident. It is inherited in the situation. The Hindu-Muslim problem in this country is not a religious conflict. Nor is it a question of minority and majority. It is essentially a struggle for power in the two provinces of the Punjab and the Bengal where the Muslims and non-Muslims are evenly balanced".

<sup>29</sup>Jenkins reported, "In the Punjab all parties are seriously preparing for civil war, and of these by far the most business-like and serious are the Sikhs, who already have a plan to seize the main irrigation centre in order to exercise physical control over the whole of the Punjab". Jenkins to Viceroy, 2 April 1947, Jenkins Papers, MSS/EUR/ D 897, British Library, London.

<sup>30</sup>Nehru to Viceroy, 10 March 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup>Raghuvendra Tanwar is not wrong in his assessment that the resolution of the partition of the Punjab by the Congress Working Committee on 8 March 1947 was prepared by Nehru who had been thinking since 20 February 1947 about partition as the one of the best solution of India but he overlooks the Rajagopalachari Formula and the

surprisingly, the very next day, Hindu and Sikh members of the Central Assembly routed a memorandum through Nehru to the Viceroy requesting the partition of the Punjab.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, members of the Punjab Assembly Panthic Party also demanded the 'Division of the Punjab'.<sup>33</sup>

Shiromani Akal Dal, agreeing with the resolutions submitted by the Nationalist Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab regarding the division of that province, stated that 'recent barbarities of the Pakistani Muslims on the Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab have left no other solution of the communal tangle except the partition of the Punjab'. The Akali Dal likewise demanded that before the transfer of power to Indian hands in June 1948, the Punjab should be divided into two provinces and a boundary commission set up to finalise these new provincial boundaries.<sup>34</sup> In a combined statement issued by Hindu and Sikh leaders of the Punjab, it was made clear that "In no circumstances are we willing to give the slightest assurance or support to the Muslim League in the formation of Ministry, as we are opposed to Pakistan in any shape or form".<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Master Tara Singh, commenting on the Congress Working Committee's resolution regarding the possible partition of the Punjab, said, "The Sikhs will be glad if the Muslim League accept the principle and concede the Sikh demand of forming districts into a separate province in which the Sikhs and Hindus are given as much land as they possess at present. We cannot tolerate a division in which predominantly Sikh districts were partitioned".<sup>36</sup> And he warned that "If the Muslims think they can break the spirit of the Sikhs and achieve Pakistan by indulging in such wanton communal violence as they have in the past few days done, then they are mistaken".<sup>37</sup> These kinds of provocative statements were akin to pouring oil on fire keeping in view the then existing bitter communal feelings and thus further intensified the communal divide. Therefore, the communal riots gained in intensity and seemed to engulf the whole of Punjab after these incidents.

According to Ian Talbot, "The announcement that the British would quit India by June 1948 had a disastrous effect on the situation in the Punjab".<sup>38</sup> No doubt, the artificial

Gandhi-Jinnah talks which also had demanded the partition of the Punjab in 1944. Raghuvendra Tanwar, *Reporting Partition of Punjab 1947, press public and other opinions* (New Delhi, 2006), p. 127.

<sup>32</sup>Nehru suggested establishing two ministries under the Governor, one for the Eastern part of the Province and one for the Western. But Mountbatten was rather doubtful of its being a practical one. "Did he propose that there should be fresh elections or that the existing Assembly should be split in two parts to the districts they came from? He did not seem to have thought an election was necessary, what he proposed was merely a temporary arrangement". Letter from Members of Central Legislatures from Punjab to Nehru, 2 April 1947. Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, p. 78.

<sup>33</sup>*Hindustan Times*, 5 April 1947.

<sup>34</sup>The Sikhs suggested the terms of reference whereof should be demarcating the Provincial boundaries keeping in view: - Population, Landed Property, Land Revenue, Historical places and traditions, of the various communities. Akali Dal further demands that faculties be provided for exchange of population and property and those special arrangements be made for the protection, honour, integrity and sanctity of the historically religious places. Akali Dal also appealed to all Panthic organisations and workers to unite and solidly stand behind this demand. Resolution No IX adopted by the Working Committee of the Shiromani Akal Dal, Amritsar in its meeting on 16 April 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, pp. 99.

<sup>35</sup>Wavell to Secretary of State, No. 82-GT, 10 March 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup>*Statesman*, 11 March 1947.

<sup>37</sup>*Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 16 March 1947.

<sup>38</sup>The Muslim League launched a campaign of direct action against the coalition government, for the Government banned the Muslim League National Guards on 24 January to 1947. In fact paramilitary organisations such as the National Guards organisation along with the Hindu Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) were

cobweb woven to ensure a semblance of communal harmony by the Punjab Governor Evan Jenkins could not withstand public pressure, and, as a result, Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana resigned on 2 March 1947, thereby creating an opportunity for the Muslim League to form a ministry, something that would have been possible otherwise.<sup>39</sup> Both Congress and Sikh leaders opposed the formation of the League ministry and threatened to resist it by force.<sup>40</sup> Here there is largely agreement among historians that Khizar's resignation paved the way for widespread disturbances because, in its wake, Master Tara Singh started issuing 'irresponsible statements', and also once the equilibrium between Muslims and non-Muslims had been broken, its restoration was going to be difficult, if not impossible. No wonder then that in a matter of days communal riots started in Lahore, soon spreading to the whole province.<sup>41</sup> Once this wave of communal riots was unleashed, it turned into a vicious cycle of attacks of revenge and counter-revenge between Muslims and non-Muslims. In Jenkins' view, rather than allowing the Muslim League to form a ministry, the only solution to the Punjab's communal problem was the imposition of Section 93.<sup>42</sup> He ruled out both the formation of the Muslim League ministry and the holding of fresh elections mainly because he believed that this would lead to a civil war.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the British were quitting India by June 1948 meant that the questions to whom and how the power would be transferred remained unclear. It was this confusion that created a situation of uncertainty in India, particularly in the Punjab. The imposition of Section 93 resulted in a stalemate so the resulting deadlock in the Punjab was, in addition to the already extant religious divisions, outgrowth of an administrative step. Nor was it just a question of minority versus majority. Essentially it represented a struggle for power in the province of the Punjab because not only were the Muslims and non-Muslims evenly balanced due to the creation of the NWF Province in 1901, but also because since 1944, Congress and Sikh politicians favoured Punjab's division into Muslim and non-Muslim areas.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, both the leadership of the Congress and the Sikhs, feared that on the eve of the partition of India, Muslim League government, if allowed to be formed, would be against their interests. This was due to the fact that the

banned. Given that he could not resist popular resistance, Khizar lifted ban on processions and meetings. Moreover, he tendered his resignations on 2 March 1947.

<sup>39</sup>Nanda maintains, "From the political point of view his resignation opened the sluice gates of anarchy". See B. R. Nanda, *Punjab Uprooted: A story of the Punjab Riots and Rehabilitation Programmes* (Bombay, 1948, reprint Delhi: NMML, 2003), p.15.

<sup>40</sup> *Eastern Times*, Lahore, 4 March 1947.

<sup>41</sup>Jenkin to Wavell, 17 March 1947, *Transfer of Power* Vol. IX, pp. 965–969.

<sup>42</sup>After the resignation of Khizar as Chief Minister, Evan Jenkins did not allow the Muslim League to form Ministry as Master Tara Singh threatened to use force to sabotage the new government. Therefore, the Governor Rule was imposed by using the Section 93 of Government of India Act 1935.

<sup>43</sup>On 1 April 1947 Jenkins informed Lord Ismay that the "Sikhs are brewing up trouble. Their object is the mastery of their kingdom, the Punjab. They may postpone action until we have gone, but Giani Kartar Singh is a hothead, and a spark might be touched off at any time. Partition could be imposed by force, it would be a dirty job requiring a lot of troops. When it had been done, the two governments would govern by sheer force, partition would spell economic ruin for the Punjab, the Sutlej Scheme, for example would be beyond their means". See Notes of an Interview between Jenkins and Lord Ismay, 1 April 1947, 3 April, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, pp. 75–76.

<sup>44</sup>Nehru suggested that there might as a temporarily measure be two ministries under the Governor, one for the Eastern part of the Province and one for the Western. Viceroy and Nehru, 10 March 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, p. 35.

Muslim League Government would be in control of the police and the local administration at a crucial period of political transition.

### **Institutionalised Riot Systems**

Borrowing terminology from Paul Brass, it is clear that by 1947 the three leading communities of Punjab—Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus—each had militant associations, namely the Muslim League National Guards, the Jathas, and the RSS,<sup>45</sup> backed by political parties. It was these militant organisations that devised and executed the “dramatic production of riot systems” that we see taking place in the Punjab, especially in the month of August 1947,<sup>46</sup> but also throughout the period from March that year onward.<sup>47</sup> The All-India National Congress Committee passed a resolution on 8 March demanding the division of Punjab into two provinces so that “the predominantly Muslim part may be separated from the predominantly non-Muslim part”.<sup>48</sup> Even before the arrival of Mountbatten as Viceroy, Punjab had been infected by the epidemic of religious violence that had rippled out from Calcutta (August 1946—The Great Killings) to Noakhali (E. Bengal) and Bihar. These episodes polarised opinion in the Punjab. During this period, Hindu-Sikh unity against what many within these communities regarded as a common enemy—the Muslims—became the hallmark of the communal violence.<sup>49</sup>

Paul Brass and Ian Talbot have already observed that the 1947 Punjab violence was ‘politically motivated’, unlike more ‘traditional’ communal religious violence. Its purpose was to carve out control over territory and to displace minority populations whose identity was reduced to that of an ‘essentialised’ religious labelling. Of course some violence was ‘spontaneous’ and motivated by the desire for loot or revenge. But alongside this was the highly organised and politicised violence which shares some of the characteristics that Brass has attributed to post-independence communal conflict in North India.<sup>50</sup>

According to Jenkins, the communal violence in the Punjab passed through three stages. The first phase lasted from 4–20 March, during which violence started in Lahore and spread to Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Gurgaon, Multan and Jullundur. On the whole, it was a phase of normal intensity of communal disturbances except in Multan where 130 non-Muslims

<sup>45</sup>Rashtriya Swyam Sevak Sang first appeared in the Central Province and spread all over India. It became ‘the Hindu *rashtra* in miniature’. It had fascist forms its military-style features including uniforms and emphasis on drill. It was common to other Indian organisations of the period, including the Congress volunteers, the Khaksars and the Muslim League National Guards. Ian Talbot, *India and Pakistan: Inventing the Nation* (London, 1999), pp. 102–103.

<sup>46</sup>In response to the Rawalpindi tragedy an exodus of Sikhs in large numbers took place to the eastern districts of the Punjab and to the Sikh princely states, where they narrated their woes, set up the nucleus of a revenge movement; as the Governor of Punjab failed to punish the perpetrators of the killings the situation got complicated further.

<sup>47</sup>Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*, pp. 5–39.

<sup>48</sup>Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab Blooded, Partitioned and Cleansed* (Karachi, 2012), p. 37.

<sup>49</sup>The newspapers while hailing the Hindu-Sikh solidarity writes, “It may be argued that situation on the Punjab with its three communities is materially different from that of Bengal where it is a simple problem of two communities, but the Hindus and the Sikhs of the Punjab are completely at one so far as the issue of separation is concerned.” *Tribune*, 16 June 1947, MBI/D84/1, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup>Paul Brass explains that in post-independence India, the Hindu-Muslim riots which have turned into pogroms, massacres of the Muslims, of course only few Hindus are killed. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*, pp. 5–39.

were killed in three hours. The second phase ensued between 21 March and 9 May, and comprised minor incidents in many cities, as local communities were preparing for the final battle as the partition of the Punjab seemed a probable prospect. The third and final phase, during Mountbatten's viceroyalty, lasted from 9 May to 15 August, when communities caused maximum scale of damage to one another and to property while "exposing minimum expense of surface to police and army".<sup>51</sup>

But, though the Muslim League's Civil Disobedience Movement had damaged communal relations, organised riot production only occurred after the resignation of Khizar Tiwana, who stepped down for various reasons including the activities of extremists from various communal organisations including the extremists/activities of various political organisations). British reports focus on the activities of the RSS<sup>52</sup> and the Muslim League National Guards,<sup>53</sup> but there were numerous other organisations as well. However, Master Tara Singh's open pronouncements to resort to a religious war, and his war preparations brought about an intensification of communal rioting in the Punjab.<sup>54</sup>

These organisations had been receiving arms and ammunitions from the rulers of the Princely States and from the Frontier. Moreover, funds were raised by the political parties to support these organisations. These organisations were fully backed by the political parties and when the RSS and the National Guards had been banned by the Punjab authorities on 24 January, agitation started against the ministry and it had to lift its ban under great pressure. Thereafter, it appeared that the general policy on the part of the British was to avoid direct confrontation with political parties and their affiliated organisations. Consequently, they avoided detaining the top leadership, as well.

From March 1947, although the whole of the Punjab was ablaze with religious frenzy, the main trouble-spots were the cities of Lahore and Amritsar, along with Gurgaon district, which remained the most disturbed areas until 15 August. The police and army continued trying to curtail the activities of the rioters with varying degrees of success and failure. Rioters had developed the tactic of 'cloak and dagger' attacks, which made the work of the police and army difficult. Nehru was critical of the British administration and he expressed his horror and disgust at the riots in the Punjab, Bengal and elsewhere and said that these were not isolated riots, but "they are planned attacks". It seemed the administration had broken down and that there was no authority left in the country to enforce order.<sup>55</sup> He suggested the imposition of Martial Law in Lahore to curb down the communal riots. However, the imposition of the martial law in Lahore, as suggested by Nehru, was deemed

<sup>51</sup>Jenkins to Mountbatten 4 August 1947, Lionel Carter, (ed.) *Punjab Politics, 1 June 1947–14 August 1947 Tragedy Governments' Fortnightly Reports and other Key Documents*, (Delhi, 2007), pp. 193–211.

<sup>52</sup>In early 1947, it was estimated that the RSS had more than 28,000 members. Quoted in Talbot, *The Deadly Embrace*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup>According to a rough estimate, the Muslim League National Guards had ten thousand members

<sup>54</sup>Evan Jenkins reported that . . . . The more unpleasant interpretation is supported by Intelligence reports of the activities of Master Tara Singh and Kartar Singh. Both have advocated retaliation against the Muslims and both have been in touch with the rulers of Sikh States. Jenkins to Mountbatten, 9 April 1947, R/3/1/176: ff 100–107.; Yunus has observed, "The Sikhs began to prepare for civil war. Master Tara Singh's war fund target of fifty lakhs Rupees was oversubscribed; he received substantial amounts from Calcutta Marwari and military form the Faridkot and Patiala State". See Yunus Samad, *A Nation in Turmoil: Nationalism and Ethnicity in Pakistan 1937–1958* (Karachi, 1995), p. 111.

<sup>55</sup>*Tribune*, Lahore, 16 June, 1947.



counterproductive.<sup>56</sup> Trouble flared up again in Lahore and Amritsar, and in Gurgaon district.<sup>57</sup> In the first two places, arson and stabbing were widespread, but the British defended their position by saying that since it was carried out by 'Cloak and dagger' methods, it was very difficult to put down.<sup>58</sup>

There is a long list of occurrences of communal violence in the Punjab from 29 March to 15 August 1947, but studies have already been carried out on these events by Ian Talbot *et al.*, it is only necessary to state here that these communal outbreaks both set the pattern and paved the way for the greater bloodbath which followed independence. As these other historians have highlighted, the province of the Punjab was passing through a critical situation and consequently posed a very different challenge for the administration to that issued by the 1942 Congress uprising. In 1942, the authorities had been faced with concentrated attacks on government servants, buildings and other institutions. Till April 1947, there had been 2,090 killings and 1,708 injured owing to violence in the Punjab.<sup>59</sup> Now the one of the major challenges for Lord Mountbatten was to deal with the widespread fighting between the Punjab's three communities.<sup>60</sup> In fact, not only the British officials believed that these attacks were planned by three major communities but differed and expressed his horror and disgust at the riots in the Punjab, Bengal and elsewhere, and said that these were not isolated riots and believed that they were planned attacks but he held the administration responsible for them.<sup>61</sup>

### Mountbatten and the Punjab Communal Riots

Mountbatten arrived in India as the last British Viceroy with a clear mandate to transfer British power to Indian hands by June 1948, in a peaceful manner so that life, property and long-term political and economic interests of the British Commonwealth would be safeguarded.<sup>62</sup> But he brought forward the date of departure to 15 August 1947, mainly to avoid a civil war.<sup>63</sup> In his words, "I arrived out there to find this terrible pendulum of

<sup>56</sup>Viceroy's Personal Report no. 10, Top secret and Personal, 27 June 1947, MBI/D284/1, pp. 1-14.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Mountbatten wrote, "In Gurgaon, where my wife went again on the 26<sup>th</sup> June there has been a longstanding feud between the Meos and Jats, and now that additional troops with the increased vehicles and wireless facilities have been sent in the hope that we shall be able to control the troubles. A similar Meo-Jat flare up in the United Provinces was dealt with very quickly, as the authorities were ready for it". *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>*Daily Nawa-i-Wakt*, Lahore, 4 April 1947.

<sup>60</sup>Mountbatten opined that "I might add that the Hindus are nearly as bad, and that the determination, from the highest to the lowest in the land, to make out that the opposite religionists are devils incarnate as well as crooks, makes any sensible solution appear out of question". Viceroy's Personal Report No. 5, 1 May 1947, L/PO/123 : ff 71-89; Nick Lloyd, "The last Governor: Sir Evan Jenkins in the Punjab 1946-1947" in Ian Talbot (ed.), *The Independence of India and Pakistan New Approaches and Reflections*, (Karachi, 2013), p. 220.

<sup>61</sup>Deploring the disturbances in the country, Nehru reiterated that Governmental authority had almost collapsed. *Tribune*, 16 June 1947, MBI/D84/1, p. 15; however, Jenkins disagreed with Nehru allegations. Jenkins to Mountbatten, 16 June 1947, MBI/D84/1, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup>Mountbatten was fully conscious of the seriousness of the situation in India and wanted everyone to show responsibility. In his first address on his Swearing-in Ceremony he said "Every one of us must do what he can to avoid any word or action which might lead to further bitterness or add to the toll of innocent victims". Speech at the Swearing in Ceremony 24 March 1947, Mountbatten Papers MBI/M6.

<sup>63</sup>Lord Ismay while explanation to the Prime Minister Clement Attlee about the winding up so quickly the British rule in India said, "I felt quite sure in my own mind that we had no option but to do what had done, and that as for rushing things too much, we would have probably been in a worse mess than we are now if we had

massacres and reprisals swinging wider and wider; if it was not stopped there was no telling where India might end".<sup>64</sup> His brief also included the need to "obtain if possible a unitary Government for all India, through the medium of the Constituent Assembly, set up and run in accordance with the Cabinet Mission Plan. He was also advised to do 'utmost to safeguard the interests of the minorities'".<sup>65</sup>

After his arrival, Mountbatten undoubtedly believed that the best solution to the Indian problem was to enforce the Cabinet Mission Plan in both letter and spirit.<sup>66</sup> But neither the Muslim League nor the Congress seemed inclined to carry on with the Cabinet Mission Plan. Rather the Congress and the Sikhs had demanded the partition of the Punjab a few days before his arrival. After meeting a wide range of Indian politicians, as early as April 1947, Mountbatten concluded that the only solution that "could bring the three main communities, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, into some acceptable agreement was the partition of India, including the partition of the Punjab and Bengal, on the communal lines. For Mountbatten, the division of the Punjab along communal lines was a logical corollary of Jinnah's two-nation theory."<sup>67</sup>

The Muslim League's demand for the partition of India gained greater ground among the overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims side by side with the demand for the partition of the Punjab and Bengal by the Congress and the Sikh political parties. In fact, the Rajagopalachari Formula<sup>68</sup> and the Gandhi-Jinnah talks<sup>69</sup> were not the bargaining chips for preservation of India as one political unit, but overtly aimed at it. Finally, in March 1947, the Congress passed a resolution and demanded the division of the Punjab whether or not the partition of India took place. They believed that non-Muslims were under the severe threat of local Muslim domination. Sikh leaders unanimously endorsed the Congress demand for the partition of the Punjab on a communal, namely Muslim and non-Muslim basis.<sup>70</sup> However, Paul Brass claims that "In the aftermath of killings of Sikhs and Hindus

delayed matters, with essential difference that we would be responsible for clearing up the mess without any means of doing so". Ismay to Lord Mountbatten, 9 October 1947, Mountbatten papers MBI/D196/2.

<sup>64</sup>Mountbatten of Burma, "Transfer of Power", *Royal Empire Society*, Vol. XXXIX. No. 6 (London, November-December 1948), pp. 271-276.

<sup>65</sup>Mountbatten's accepted this position after great pressure from His Majesty's Government and his term was fixed for only fifteen months. Prime Minister to Lord Mountbatten, 8 February 1947, MBI/D92/14.

<sup>66</sup>Minutes of Viceroy's Staff Meeting, 31 March 1947, Mountbatten Papers MBI/M6.

<sup>67</sup>Lord Ismay said, "We had no option but to do what had to be done, and that as for rushing things too much, we would have probably been in a worse mess than we are now if we had delayed matters, with essential difference that we would be responsible for clearing up the mess without any means of doing so." Ismay to Lord Mountbatten, 9 October 1947, Mountbatten Papers MBI/D196/2.

<sup>68</sup>For details see: Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Quaid-i-Azam and Rajagopalachari Formula", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 17, No.1, January 2002, pp. 1-15, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore Pakistan, 2002.

<sup>69</sup>Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Picture of Muslim Politics in India before Wavell's Viceroyalty", *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2008, pp. 74-138.

<sup>70</sup>*Dawn* wrote that "the Congress propaganda is intended to disrupt and put obstacles and obstructions and difficulties in the way of an amicable solution. It is quite obvious that they have put up the Hindus Mahasabha in Bengal and the Sikhs in the Punjab, and the Congress Press is inciting the Sikhs and misleading them. The Sikhs do not stand to gain by the partition of the Punjab but they will be split into two halves. More that half of their population will have to remain in Pakistan, as proposed by the Muslim League even if partition of the Punjab takes place according to their conception, whereas in Pakistan, as proposed by the ML they will play, as one solid minority, a very big part. We have always been very willing to meet them in every reasonable way". *Dawn*, 1 May 1947, MBI/D288/5.

that occurred in Rawalpindi, Attock, and Multan districts, including massacres in “several villages” the Sikh leaders and the Congress demanded the partition of the province”.<sup>71</sup>

We need to remember, however, that the Punjab, far from experiencing ideal communal relations, had in recent years witnessed relatively fewer disturbances between various religious communities. Whether it was because of the Unionist Coalition government or the tight, overall, British control of the Punjab administration, its record was much better when compared to that of other provinces like Bengal, UP, Bihar, and the NWFP. As a matter of fact, the communal disturbances that took place in other parts of India that had a profound impact upon the communal relations among the major religious communities in the Punjab.

Since Mountbatten's main aim was to hand over power as early as possible, he, at all costs wished to take on board all important leaders, parties, and communities, who could be a potential threat to the peaceful transfer of power. It was his considered opinion that only negotiated settlement among the three parties could guarantee the success of his mission. The only hope of a peaceful unified Punjab lay in a Unionist or a Coalition government, but that appeared unlikely. The only alternative to a Unionist government was partitioning the Punjab which had become a Congress and Sikh demand. But Jenkins feared that such a partition would create bloodshed as well as spell economic ruin for the province.<sup>72</sup>

However, in spite of the practical difficulties and grave dangers inherent in such a plan, the partition of the Punjab along lines that would satisfy the rival nationalisms in the province, became viewed by many as an unavoidable accompaniment to the transfer of power in June 1948.<sup>73</sup> Mountbatten himself was convinced, after receiving feedback from leading local and central Indians, that a negotiated settlement would ease communal tension and hence create a conducive atmosphere for the peaceful transfer of power.<sup>74</sup> Reporting to His Majesty's Government, he concluded that in the prevailing unfortunate circumstances, the Cabinet Mission Plan had proved unacceptable to all parties; therefore, partition was inevitable.<sup>75</sup>

Under these circumstances, Mountbatten then assumed the obligation to bring about a negotiated settlement, which he successfully did in the shape of the 3 June Plan. Bringing the three main communities to agree on a mutually acceptable solution proved a hard nut to crack: however thanks to his ‘magical trick’— as Gandhi referred to the 3 June Plan—India was to be partitioned along with the Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and the Punjab. The principles of the plan were accepted by all the communities, though its main loophole was the demarcation of the boundaries between Muslim and non-Muslim areas. Ambiguity here caused a major dent between Muslims and non-Muslims and thus opened a space for Sikh leaders to claim, more vigorously, the establishment of a Sikh state covering a large area of the Punjab. While their demand was not a new one, in Mountbatten's eyes, it seemed

<sup>71</sup>Paul R. Brass, “The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946–47: Means, Methods, and Purposes”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5(1), (2003), pp. 71–101.

<sup>72</sup>He was told that Jenkins had no hope of getting out of Section 93 and trouble was that a general election would solve nothing. The League would probably get a majority of up to 5 out of 175 seats, and would then proceed to form a government with bare Muslim majority, there might be real trouble. Viceroy's Personal Report No.2, dated 9 April 1947 MBI/D283/2.

<sup>73</sup>Extract from a secret letter from Secretary of State to Mountbatten, 3 April 1947. Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, p. 78.

<sup>74</sup>Notes of an Interview between Mountbatten and Nehru, 1 April 1947. Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, p. 77.

<sup>75</sup>Viceroy to Secretary of State, 17 April 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, p. 80.

to contradict the principle on which the 3 June Plan had been based. Seemingly losing the battle in the political arena, the Sikhs resorted to violence to achieve their goal of establishing a Sikh state.<sup>76</sup>

### Engaging the Central Government

Mountbatten knew that his mission could not be accomplished without getting into confidence all stakeholders in the country. He hoped:

His Majesty's Government will support me should this eventuality arise. But I feel that if we can blot out 10,000 fanatics in the first round we may stop four hundred million people from being involved in war.<sup>77</sup>

London, however, was never prepared to countenance such action, so Mountbatten embarked on a race against time to ensure that Britain handed over power in advance of any widespread disorders. This put a premium both on haste and on using the powers vested in the Interim Government and the Partition Council, in particular, to ensure a smooth handover. Jenkins meanwhile believed that Punjabis could settle the situation between themselves, "if the respective High Commands would stand clear", and "call off the whips". However, he suggested calling in Sikh leaders for consultations to resolve their issues because, in his opinion, it was the Sikhs who were brewing up trouble.<sup>78</sup> But Mountbatten not only decided to take into his confidence the top leadership of the three main communities but also brought Punjab matters to the Interim Government's Cabinet meetings in order to reach a consensus concerning official policy towards the Punjab disturbances. He asked the Cabinet to support him "in putting down the first signs of communal war with overwhelming force", and, if they agreed, that "we should also bomb and machine gun them from the air". He was happy that this proposed policy was greeted with real enthusiasm by Congress and Muslim League members alike.

However, the meeting of the Cabinet on 25 June turned out to be a very difficult one in which Mountbatten was violently attacked by leaders of both parties for the complete failure of the British to maintain law and order even under Section 93. Nehru, completely lost control, and demanded the sacking of every government official, from the Governor downwards, that very same day. Patel also spoke against the British, saying that in the days when they had been putting down Congress and freedom movements, they had had no difficulty in keeping law and order. League leaders also criticised the British policy in the Punjab and suggested that if the situation continued in the same manner in Lahore, "there would soon be no city left for them to inherit". Even so, Mountbatten obtained unanimous agreement that the Punjab Governor should be invited to form a Security Committee comprising of the local leaders representing Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs; that

<sup>76</sup>Viceroy's Conference Report No. 46, 29 April 1947, Viceroy's Personal report no 6, MBI/D283/6.

<sup>77</sup>Viceroy's Conference Report Number Forty-Six, Viceroy's Personal Report No 6, 29 April 1947, MBI/D283/6.

<sup>78</sup>Jenkins predicted that "they may postpone action until we have gone, but Giani Kartar Singh is a hothead, and a spark might be touched off at any time". Notes of an Interview between Jenkins and Lord Ismay, 1 April 1947. Noted and signed Ismay on 3 April 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D259, pp. 75–76.

this Committee should draw up an agreed list of local officials in whom all three parties would have confidence; and that they should become operative wherever possible. He also suggested that the Security Committee should meet every day and that all leaders, from the High Commands downwards, should use every effort to call off violence.<sup>79</sup> In a confidential report dating from this period, he commented:

I asked if the Cabinet would support me to the hilt in putting down the first signs of communal war with overwhelming force, and if they agreed that we should also bomb and machine gun them from the air, and thus prove conclusively that communal was not going to pay. . . . I sincerely hope that HMG will support me should this eventuality arise. But I feel that if we can blot out 10,000 fanatics in the first round we may stop four hundred million people from being involved in war. In any case it will not be the British Viceroy doing this, but the whole of Interim Coalition Government of India. It is in fact where there has been failure to curb movements of violence by sufficiently strong and quick use of armed force, that massacre have spread.<sup>80</sup>

### **The Partition Council**

After June 3, the Partition Council was set up in Delhi to carry out the vast process of the working out how to divide assets between the future Dominions of India and Pakistan. Mountbatten persuaded the Partition Council to draft a joint statement giving full assurances to minorities and former political opponents in both Dominions and declaring, as a corollary, that they would not tolerate any violence in either Dominion and particularly in the areas affected by the Boundary Commission's awards.<sup>81</sup>

But while Mountbatten issued these warnings, they never went beyond the paperwork and remained unimplemented. When Giani Kartar Singh promised that the Sikh community would not fight so long as the British were present, Mountbatten made it crystal clear that "they (Sikhs) would be hit just as hard by the Indian armed forces after the transfer of power as before, and I hoped the Sikhs would not be so foolish as to commit virtual suicide".<sup>82</sup> Sikhs, however, remained troublesome in their meetings and public statements and even Sardar Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister, was reported in the press to have said at a meeting on 8 July that "It is the demand of the Sikhs that the Boundary Commission should give its decision by August 15. I hope that the Boundary Commission will be fair to us, but if its decision is against us, we will read it, and will not consider any sacrifice too great to vindicate the honour of the Panth". Mountbatten met with the Maharajah of Patiala and impressed upon him once again that if "Sikhs showed any sign of fight they would have the Armed Forces of India against them and would be crushed". The Maharaja fully realised this and undertook to do everything in his power to try and steady them.<sup>83</sup>

While Mountbatten had to control the communal bloodshed he was also entangled with accusations and pressure tactics from all sides. Nehru opened a tirade against the mismanagement of the government and showed no confidence in the civil administration

<sup>79</sup>Viceroy's Personal Report no. 10, Top Secret and Personal, 27 June 1947, MBI/D284/1, pp. 1–14.

<sup>80</sup>Mountbatten to Jenkins, 17 May 1947, R/3/1/178: ff 55–56; Viceroy's Personal Report no 6, MBI/D283/6.

<sup>81</sup>Viceroy's Personal Report No. 13, 18 July 1947, MBI/D284/4.

<sup>82</sup>Viceroy's Conference Paper No. 68, Viceroy's Personal Report No. 8, 5 June 1947, MBI/D83/8.

<sup>83</sup>Viceroy's Conference Paper No. 127, Viceroy's Personal Report No. 12, 12 July 1947, MBI/D84/3.

of the Punjab,<sup>84</sup> and the Muslim League demanded the resignation of the Governor of the Punjab. This affected the working of the provincial administration. Therefore, Jenkins said:

If Nehru was simply the leader of a political party, his views would not be of great importance; but he is the Vice-President of your Excellency's Executive Council and I should be glad to know how far his views are endorsed by HMG and your Excellency. I do not think HMG's Government can expect their British Servants in India to remain in office until the transfer of power unless they are able to protect them from official onslaught of this description.<sup>85</sup>

Anyhow, Mountbatten took notice of the charges and tried to verify them. He found most of them unfounded.<sup>86</sup>

### The Provincial Administration in Punjab

The Punjab had come under Section 93 on 3 March 1947 which brought the administration under the control and command of Jenkins as Punjab Governor. He along, with his civil administration, was running the business of the province but the writ of the government continued to be challenged by fresh communal disturbances. Yet somehow with the use of police and army, he was able to control and curtail the rioters' violent activities. While the top-level officers were British, most police personnel were Muslims. The overall morale of the civil bureaucracy, as we have discussed earlier, was discouraging. After incidents in Rawalpindi and Gurgaon there was widespread propaganda that the police had shown partiality towards one or the other community in the restoration and maintenance of order.<sup>87</sup> But when Lady Mountbatten, in her visit to Rawalpindi, looked into the matter, she categorically rejected these allegations on the grounds that no concrete evidence could be produced to substantiate these vague complaints. She verified that it appeared that the action taken by the police had been justified in the prevailing circumstance.<sup>88</sup> Not only did Jenkins retain full confidence in his administration, Mountbatten also applauded the police and military for their actions and conduct under what he believed were the very trying and dangerous conditions of the communal riots: "superhuman efforts have obviously been

<sup>84</sup>Deploring the disturbances in the country, Nehru reiterated that governmental authority had almost collapsed. The British were no longer interested in curbing the disturbances because they were leaving. *Tribune*, 16 June 1947, MBI/D84/1, p. 15.

<sup>85</sup>Jenkins to Mountbatten, 16 June 1947, MBI/D84/1, p. 16.

<sup>86</sup>G. D. Khosla and S. Gurcharan Singh Talib argue that the Rawalpindi violence was a war unleashed by the Muslim population to cow down Sikhs and Hindus; to carry on a total campaign of murder, arson, loot and abduction of women. It was the common perception of the Hindus and the Sikhs that that there had been cases of the police showing partiality to one or the other community in the restoration and maintenance of order after the riots. Therefore, Lady Mountbatten particularly enquired into this matter. Her finding was that no concrete evidence was produced to substantiate these vague complaints. She also confirmed that no action had been taken by the police that had not been justified in the prevailing circumstance. Further the police and military deserved praise for their action and behaviour under the very trying and dangerous conditions of the communal riots. Viceroy's Conference Report No. 46, 29 June 1947, Viceroy's Personal Report No 6, MBI/D283/6.

<sup>87</sup>*Hindustan Times*, 5 April 1947.

<sup>88</sup>During her four-day visit to the NWFP and the Punjab Lady Mountbatten visited nine hospitals, seven refugee centres varying in numbers accommodated from a small unit of forty to Wah Camp of 8,700 and four areas included Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Kahuta, Wah, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Amritsar and Lahore. At the refugee centres she spoke with some hundreds of the refugees and in hospitals met Hindu Sikhs and Muslim patients who had been victims of the riots and were still undergoing treatment. Viceroy's Personal Report No 6, 8 May 1947, MBI/D283/6.

made by the civil, military and police authorities” to meet the challenge and their efforts had done much to prevent further loss of life.<sup>89</sup>

During this critical period in the run-up to independence and partition, the British Indian Civil Service and other civil servants were under great pressure owing to the nationalisation of military and civil services by the elected representatives of India. Evidence suggests that many members of the British bureaucracy either wanted premature retirement or looked to quit India as early as possible.<sup>90</sup> No new recruitments had been made for years and Jenkins informed the Viceroy that he was unsure whether many British officials would stay in the Punjab, even temporarily. In his view, they had been disgusted by recent events and most of them doubted whether they had much to contribute after independence.<sup>91</sup> Even Jenkins, anticipating critical days in the near future, was not prepared to stay on in the Punjab.<sup>92</sup>

Once the 3 June Plan was announced, Jenkins was very anxious to get a coalition government in place. For him, this had to be a ‘divisible’ coalition government, consisting of members who could, when the time came, fall into two groups and form, perhaps with certain additions, the ministries of the two new provinces carved out of colonial Punjab. For the partition to work he called for the local adopting of the general outline of procedure as had already been suggested by Mountbatten for the Centre, and on which a number of expert committees set up by Mountbatten were working. Meanwhile, Punjab officials were getting ahead with preparing material.<sup>93</sup> It was also decided that after 15 August, Major General Rees would operationally control the forces of both new states in this region, and would be responsible through the Supreme Commander and the Joint Defence Council, to the new governments.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>89</sup>Mountbatten observed that “In regard to the refugee centre (apart from Wah at which amenities are quite good as this was previously an Army huttid camp) the present accommodation is unsuitable for more than the purpose of temporary shelter. The buildings are all that are available but the inevitable conditions of overcrowding, the refugees’ ignorance of hygiene accompanied by lack of facilities such as adequate drainage, water, soap and clean clothing, and their lack of occupation, entail risks that are apt to result in epidemics and disturbances among the refugees as well as further degeneration of morale. Superhuman efforts have obviously been made by the civil, military and police authorities to meet the emergency and their action during and after the riots and setting up the centres had done much to prevent further loss of life”. *Ibid.*; Viceroy’s Personal Report No 6, 8 May 1947, *Transfer of Power*, Vol. X, p. 688.

<sup>90</sup>A civil servant wrote to Mieville that “morale now in the Services has almost completely gone - it is not surprising, and may not even matter very much, but that is the fact, the old Steel frame has rusted badly at the joints, and all the bonds that held it together have been removed, so that at the first puff of trouble it will just fall apart. I think that is rather serious, even though we are **handing over**, because the Services can no longer save the country from descending into chaos if the political leaders do not reach some agreement, or at least evolve some ‘modus vivendi’ under which to carry on the ordinary essential administration of the country. Since the services, both military and civil, have been so undermined that they can no longer keep the ring, the urgency of some political settlement or arrangement is obvious, if there is not to be a civil war in this country. However, you will no doubt be getting all the latest dope from the India office, who I think may be getting some idea of the extent to which things have slid here, particularly in the last 6 months”. A Letter from I.C.S. (17 years service) to Sir Eric Mieville, 24 February 1947. (Extracts) Mountbatten Papers MBI/D125/2.

<sup>91</sup>Jenkins informed the Viceroy that he was not interested in serving the Punjab after the partition of India. *Transfer of Power*, xii, p. 824

<sup>92</sup>Similarly, Burrows was sure that it would be unsuitable and undignified for him to stay on as Governor of half the Province. Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 9, Top Secret and Personal, 12 June 1947, MBI/D283/9.

<sup>93</sup>Jenkins could not consult Mamdot, the Punjab leader of Muslim League, as he was from Lahore. Jenkins took rather a stiff line about this but Mountbatten asked him to alter his arrangements to securing the co-operation of both parties. *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup>Statement by the Partition Council, MBI/D84/5, Appendix 1.

### Army and the Punjab Boundary Force

As the time came nearer to partition, the internal situation in the country continued to deteriorate especially in the Punjab.<sup>95</sup> The army was the strongest institution of the British Raj and whenever it was called upon, it helped the civil authorities to restore the writ of the government. It played an important role in restoring law and order in Rawalpindi, Lahore,<sup>96</sup> and Gurgaon, in the initial phase of the spreading violence.<sup>97</sup> Mountbatten rejected Jenkins' proposal to amend the Punjab Public Safety Act 1947 and set up Special Courts for speedy trials, because of their, possibly, controversial nature, but, additionally, he felt that they would be counterproductive and unpopular.<sup>98</sup> Mountbatten and Jenkins did not like to impose martial law and preferred to use the army for a longer period of time in support of the civil administration.<sup>99</sup>

They thus rejected calls by Jinnah and Nehru to impose martial law following the second phase of violence in Lahore. On 23 June Jinnah begged Mountbatten to be "utterly ruthless" in suppressing trouble in Lahore and Amritsar. Jinnah stated, "I do not care whether you shoot Muslims or not, it has got to be stopped".<sup>100</sup> On 24 June, Nehru suggested the imposition of martial law in Lahore. This reluctance was used at the time and has been cited by later critics as evidence of a dereliction of British duty. In fact the British had reasoned that not only would the use of army be disliked by the people<sup>101</sup> but it was feared that the army would also become divided on a communal basis. However, strong military arrangements still had to be made to cope with any likelihood of disturbances at the time of the British withdrawal. It

<sup>95</sup>One of main reasons for the growing communal disturbance was the spreading rumours about the so-called ill-designs of the communities. Therefore Government of the Punjab appealed the people of the Punjab to discourage rumour mongers and remain peaceful and do not panic. Government also appealed to form peace committees to control riots. *Daily Inquilab*, Lahore, 31 March 1947; Viceroy's Personal Report No. 10, Top Secret and Personal, 27 June 1947, MBI/D284/1, pp. 1–14.

<sup>96</sup>Mountbatten observed that the city was badly affected by the riots and whole city presented a tragic scene of brutality.

<sup>97</sup>In Gurgaon, additional troops with the increased vehicles and wireless facilities were sent in hope that "we shall be able to control the troubles". Extract from the Punjab Police Abstract of the Intelligence for the week ending 5 April, Special Branch Lahore. National Documentation Centre Accession No. S 415.

<sup>98</sup>Jenkins said "It seems to me that if a man is caught actually stabbing another or in possession of explosives or bombs or in the act of manufacturing the same it should be possible to try him summarily in the morning, to have sentence confirmed in the evening and to hang him next day. I believe that this would have a very good effect. At present what with communal feeling from which the courts are not immune and the pre-occupation of the police with their out-door work the chances of quick convictions and sentence are small". Jenkins to Mountbatten, Telegraph No. 143-G, 25 June 1947, Jenkins Papers, R/3/1/176, ff 209–10, British Library, London; Khushwant Singh also verifies this cleavage between the communities. He says, "I had no illusion about the Muslim-Hindu/Sikh social divide. Even in the High Court Association and Library, Muslim lawyers occupied different corners of the lounge and the library from Hindus and Sikhs". Khushwant Singh, 'Lahore, Partition and Independence', in Ahmad Saleem, (ed.), *Lahore 1947* (New Delhi, 2nd ed., 2006), p. 119.

<sup>99</sup>It was at that time the understanding of the Government that decisive action by troops against "Cloak and dagger" activities was impossible, fear of the martial law would fail to produce the right results, and the army would stand exposed to the same communal attacks as the police force was experiencing. Therefore, Jenkins, while admitting that the situation was causing him grave anxiety, refused to impose martial law. Viceroy's Personal Report no. 10, Top secret and Personal, 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1947, MBI/D284/1, pp. 1–14.

<sup>100</sup>Viceroy's Personal Report No. 10, Top Secret and Personal, 27 June 1947, MBI/D284/1, pp. 1–14.

<sup>101</sup>Mountbatten refused on the ground that these courts were never appreciated by the people and politicians and therefore would open up another dispute. The more Government took actions against terrorists the more protests there would be from the people and politicians. Congress Party, Sikh leaders and even the Muslim League leaders protested against these acts. Even Ifikhar Hussain Mamdot, president of the Punjab Muslim League tendered his resignation when house to house search by the army was made in Lahore at Misri Shah. Viceroy's Conference Paper No. 48, Viceroy's Personal Report No. 7, 16 May 1947, MBI/D283/7.



had already been decided by Mountbatten that the Auxiliary Force (India) would be preserved until the transfer of power.<sup>102</sup> Mountbatten thus got the Partition Council to agree to the establishment of what became known as the Punjab Boundary Force. This was to operate in the closing days of British rule and in the immediate post-independence period. It was decided that the Commander would be Major General Rees.<sup>103</sup> Mountbatten discussed with the Punjab Partition Committee the question of military measures that might have to be taken in the Punjab along the Boundary Line before the Boundary Commission's award was announced.

In conjunction with the Commander-in-Chief, the Army Commander, and the Punjab Partition Committee, it was decided that special military measures should be taken in twelve of the fourteen disputed districts.<sup>104</sup> In this regard, a special military Command came into effect from 1 August, covering the civil districts of Sialkot, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura, Lyallpur, Montgomery, Lahore, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, Ferozepur, and Ludhiana. Major-General T. W. Rees was nominated as the Military Commander for this purpose and Brigadier Digmabar Singh Brar (India), and Colonel Ayub Khan (Pakistan), were attached with him in advisory capacities. It was also decided that after the British departure on 15 August, Major General Rees would control, operationally, the forces of both the new States in this area and would be responsible through the Supreme Commander and the Joint Defence Council to the new Governments.<sup>105</sup>

No doubt, the soldiers were doing everything that was humanly possible to try and hold the situation. Mountbatten knew that the military action would not work for long and that finally political leadership of the highest level would have to settle the issues. Therefore, he thought that the Prime Ministers of the both countries and their ministers should take full responsibility to deal with the situation lest it get out of control.

### **The Refugee Problem**

Before partition, owing to the communal riots, migrations of affected families from West to East Punjab had already started.<sup>106</sup> Mountbatten took keen interest in the migration of

<sup>102</sup>The Auxiliary Force (India) consisted of a number of units manned entirely by Europeans and Anglo-Indians. These were mainly located in the few big cities, with detachments at railways centres. As the communal riots continued to mount and life and property of the British population in India came under threat, Mountbatten decided that Auxiliary Force (India) would not be disbanded until the transfer of power. General Auchinleck was informed accordingly. Ismay to Auchinleck, 17 April 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D 104/ p. 12; Ismay to Auchinleck, 30 April 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D 104, p. 17.

<sup>103</sup>Mountbatten Papers: Viceroy's Personal Report, MBI/D284 Folder 2 (report 13-15), 19 July-1 August 1947.

<sup>104</sup>It was also decided in the Punjab Partition Committee that the posting of officers should continue on the basis of the notional partition except in the case of the DC and Superintendent of Police in the districts of Gurdaspur, Amritsar, and Lahore. In those districts, which were the most disputed areas, British DCs and Superintendents of Police should remain in control until 15 August. Meeting of the Special Committee of the Indian Cabinet, 26 July, 1947, MBI/D85/1.

<sup>105</sup>For details see Rees Papers, MSS/EUR/ F 274, British Library, London.

<sup>106</sup>Hindus and Sikhs, owing to communal riots in the NWFP and the Baluchistan, had started migrating to the Punjab but after the Rawalpindi incident many of the local non-Muslim population started to move to the East of the Punjab. Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*, (London, 1961), pp. 279-280.

people from both sides of the Punjab; however, he had serious concerns about the refugee camps set up for families affected by the communal bloodshed. Under the supervision of a Civil Surgeon, he organised full-time health clinics in each refugee centre where free medical supplies were provided.<sup>107</sup> By the eve of Partition, the earlier trickle of refugees was swelling into a flood, although it was still not the massive tidal wave which followed 15 August. A week before independence, Mountbatten persuaded the Partition Council to issue a statement on refugees.<sup>108</sup> Leading from the front, after the transfer of power, he visited the affected areas of the Punjab whenever the news of some serious disturbance reached him.<sup>109</sup> He decided that the situation was long past where mere military action would work and it actually required political leadership of a high order to cope with the situation. He was hopeful that both the Indian and the Pakistani Governments would honour their pledges.<sup>110</sup> That is why he suggested that the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, the Governors of East and the West Punjab, and their ministers should meet Major General Rees, Commander of the Boundary Force.<sup>111</sup>

### Engaging the Top Leadership to Help Control the Communal Bloodshed

Mountbatten knew that his aims as Viceroy could be achieved if he could gain the confidence and cooperation of the top leadership of the main political parties and the concerned religious communities. He also knew that the Punjab affairs could not be dealt without the support of the central leadership. This was achieved through notification of the Interim Government's Cabinet and through involving the Central Partition Council and the Partition Committee in the Punjab.<sup>112</sup> He also decided to set up Arbitral Tribunal to settle potential disputes about assets.<sup>113</sup> In addition to proceeding through these institutional channels, Mountbatten from time to time, sought to get the main political leaders to issue statements in which they

<sup>107</sup>In Rawalpindi each clinic was put under a local medical practitioner and it was expected that the refugees themselves would take the most active part in this important work. All clinics would be under the general supervision of the Civil Surgeon who will co-ordinate their activities, wherever necessary, and arrange medical supplies, etc. Viceroy's Conference Paper No. 48, Viceroy's Personal Report No. 7, 16 May 1947, MBI/D283/7.

<sup>108</sup>Viceroy's Conference Paper No. 160, Viceroy's Personal Report No. 16, 8 August 1947, MBI/D85/1.

<sup>109</sup>Mountbatten visited Rawalpindi (May) Gurgaon (1 June) and Lahore (20 July) to witness the carnage done by perpetrators. Extract from Viceroy's 35<sup>th</sup> staff meeting, 31 May 1947, Mountbatten Papers MBI/D328/39.

<sup>110</sup>Commenting about Nehru Mountbatten stated, "Almost alone in the turmoil of communalism, with all its variations, from individual intrigues to mass madness, he speaks with the voice of reason and charity". Speech of Mountbatten on Nehru's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Dinner, Savoy, London, 16 November 1959, Mountbatten Papers MBI/M26.

<sup>111</sup>Mountbatten wrote, "Within three weeks of the transfer of power the troubles in the Punjab had grown in a magnitude to a point where the existence of the Government of India was threatened. We sent a Punjab Boundary Force up there, 55,000 officers and men of the old undivided Indian Army. The transfer of population that took place was of the same order of magnitude as the entire population of the Dominion of Australia. We flew over those long routes of refugees—column extending fifty miles end to end along a single road, bullock carts and herds of people on the move". See Mountbatten, "Transfer of Power", *Royal Empire Society*, Vol. XXXIX., No. 6 (London, November-December 1948), pp. 271–276.

<sup>112</sup>An Arbitral Tribunal was set up at the same time as the Partition Council. It consisted of three members, all men of great judicial experience and the composition of it was settled by the Partition Committee. The service of the Arbitral Tribunal would be offered to the Provinces which are to be partitioned. Mountbatten to Sir William Patrick Spens, Chief Justice of Federal Court, 11 July 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D 93/ p. 10.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*

condemned the ongoing violence.<sup>114</sup> Gandhi's apparent readiness to accept that the instant transfer of power could well bring much "loss of life",<sup>115</sup> led Mountbatten to observe:

Gandhi, with a wily smile, pointed out that if Jinnah indeed signed the appeal, to which I have referred earlier, for a political truce, and the renunciation of force, then he could not again use force for political purposes. I must say I was speechless at this immoral suggestion, and shook my finger at him. But he only blinked and smiled.<sup>116</sup>

Gandhi eventually agreed to this demand, as did Jinnah<sup>117</sup> but Master Tara Singh flatly refused. But by the time Gandhi and Jinnah had issued their combined statement, it had little soothing effect as the communal violence and riots continued to increase.

Sikhs leaders including Master Tara Singh,<sup>118</sup> Giani Kartar Singh, and Sardar Baldev Singh met with Mountbatten and made it clear that the Sikhs would fight to the last man if put under Muslim domination.<sup>119</sup> They considered that the Cabinet Mission had let them down badly.<sup>120</sup> Mountbatten was concerned lest they publicly distance themselves from the 3 June Plan, upon which he had expended so much effort. Sikh leaders did continue to reluctantly accept this, but as it dawned on them that its implementation could result in their community being divided, they placed increasingly unrealistic hopes in the possibility that the Boundary Commission would rule in their favour. Mountbatten realized that the Partition Plan might not fulfill Sikh aspirations, but by then:

It was then too late to change the basis of partition, and if we were to adhere to the principle concerning Muslim and non-Muslim majority areas, the principles accepted and conceded both sides, only a miracle could have kept the Sikhs together in one part of India. Well we were not able to work miracles and we did not find a solution. The best thing we were able to do was to arrange for the leaders, including the Sikh leaders, to nominate a Committee so that the boundaries might be drawn up on lines acceptable to all those concerned.<sup>121</sup>

As 15 August approached, Mountbatten had begun to realise that the peaceful transfer of power would only be possible if the Muslim League and the Sikhs arrived at some agreement on the future of the Punjab. Therefore, he suggested to both, including Jinnah, Maharaja

<sup>114</sup>Gandhi felt that if the Congress accepted a Jinnah led League or coalition Ministry in New Delhi, polarisation in Punjab, Bihar and all of India (and in the interim government) could be reversed and the unity of India, Punjab and Bengal preserved." In Rajmohan Gandhi, *Punjab A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten*, (New Delhi, 2013), pp. 342–343.

<sup>115</sup>Gandhi urged Mountbatten "whatever happened to have courage to see the truth and act by it, even though correct solution might mean grievous loss of life on our departure on an unprecedented scale". Record of Viceroy's Interview with Gandhi No 19, Meeting with Gandhi on 31 March 1947, MBI/D283/1.

<sup>116</sup>Record of Meeting between Mountbatten and Gandhi, 12 April, Mountbatten Papers, Viceroy's Interview No. 54; *Transfer of Power*, Vol. X, pp. 211–213.

<sup>117</sup>Mieville to Mountbatten, 11 April 1947, Mountbatten Papers, Official Correspondence File: Interviews.

<sup>118</sup>Some highly activist political personalities in the Punjab, in pursuit of their personal agenda, played a leading role in inciting violence and one such figure was Master Tara Singh. "The episode of Tara Singh brandishing a sword on the footsteps of Punjab Assembly building ignited the tinderbox of communal animosity". For more detail see Tahir Kamran, 'The Unfolding Crisis in Punjab: March–August 1947, the key Turning Points and the British Responses', *Journal of the Punjab Studies*, 2007, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 187–220.

<sup>119</sup>Viceroy Personal Report No-4, 24 April 1947, MBI/D283/4.

<sup>120</sup>Sikh leaders presented Mountbatten a book called "The Betrayal of the Sikhs" on this subject, written by Landon Sarasfield. Viceroy's Personal Report No. 4, 24 April 1947, L/PO/6/123 : ff 51–59.

<sup>121</sup>Mountbatten's speech to the Members of the East India Association made at the Imperial Institute in London, 29 June 1948, Mountbatten Papers MBI/M6.

of Patiala, and others, that they should discuss matters regarding the province.<sup>122</sup> However, the meeting with Jinnah and Maharaja of Patiala proved fruitless as Sikhs were not satisfied by the assurances given by Jinnah about the future position of Sikhs in West Punjab.<sup>123</sup> So, although Sikhs had accepted the 3 June Plan, they started making quite big demands, and called for the establishment of a separate Sikh State. They hoped that the Boundary Commission would give them such an award which would help them establish a Sikh State. When the Maharaja of Patiala said that the Sikhs would fight if the boundary award went against them, Mountbatten retorted:

If they do, Maharaja Sahib, they will have to fight the Central Government; for I and my government are determined to put down any attempts at communal war with a ruthless iron hand; they will be opposed not only by tanks and armoured cars and artillery, but they will be bombed and machine-gunned from the air. You can tell your Sikhs that if they start a war they will not be fighting the Muslim League, but the whole might be armed forces.<sup>124</sup>

The Maharaja accordingly promised to fix his coreligionist extremists.<sup>125</sup> But there were constant threats that the Sikhs would make all sorts of trouble after the Boundary Commission Award, if it did not satisfy them.<sup>126</sup> Even Sardar Baldev Singh was reported in the press to have said that “I hope that the Boundary Commission will be fair to us, but if its decision is against us, we will not consider any sacrifice too great to vindicate the honour of the Panth”. Giani Kartar Singh likewise also threatened that the Sikh community would not fight so long as the British were present. But as Mountbatten replied:

I pointed out that they would be hit just as hard by the Indian armed forces after the transfer of power as before, and I hoped the Sikhs would not be so foolish as to commit virtual suicide.<sup>127</sup>

Mountbatten feared that the Sikhs’ preparations would lead to a serious civil war and he felt the need for the prevention of “any chance of hot headed action on their part”.

Reports about the Sikh preparations for the war on the eve of the announcement of the Boundary Award continued to pour in.<sup>128</sup> Credible information came in about a plan of Master Tara Singh to sabotage the whole partition process, and reportedly to assassinate Jinnah as well.<sup>129</sup> Jinnah and Nehru insisted on the arrest of Master Tara Singh but Mountbatten

<sup>122</sup>Latif Ahmad Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten* (Karachi: Council for Pakistan Studies, 1986), p. 110.

<sup>123</sup>Mountbatten to Secretary of State, No-1094-S, 20 May 1947, Mountbatten Papers, MBI/D261/ pp. 3-4.

<sup>124</sup>Viceroy’s Personal Report No 6, 8 May 1947, L/PO?6/123: ff 90-99; When the Boundary Commissions began its work it was deemed pertinent that; if they were to discharge their duties satisfactorily, it was essential that they should not be hampered by public speeches or writings threatening boycott or direct action, or otherwise interfering with their work. It was pledged that the both Governments would take appropriate steps to secure this end; and as soon as the awards announced, both Governments will enforce them impartially and at once. Viceroy’s Conference Report Number Forty-Six, Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 6, 5-June 1947, MBI/D283/6.

<sup>125</sup>On this occasion Maharaja of Patiala also brought ten retired Sikh officers as a delegation to discuss about the Boundary Commission. Viceroy’s Conference Paper No. 127, Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 12, 12 July 1947, MBI/D84/3.

<sup>126</sup>Viceroy’s Conference Paper Number 149, Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 15, 2 August 1947, MBI/D284/5.

<sup>127</sup>Viceroy’s Conference Paper No. 68, Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 8, 5 June 1947, MBI/D83/8.

<sup>128</sup>Tai Young Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 120.

<sup>129</sup>Jenkins, Muddie and Trivedi (the present Governor and two future Governors of the Punjab) considered the matter together, and unanimously decided that arrests should not be made until after the Boundary Commission’s

avoided this as Jenkins disapproved of it, along with the governor designates of the future East and West Punjab.<sup>130</sup> He accepted the latter's opinion as it was quite possible that Tara Singh's arrest would have led to even more serious trouble with the Sikhs, something that the British had been trying to avoid for a long time.<sup>131</sup>

Mountbatten, realising the serious repercussions of the announcement of the Boundary Commission Award and the partition process more generally, took the main parties into his confidence. Therefore, he persuaded the members of the Partition Council at the centre, together with the Partition Committee in the Punjab, to declare—on behalf of the future Governments—that they would take responsibility for establishing peaceful conditions in which the process of partition would be completed and the many urgent tasks of administration and economic reconstruction would also be taken in hand.<sup>132</sup> He was assured both by the Congress and the Muslim League, of fair and equitable treatment of the minorities after the transfer of power.<sup>133</sup> He also secured a pledge to accept the awards of the Boundary Commissions, whatever these may be.<sup>134</sup> By these measures and arrangements Mountbatten believed that the process of the transfer of power would be peaceful, but his assessments proved incorrect as these arrangements turned out to be insufficient to cope with large-scale bloodshed that followed British India's partition.<sup>135</sup>

### Conclusion

Mountbatten's hope of transferring the power to Indians in a relatively peaceful manner with little resources was an ambitious project from the start because Lord Wavell, Mountbatten's predecessor viceroy of India, had already pointed out that on eve of partition of India, there would be a civil war and therefore he had prepared a plan that known as the 'Breakdown Plan'.<sup>136</sup> He had proposed a phased withdrawal of British administrative presence in India to

award was announced, and the new Governments were responsible for law and order. Jenking to Mountbatten, 9 August 1947, *Disturbances in Punjab 1947*, (Islamabad, National Documentation Centre, 1995), pp. 330–331.

<sup>130</sup>Sir Zafullah Khan, Foreign Minister of Pakistan and leader of the country's delegation at the Security Council, said that Viceroy Mountbatten knew the Sikh plans but failed to arrest the leaders and use the force to crush the trouble-makers. Mussarat Abid, *Britian, India, Pakistan, Partition and After, 1947-1951*(Lahore, Pakistan Study Centre, 2013), pp. 86–87.

<sup>131</sup>R. Jeffrey, 'The Punjab Boundary Force and the Problem of Order in the August 1947', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1974, pp. 491–520.

<sup>132</sup>Sher Muhammad Garewal, *Jinnah-Mountbatten Correspondence 22 March–9 August 1947* (Lahore, Research Society of Pakistan, 1998), p. 208.

<sup>133</sup>Both declared that 'It is their intention to safeguard the legitimate interests of all citizens irrespective of religion, caste or sex. In the exercise of their normal civic rights all citizens will be regarded as equal and both the Governments will assure to all people within their territories the exercise of liberties such as freedom of speech, the right to form associations, the right to worship in their own way and the protection of their language and culture'. Jinnah also assured in answering questions to correspondents that he assured that minorities will get fundamental rights in Pakistan. *Times of India*, 14 July 1947.

<sup>134</sup>Mountbatten cared to see that the Boundary Commission's duties should be performed satisfactorily and it was essential that they should not be hampered by public speeches or writings threatening boycott or direct action, or otherwise interfering with their work.

<sup>135</sup>After partition, Mountbatten as the Governor-General of India, continued to look after the matters relating to communal disturbances, He established the Emergency Committee to check the communal rioting and to make arrangement for transfer of refugees whom were pouring in millions by air, train, truck and foot. Mountbatten to Ismay, 17 October 1947, Mountbatten Papers MBI/D196/2.

<sup>136</sup>Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, Wavell's Breakdown Plan, 1945-47: an Appraisal, *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Fall 2009, Volume 16, No. 2.

reduce the quantum of violence. Lord Mountbatten, before his arrival in India was desirous of seeing the country maintain its geopolitical unity in the post-independence period but faced with actual and complex ground realities, concluded very quickly that with the then prevalent communal divide and irretrievably hardened political stance of all the major political parties, any effort in that direction would be totally futile. Therefore he agreed on the partition of British India at the national level accompanied by partitions of Punjab and Bengal at the provincial level. He, also concluded that if the process of granting India freedom and the concomitant relinquishing of British authority from all possible spheres of Indian administrative arena was not accelerated, there would a real possibility of even greater bloodshed in India. Therefore, he brought forward the date of Indian independence to 15 August, 1947, in order to avoid an even greater civil war.<sup>137</sup>

The Punjab, however, was already going headlong towards a major civil war, owing to the lofty demands and fixed mindsets of the various political parties in pursuit of their communal goals. The province was full of para-military organisations, *jathas*, and armed members of various political groups were, reportedly, already making all sorts of military-style preparations in anticipation of a full-scale armed confrontation; violence was already being carried out by these groups. The provincial administration from the Governor to the lower levels including the police were ready to nip violence in the bud but some of Punjab officials quickly lost heart and decided to leave India at the earliest because of the growing conflict.<sup>138</sup> Mountbatten also quickly realised that he had only limited resources at his disposal with which to control any widespread communal violence. Faced with these realities, he, attempted to engage the the top leadership of major political organisations in his effort to maintain relative peace amongst various groups. He attempted to raise their awareness of the seriousness of the situation and tried to push them towards responsible action. He set up many committees, and strengthened the police and the army by providing sufficient arms and ammunition. He himself visited the province to assess the gravity of the situation first hand. Above all, he tried to prepare the future rulers of India and Pakistan to meet this challenge by establishing the Partition Council, the Combined Defence Council, and the Punjab Boundary Force. Through these measures, Mountbatten, attempted to provide an institutional framework for addressing violence before it assumed uncontrollable dimensions.

Mountbatten could only check violent and criminal activities of the organised groups with the help of the police and the army. But rather tragically, along with total division amongst the political groups along communal lines there were also signs of division visible in the Punjab police and the army as well. With his efforts, Mountbatten was successful in checking the organised activities of paramilitary organisations, but could not succeed in disbanding them in advance of the British departure. However, with the local government structures already in disarray and already divided along communal lines, these armed and well-trained organisations were able to step up their efforts in pursuit of their political goals.

<sup>137</sup>Mosley believes that the change of date from June 1948 to 15 August 1947 caused confusion and thereby communal disturbances grew in intensity and thus caused more harm than good. But this article argues that, from a British perspective, it was a wise decision to wrap up the Raj, have a safe exit and let the future rulers of India and Pakistan cope with the problem because it was not merely a matter of law and order, in fact it had been the matter of different mind-set whom could not be changed in a few months. L. Mosley, *Last Days of the Raj* (London, 1961).

<sup>138</sup>It was in the knowledge of the superior authorities that the morale of the civil services in India was completely gone. See Sir Eric Mieville, 24 February 1947, (Extracts) Mountbatten Papers MBI/D125/2.

This forms the background to the intense violence and mass migrations of the immediate post-partition period.<sup>139</sup>

Critics of Mountbatten have not cared much to investigate the historical forces in India<sup>140</sup> that were working during the last few months of British rule.<sup>141</sup> They have generally overlooked the extremely hardened stance of all the political players and the intent of Indian politicians and parties to use violence as a vehicle to achieve their goals during this period. Instead, they have opted to put all the blame for violent disturbances on Mountbatten and his administration for the bloodshed.<sup>142</sup> The real fact of the matter is that Indian politicians and parties failed to lend support to the administration in curbing mounting violence which led to an increasingly frenzied activities of violence amongst the different communities. Keeping this in mind, one is left to wonder what good would arresting the increasingly hostile and aggressive top Sikh leadership or announcement of the the Radcliffe Award before 15 August, would have served.<sup>143</sup>

Contrary to the views of his critics, despite limited resources, Mountbatten was able to curtail communal bloodshed in the Punjab to manageable proportions in the March to 15 August 1947 period, and therefore, was largely happy with Jenkins and his faithful band of officials. Following the transfer of power, however, a new set of circumstances prevailed, which enabled the plans of, for example, the Sikh rulers and the Akalis's for ethnically 'cleansing' of Muslims from East Punjab to come to fruition. Similarly, the Muslim League National Guards and criminal groups were given free rein to loot, pillage and drive out Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab, although some of these activities were mitigated by the Punjab Boundary Force which Mountbatten had established.<sup>144</sup>

Generally speaking, the State is responsible for the law and order within its boundaries but as this article has tried to show that Mountbatten as the chief of central administration in India, was greatly concerned about the ever-increasing instances of communal violence. In addition, he was also determined to deal effectively and authoritatively with whatever disturbances took place without any reservation and delay. Lord Mountbatten's case-study thus brings home the importance of endeavours on the part of the British authorities to curtail and to control the communal riots in the Punjab. The views of Mountbatten's critics

<sup>139</sup>Francis Mudie wrote to Liaquat Ali Khan on 21 September 1948 that "there is little doubt that the massacre of Muslims in East Punjab and their expulsion to Pakistan was planned and carried out with the knowledge and approval of at least two of the present Indian Ministers Sardar Baldev Singh and Sardar Patel". Quoted in Zahid Khan Lodhi, *Mountbatten Facts About The Partition* (Lahore, n.d.), p. 83.

<sup>140</sup>Farooq Dar, *Jinnah's Pakistan, Formation and Challenges of A State*, (Karachi, 2014), pp. 45–47.

<sup>141</sup>Wolpert writes "Two weeks before Mountbatten's partition deadline, violence escalated. Mountbatten wired the cabinet on the next day. He kept trying to assure Attlee's cabinet, as well as his own council, and his own weak and troubled mind that he was really doing the right thing." See Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (Karachi, 2006), p. 165.

<sup>142</sup>According to Judith Brown, "It is hardly surprising that controversy surrounds the complex bargaining of these final months of British rule, partly because British participants, Congressmen and the founders of the new Pakistan all wished to throw blame for partition on one another party, because history became part of self-imagining of both India and Pakistan". See Judith M. Brown, *Nehru: Profiles in Power* (Essex., 1999), p. 70.

<sup>143</sup>As Massarat Sohail writes, "The appalling communal disturbance in the Indian sub-Continent in 1947, created a general feeling in Pakistan, the Muslim population of which was most affected by these riots, that the British Government had changed the date for the transfer of power from June 1948 to August 1947". See Massarat Sohail, *Partition And Anglo-Pakistan Relations, 1947–51* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1991), p. 106.

<sup>144</sup>Viceroy's Personal Report, 16 August 1947, MBI/D85/3, folder 2.

can thus be generally characterised as not taking in the wider picture when pointing their criticism at him.

Despite all his actions, the last Viceroy failed to totally eliminate the springs of collective violent behavior in Punjab. This failure was mostly due to the mindset of the communities themselves. Indeed, disturbances turned into ‘ethnic cleansing’, ‘holocaust’ or ‘genocide’, thanks to the inherent undercurrents of aggressive communal feelings and thus it was almost impossible for the state machinery during the short period of Mountbatten’s viceroyalty to either curb them or put an end to them altogether.<sup>145</sup> [chawla\\_iqbal@yahoo.com](mailto:chawla_iqbal@yahoo.com)

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<sup>145</sup>Paul R. Brass, “The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946–47: Means, Methods, and Purposes”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5(1), (2003): 71–101.