

THE FINAL DEBATE

FRAMING A NATION BEFORE PARTITION

HCC



HISTORICAL CRISIS COUNCIL - BACKGROUND GUIDE



By direction of His Majesty's Government and with the concurrence of His Excellency the Prime Minister of Britain

A PROCLAMATION

3rd of July, 1947

To the Princes and People of India,

It is hereby declared, by direction of His Majesty's Government, that British rule in India shall cease, and authority will be transferred to responsible Indian governments.

In accordance with the plan approved, two independent Dominions of India and Pakistan will be established on 15 August 1947. The provinces of North-West Frontier Province, Punjab, Bengal, and Sylhet shall determine their future through due process.

All treaties and agreements with the Princely States will lapse upon the transfer of power. Each State shall be free to accede to either Dominion, having regard to its geographical position and the welfare of its people. Paramountcy will not continue thereafter.

This proclamation marks the conclusion of British sovereignty in India and the beginning of self-government for her peoples.

Issued under the authority of His Majesty's Government

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INTRODUCTION

In 1947, the Indian subcontinent stood on the brink of history. Centuries of colonial rule are collapsing, yet the dawn of freedom is clouded with uncertainty. The Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Sikh leaders, the princely states, and the Leftists, each stake their claim to the future of the nation. But freedom comes not as a gift of unity, it comes as a test of survival.

From the Quit India Movement in 1942 to the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, the path to this moment has been fraught with tension, compromise, and unrest. Communal riots, political deadlock, and the fragile negotiations between leaders of opposing factions have brought the subcontinent to a tipping point. Trains carry refugees fleeing violence, and the cries of divided communities echo across the land. The princely states face impossible choices: to join India, Pakistan, or declare independence; each decision has the power to shift the balance of power, inflame conflict, or safeguard millions of lives.

The air is thick with uncertainty. The choices made in this council will decide whether this freedom is remembered as triumph or tragedy. The borders drawn, the alliances formed, and the compromises accepted here will ripple across generations, shaping not only the political map but the social and cultural fabric of the nation. History will judge whether India emerges as a united, resilient democracy, or whether it fragments into bitter rivalries and contested sovereignties.

As you step into this council, remember: you are not merely debating policy, you are determining the fate of millions, and the echoes of your decisions will resonate far beyond these walls.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Where we are (July 1947)

This council takes place directly on the heels of Lord Mountbatten's 3 June 1947 Plan, which has proposed two new dominions India and Pakistan with the princely states free to accede to either. Dates for independence have been set (14–15 August 1947), but not yet the political map, the future of minorities, or the alignment of princely states. Options here can ratify partition as stated, attempt to re-define its terms, or try last-ditch alternatives (federal plans, regional guarantees, or staged timetables).

WWII ends; Britain recalculates (Feb–Jul 1945).

The war strains Britain both militarily and economically. Indian manpower and resources had been crucial to the Allied effort, and this serves to strengthen the political case for self-government. The Labour government of Clement Attlee is more inclined than its predecessors to transfer power quickly, and the path is cleared for serious constitutional talks.

Shimla Conference / Wavell Plan (June–July 1945).

Viceroy Lord Wavell tries to bring Congress and the Muslim League together in an interim Executive Council. It collapses over the League's insistence on separate Muslim representation and Congress's refusal to make that concession exposing the depth of suspicion that will haunt all further negotiations.



Cabinet Mission arrives (Feb–June 1946).

London sends Pethick-Lawrence, Cripps, and Alexander with a plan for India's unity on a three-tier federal scheme: a weak centre (defence, foreign affairs, communications), strong provinces, and three provincial groups (A/B/C) roughly on communal lines. Congress and the League both accept initially but differ basically on whether grouping is compulsory and how sovereign would be the Constituent Assembly. The provisional agreement breaks down within weeks.



THE CABINET MISSION, 1946 COURTESY : AL HAKAM

Direct Action Day (16 Aug 1946).

Following the collapse of the Cabinet Mission formula, the Muslim League summons mass action in favour of Pakistan. Communal riots in Calcutta claim thousands of lives and unleash violence spirals elsewhere, leading many leaders to suspect that coexistence under a single centre might be impossible without substantial safeguards.



Constituent Assembly meets (9 Dec 1946).

The Assembly meets to draft a constitution but is boycotted at its opening by the League, damaging its claim to speak for all communities within one structure. Delegates are concerned because any "united India" outcome now entails the reconstruction of trust and incentives for League membership—or the construction of an alternative with due consideration of the boycott.



THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Attlee's deadline; Mountbatten arrives (Feb–March 1947).

20 Feb 1947: London establishes a firm deadline to transfer power by June 1948. Lord Mountbatten replaces Wavell, quickly deciding that administrative breakdown and communal bloodshed make partition the "least-worst" path to an orderly retreat on a shorter timetable.

Violence deteriorates; borders become urgent (Spring 1947).

Punjab and Bengal witness escalating killings and migration. Any solution now must address security, control of migration, and delineation of borders not merely high-principle constitutional matter.

3 June Plan (Mountbatten Plan).

Announces partition into two dominions and gives the option of accession to princely states. Also envisages boundary commissions (later the Radcliffe commissions) to slice up Punjab and Bengal. Independence follows in weeks, legalized in the Indian Independence Act (18 July 1947). For delegates, this is the default timeline open to change only if you can devise a realistic, negotiated alternative.



LORD MOUNTBATTEN WITH THE MAJOR NEGOTIATORS
FROM THE INC AND THE MUSLIM LEAGUE

Partition or Unity.

If partition is continued, can you stage it to reduce violence (e.g., phased transfer, joint security corridors), or reconfigure it (confederation; stronger centre with opt-outs)? If you attempt unity, what binding guarantees do you secure the League (and major provinces) agreement?

Borders and commissions.

If partitioning, On what basis communal majorities, contiguity, administrative links, canals/rail and what solutions if minorities are stranded? Do you accept or modify the Radcliffe process?

Security and migration.

How do you prevent train massacres, rural pogroms, and reprisals? Are there joint police commands, mixed peace committees, neutral corridors, or international observers? (By late 1946–47, uncontrollable violence already raged.)

What are the incentives (or pressures) for early, peaceful accession of major states (Kashmir, Junagadh, Travancore), and what do you do if a ruler's choice is in conflict with popular opinion or geography?

What are the incentives (or pressures) for early, peaceful accession of major states (Kashmir, Junagadh, Travancore), and what do you do if a ruler's choice is in conflict with popular opinion or geography?

Regardless of what map is the outcome, millions of individuals are minorities overnight. Do you negotiate mutual minority treaties, property/return guarantees, compensation schemes, and special status for sensitive districts?

Close central union or loose federation with group autonomy? What powers must be reserved at the centre (defence, foreign affairs, currency, communications), and which are with provinces.



TIMELINE

- **18th - early 20th century**

1757 – Battle of Plassey

- Robert Clive defeats Siraj-ud-Daulah in Bengal. Marks the beginning of British political control in India via the East India Company. Bengal becomes the center of British power and revenue.

1857 – Revolt of 1857

- The first widespread revolt of Indians against British rule, sparked by the use of greased cartridges. Although suppressed, it ended East India Company rule.

1858 – British Crown Rule Begins

- Queen Victoria's Proclamation establishes direct rule, known as the British Raj. Emphasizes loyalty, protection of religious practices, and modernization.

1885 – Formation of the Indian National Congress (INC)

- Established by A.O. Hume to create a platform for Indian political dialogue.
- Initially moderate in approach, seeking reforms and greater participation in governance under the British Raj.

1906 – Formation of All-India Muslim League

- Created to protect Muslim political interests.
- Becomes central in demand for a separate Muslim homeland later.

1919 – Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

- British troops under General Dyer fire on peaceful protesters in Amritsar; hundreds killed, thousands injured.

- **1920 - 1945**

1920–1922 – Non-Cooperation Movement

- Launched by Gandhi after the Rowlatt Act and Jallianwala Bagh.
- Nationwide boycott of British institutions, goods, and schools.
- Movement suspended after the Chauri Chaura incident (1922), showing Gandhi's insistence on nonviolence.

1928 – Nehru Report & Demand for Purna Swaraj

- INC adopts the Nehru Report (dominion status), but dissatisfaction grows.
- 1930: Lahore Session declares Purna Swaraj (complete independence) as the ultimate goal.
- Marks a shift from reform to outright independence (26th Jan declared as the Independence Day by the INC)

1930 – Salt March & Civil Disobedience Movement

- Gandhi leads a 240-mile march to Dandi to protest the salt tax.
- Sparks nationwide civil disobedience, strikes, and boycotts.

1936 – Provincial Elections & Council Politics

- Provincial elections held under 1935 Government of India Act.
- Congress forms ministries in several provinces, gaining experience in governance.
- Muslim League strengthens political influence among Muslims, increasing communal polarization.

1939–1945 – World War II and Colonial Weakening

- Britain declares India part of war without consulting Indian leaders.
- Congress ministries resign in protest (1939).
- Britain's focus on war weakens colonial control, while the Indian economy and social structures suffer.

- **1945 - present day**

February 1945 – End of WWII in Europe / Britain Reassesses India

- WWII is nearing its end; Britain is economically and militarily exhausted.
- Indian troops and resources have contributed massively to the war, intensifying Indian demands for self-rule.
- The Labour Party wins the UK elections, Clement Attlee becomes Prime Minister, showing Britain is now more open to Indian independence than pre-war governments.

July 1945 – Simla Conference (Wavell Plan)

- Viceroy Lord Wavell tries to form an interim government including Congress and League.
- Fails because the Muslim League insists on exclusive Muslim representation; Congress refuses to accept the League's dominance.

February 1946 – Cabinet Mission Arrives

- British send Pethick-Lawrence, Cripps, and Alexander to India to negotiate the transfer of power.
- Propose a federal India with grouped provinces (A, B, C) and provincial autonomy.
- Initially accepted by both Congress and the Muslim League, but differences emerge over interpretation.

July 1946 – Direct Action Day

- Muslim League rejects the Cabinet Mission Plan; demands Pakistan.
- 16 August 1946 – Direct Action Day in Bengal leads to massive communal riots.
- Thousands killed; foreshadows the inevitability of Partition.

December 1946 – Constituent Assembly Convenes

- Despite violence, the British allow the Constituent Assembly to meet to draft the Indian Constitution.
- Muslim League initially boycotts.
- Marks the formal start of Indian self-governance framework.

Early 1947 – Mountbatten Appointed Viceroy

- March 24, 1947: Lord Mountbatten arrives as the last Viceroy, tasked with overseeing the transfer of power within a year.
- Quickly realizes that communal violence, princely state issues, and administrative collapse make partition inevitable.
- Holds intensive meetings with Congress, Muslim League, Sikhs, and princely states.

May 1947 – Violence Escalates in Punjab and Bengal

- Communal riots intensify, especially in Punjab; migration tensions rise.
- Mountbatten begins planning boundary demarcation and timelines.

3 June 1947 – Mountbatten Plan Announced

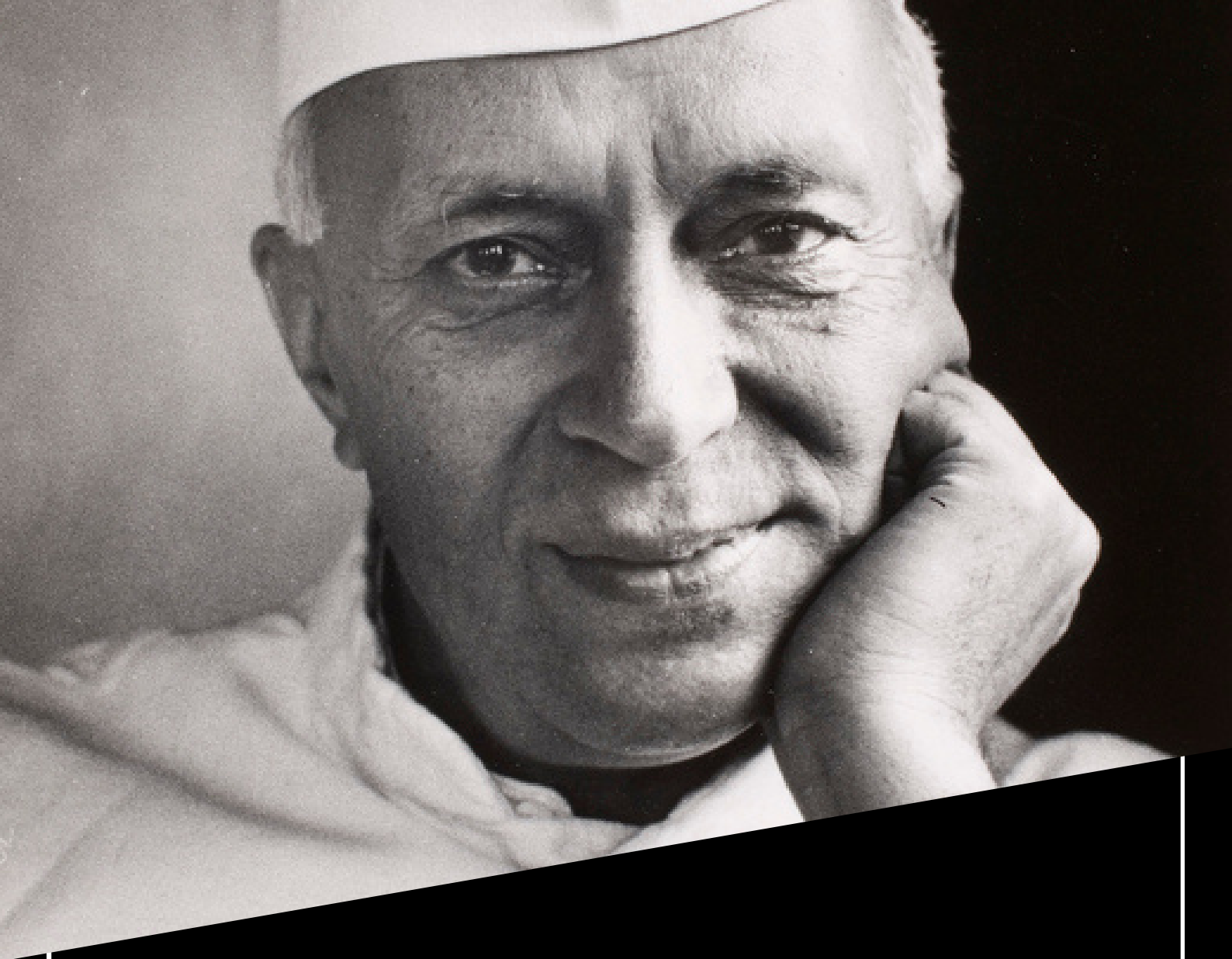
- The plan divides India into India and Pakistan; princely states choose accession.
- Sets independence dates: 14 August 1947 for Pakistan, 15 August 1947 for India.

TIME FREEZE- COUNCIL STARTS FROM HERE.



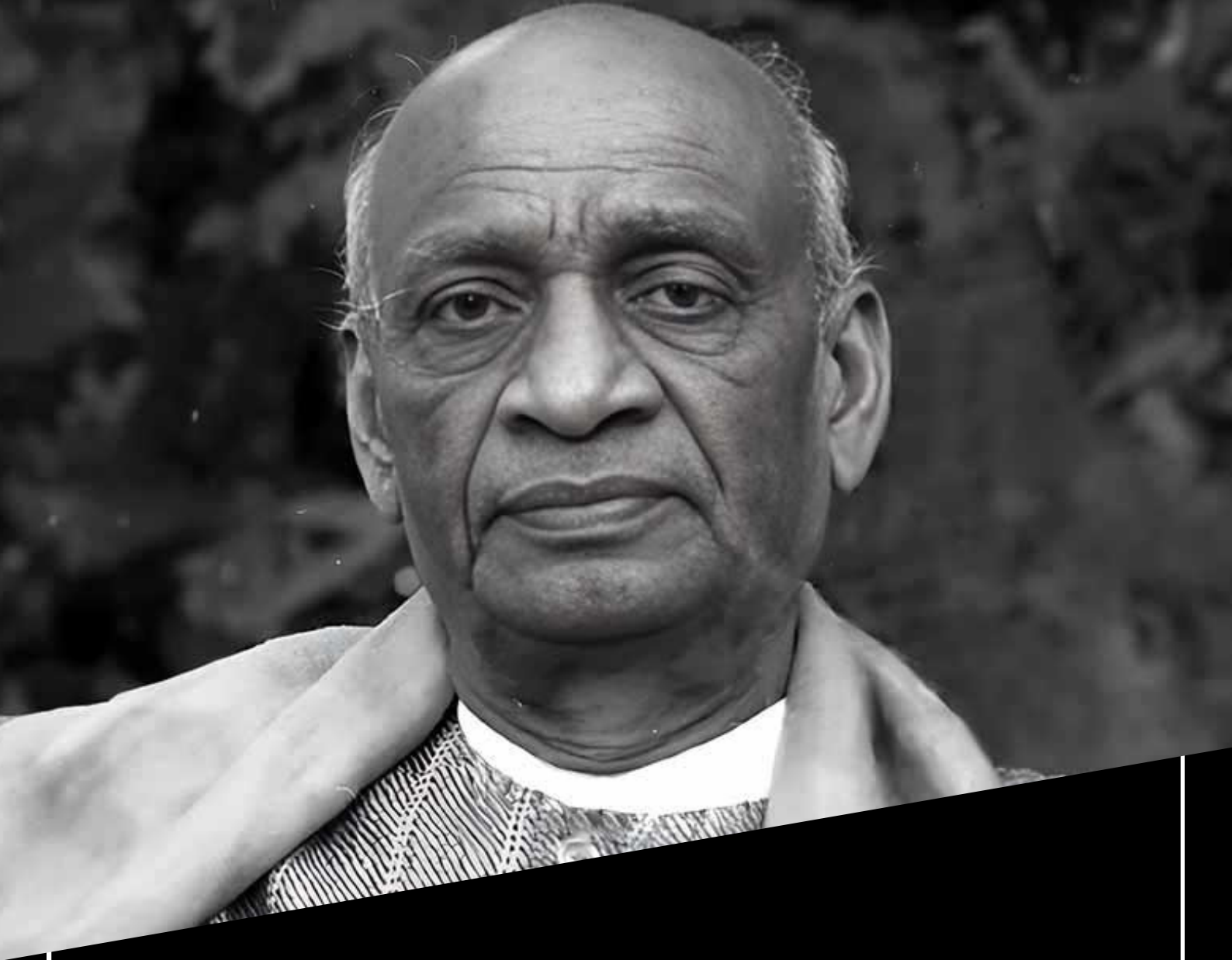
MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED





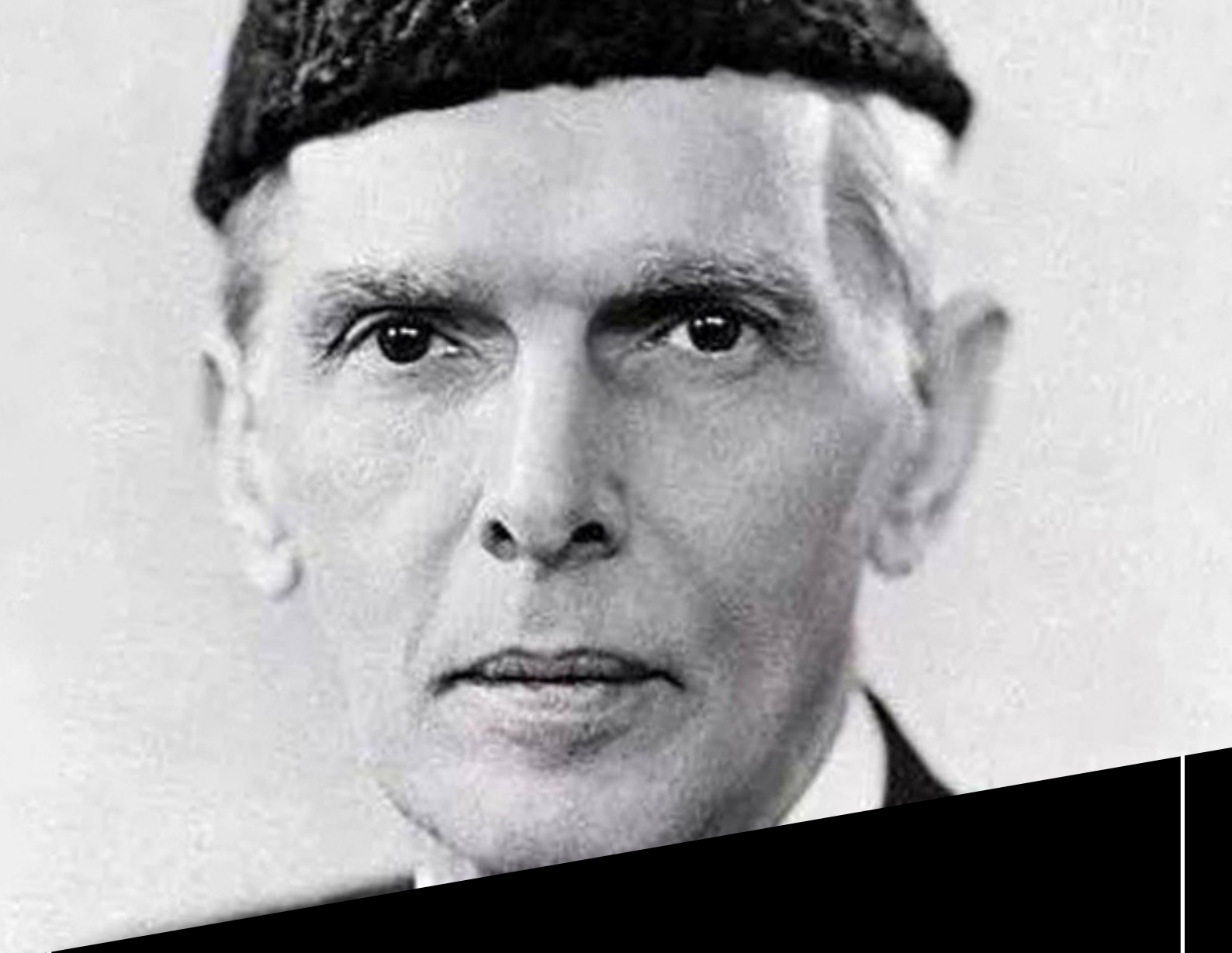
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Jawaharlal Nehru is a central leader of the Indian National Congress (INC) and a prominent voice for a modern, socialist, and secular India. He actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Salt March, and the Quit India Movement, working closely with Gandhi while also engaging in negotiations with the British. As the Congress President in 1929, Nehru called for 'Purna Swaraj' from British rule. Now he is the main negotiator for the INC in key constitutional discussions, balancing idealism with pragmatic compromises. His aim is to unify India's diverse populations under a common national identity, as he opposed the idea of partition and believed it couldn't bring communal peace.



SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is a skilled organizer and a pragmatic leader within Congress. He is a senior leader of the Indian National Congress and a key organizer of underground activities during the Quit India Movement (since most top leaders, including Gandhi and Nehru, were imprisoned). Patel is a firm advocate of a united India and opposes the partition on religious lines, insisting on a strong central government to maintain national unity. His role is to secure India's political and administrative stability, manage princely states' relations, and ensure that the transfer of power preserved national integrity.



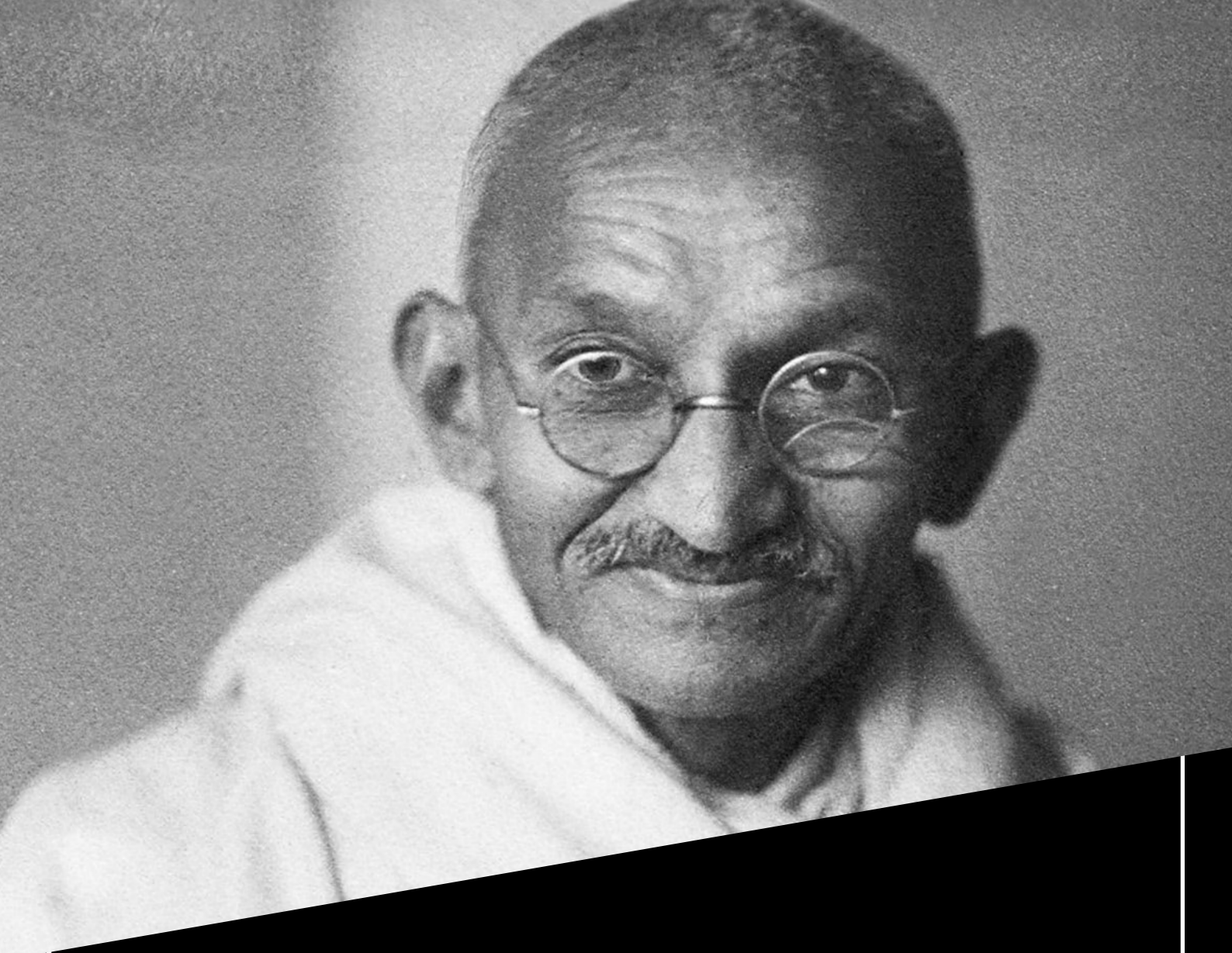
MUHAMMAD ALI JINNAH

Once a member of Congress, he had become the leader of the Muslim League and the foremost advocate of Muslim political rights. In the early years of his political career, he strongly advocated for Hindu-Muslim unity. Jinnah later resigned from the INC in 1920. During the 1930s, frustrations with Congress's dominance and fears that Muslim interests would be ignored gradually influenced him toward the Two-Nation Theory. By 1940, under his leadership, the Lahore Resolution formally demanded "independent states" in Muslim-majority areas, marking the full adoption of the Two-Nation Theory. From then on, Jinnah became the central advocate for Pakistan.



LIAQUAT ALI KHAN

Liaquat Ali Khan is a prominent leader of the All-India Muslim League. He played a key role in organizing Muslim political mobilization during the 1930s and 1940s and was instrumental in strengthening the League as a mass political party. Khan assisted Jinnah in the campaign, which was later known as the Pakistan Movement and is often regarded as his 'right hand'. Khan supports the Two-Nation Theory and has been actively working for the creation of Pakistan, participating in negotiations with the British and Congress.



MAHATMA GANDHI

Mahatma Gandhi, the spiritual and moral leader of the independence movement, led mass mobilizations through non-violence such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement. He has been consistently advocating for Hindu-Muslim unity and non-violence as a political strategy. He favors a decentralized, self-reliant India with moral and ethical governance, and is wary of purely political power struggles. Gandhi's ideology is centered on Swaraj and grassroots empowerment. He is firmly against the partition of India, seeing it as "contradicting his vision of unity among Indians of all religions."



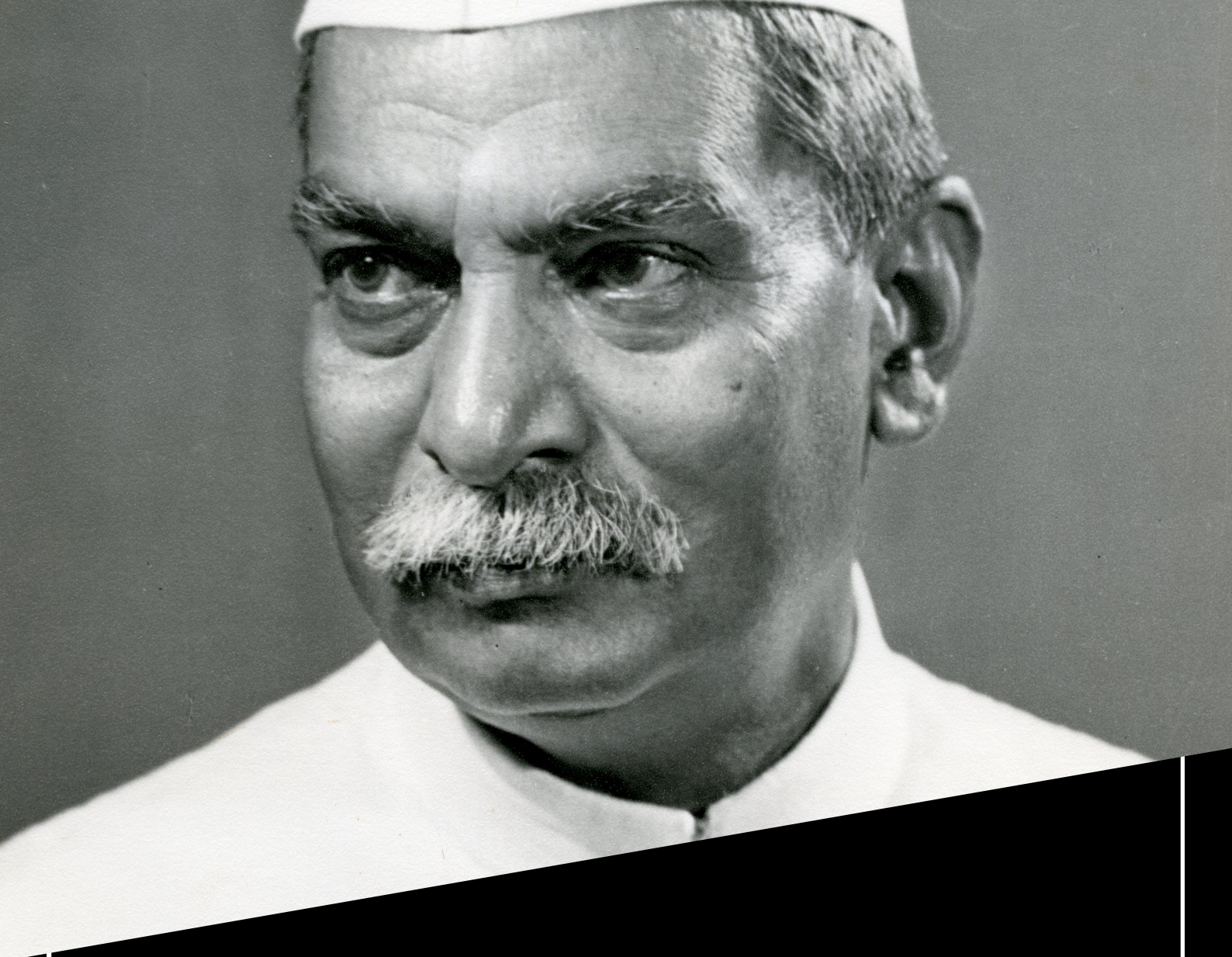
MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

He is a senior Congress leader and scholar who is a strong advocate for Hindu-Muslim unity and opposes partition. He led Congress during critical periods such as the Quit India Movement and has been contributing to negotiations on constitutional reforms. His ideology emphasizes composite nationalism, secular education, and cultural cohesion. He stated that the “creation of a Pakistan would only benefit upper-class Muslims who would come to monopolize the economy of the separate state.” He has led multiple negotiations with Jinnah and the Muslim League to avoid partition.



C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

He is a senior Congress leader, Gandhian thinker, and advocate of constitutional negotiation over mass agitation. He participated actively in the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements but opposed the Quit India Movement, fearing it would lead to chaos and harm India's long-term interests during WWII. Rajaji promoted Hindu-Muslim understanding and proposed the Rajaji Formula (1944) as a compromise to avoid partition, offering Pakistan only if Muslims chose it after independence. He now acts as a bridge between moderate Congress leaders and British officials.



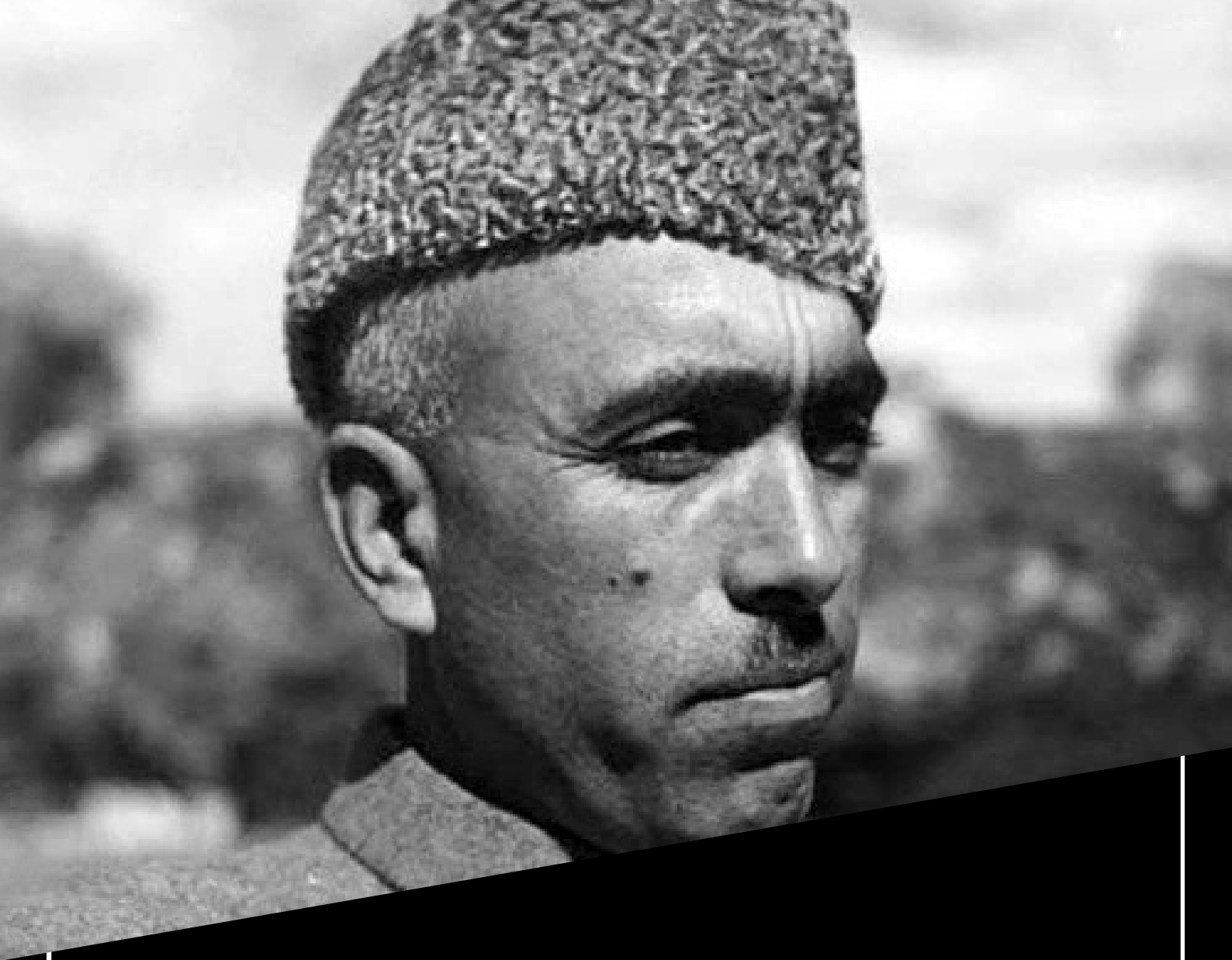
DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

Dr. Rajendra Prasad is a senior leader of the Indian National Congress and a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi. He has been a key member of the partition discussions with the British and the Muslim League since 1946. He is reluctant about the partition and supports the efforts for a united India. His primary focus, as the president of the constituent assembly, is now on stability and constitutional continuity, preparing for the future framework of independent India



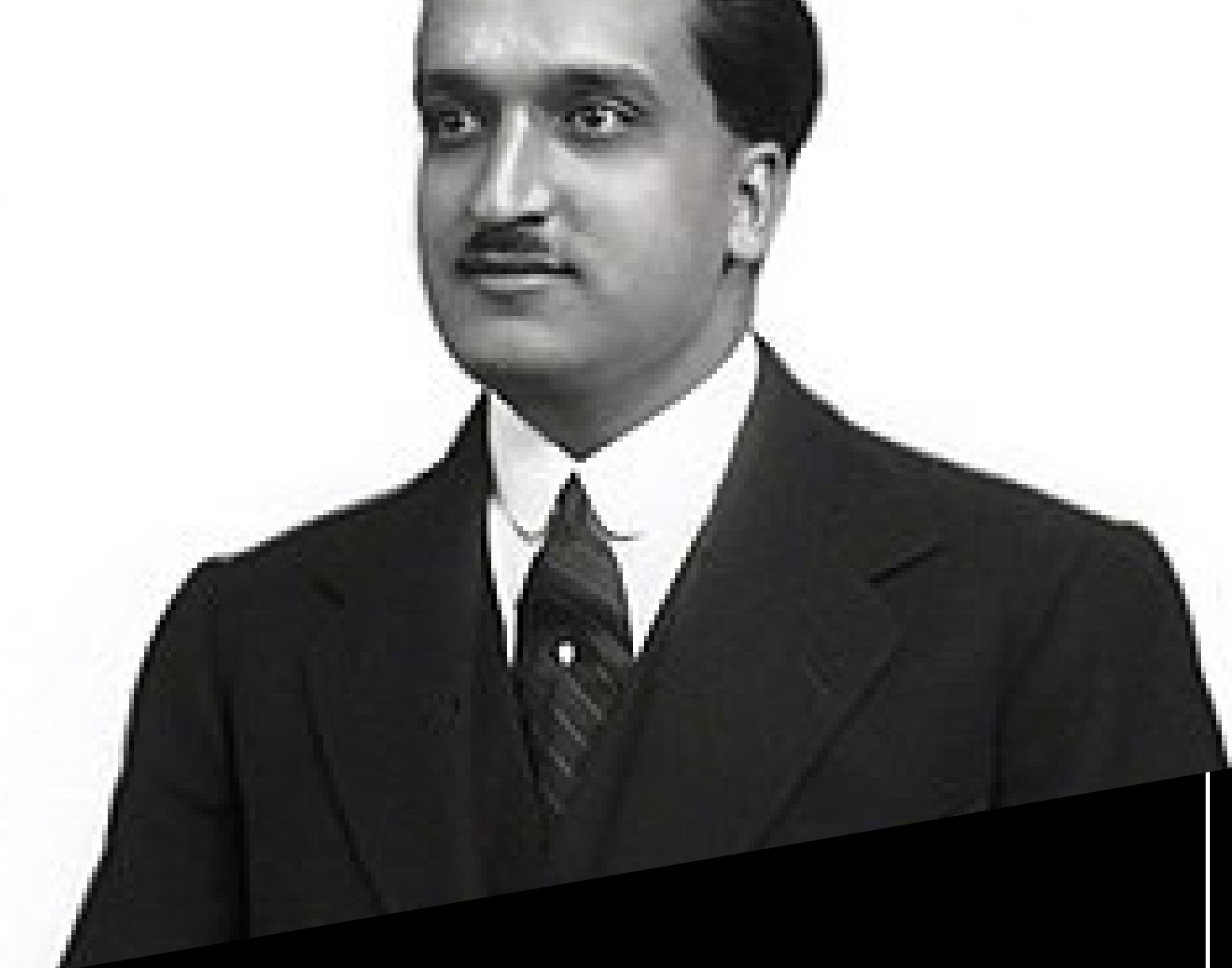
MASTER TARA SINGH

Master Tara Singh is a leading Sikh political leader and head of the Shiromani Akali Dal, representing Sikh interests during these crucial partition years. He strongly opposes the creation of Pakistan, fearing the harsh treatment of the Sikh minorities. He has campaigned for Sikh rights and adequate safeguards in any constitutional arrangement, demanding either inclusion of Punjab in India or significant autonomy for Sikhs if partition occurred.



SHEIKH ABDULLAH

Sheikh Abdullah, known as the “Lion of Kashmir,” led the National Conference and had built a strong mass movement advocating for responsible governance in Jammu & Kashmir. By the mid-1940s, he had become the voice of the Kashmiri people, challenging feudal rule while promoting secularism and social reform. In 1946, he launched the Quit Kashmir agitation against Maharaja Hari Singh and was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Despite his imprisonment, he is still extremely popular among the locals of Kashmir.



MAHARAJA HARI SINGH

He is the ruler of the princely state of Kashmir. This state is of great strategic significance and is religiously mixed. As the British began showing intentions of leaving in 1946, he aimed to remain independent, not inclining toward either side. He is constantly engaged in suppressing the pro-Pakistan factions in his state, while also being cautious of Congress influence and Sheikh Abdullah's growing popularity. His decisions now carried significant weight in shaping the immediate future of his state.



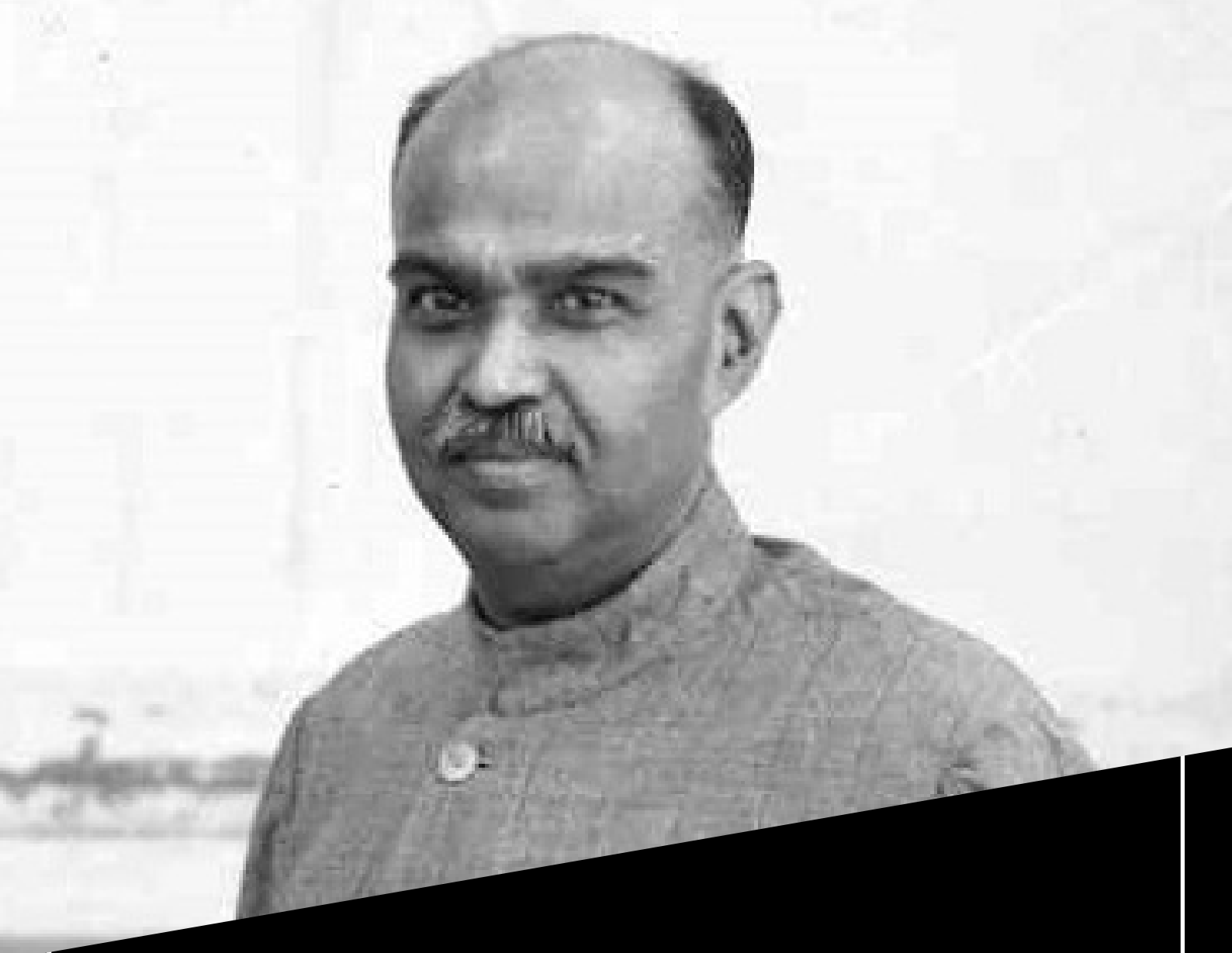
Muhammad Mahabat Khanji III

He is the Nawab of the princely state of Junagadh with a Hindu-majority population. His administration has never seriously engaged in negotiations with the Indian National Congress. He has, however, maintained communications with the Muslim League, signaling interest in Pakistan's support to preserve his princely powers. He is currently in Europe enjoying his holiday.



CHITHIRA THIRUNAL BALARAMA VARMA

He is the Maharaja of the wealthy princely state of Travancore in Southern India, known for its progressive administration. Aware of his state's strategic importance and rich Thorium reserves, he has been eyeing declaring it as an independent state ever since the British showed intentions of leaving India. He has maintained a cautious relationship with both the INC and the Muslim League and has preferred negotiating directly with the British to claim autonomy.



SHYAMA PRASAD MUKHERJEE

He is a prominent leader from the province of Bengal. He was appointed as the president of the Akhil Hindu Mahasabha in 1943 and remained in the post until 1946. He has been advocating for the partition of Bengal and even wrote a letter to Lord Mountbatten in May 1947, suggesting that Bengal must be partitioned even if India wasn't. He aims to safeguard the Hindu-majority areas, mainly in Bengal and Assam.



DR. BR AMBEDKAR

He is a prominent leader of the Scheduled Castes in India and has been a strong advocate for Dalit rights and political safeguards, especially now as the country is on the brink of Independence. He is not ideologically opposed to partition, viewing it as a possible solution if the two parties cannot coexist. His main focus is, however, on voicing the demands of the scheduled communities at the constituent assembly.

SUGGESTED MOD TOPICS

- 1) What immediate measures should the community leaders take to prevent escalating communal violence during the transition of power?
- 2) What role should princely states play in the Post-Independence structure?
- 3) How should foreign powers be involved or excluded from the transition?
- 4) Should the British Remain Temporarily for Stabilization Post-Independence?
- 5) How can communal riots be prevented during partition?

SUGGESTED UNMOD TOPICS

- 1) Should the princely states retain special rights post-independence?
- 2) Would a united India survive under a federal structure?
- 3) Should religious identity be a legitimate basis for state boundaries, or should territorial and administrative concerns prevail?
- 4) Should the princely states decide their fate through a plebiscite or negotiation?
- 5) Should the Mountbatten Plan be accepted without modifications?

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