Modern History · GS - I

Assess the role of British imperial power in complicating the process of transfer of power during the 1940s.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2019	GS - I	Modern History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

British strategic interests; Second World War; constitutional negotiations; Cripps Mission; Cabinet Mission; communal divisions; Muslim League and Congress; princely states; Mountbatten Plan; Partition; hurried withdrawal

Model Answer

Introduction

The transfer of power in India during the 1940s was shaped by Britain's declining imperial capacity, the rise of mass nationalism and deepening political disagreements. British policies and strategic calculations complicated negotiations, contributing to Partition and the violence surrounding independence.

Body

1. Wartime Imperial Priorities

Britain involved India in the Second World War without consulting elected Indian representatives. The resignation of Congress ministries in 1939 and the subsequent political confrontation deepened mistrust. The Cripps Mission of 1942 failed to secure Congress support because its proposals did not provide an immediate and satisfactory transfer of power.

2. Constitutional Ambiguity

The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 attempted to preserve Indian unity through a federal arrangement, but disagreements over provincial groupings, constitutional powers and political safeguards undermined its prospects. British ambiguity over competing interpretations prolonged uncertainty.

3. Communal Polarisation

The Muslim League's demand for Pakistan and Congress's commitment to a united India created conflicting political objectives. British engagement with competing claims and the failure to secure a durable power-sharing settlement aggravated tensions.

4. Limited Representative Consensus

The princely states, provincial interests and diverse communities complicated the question of how sovereignty should be transferred. Britain struggled to reconcile these competing demands within a single constitutional framework.

5. The Mountbatten Plan and Partition

The decision to advance the transfer of power to August 1947 shortened the period available for administrative preparation. Partition was accompanied by inadequate preparation for population movements, security arrangements and the division of assets, contributing to widespread violence and displacement.

Assessment

British imperialism was not the sole cause of Partition; political disagreements among Indian leaders and communal mobilisation were also decisive. Nevertheless, colonial policies, strategic calculations and the hurried withdrawal significantly complicated the transition.

Conclusion

The transfer of power ended colonial rule but was not a smooth constitutional settlement. Britain's failure to secure an accepted political framework and its hurried departure intensified the costs of independence, leaving lasting consequences for the subcontinent.