

## Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division

*By Patrick French*

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**Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division** By Patrick French

At midnight on August 14, 1947, Britain's 350-year-old Indian Empire cracked into three pieces. The greatest mass migration in history began, as Muslims fled north and Hindus fled south, over a million being massacred on the way. Britain's role as world power came to an end and the course of Asia's future was irrevocably set. Patrick French offers a reinterpretation of the events surrounding India's independence and partition, including the disastrous mistakes made by politicians and the bizarre reasoning behind many of their decisions. Exploring the interplay between characters such as Churchill, Mountbatten and Gandhi, it reveals a tale of idealism and manipulation, hope and tragedy. With sources ranging from newly declassified secret documents to the memories of refugees, Patrick French gives an account of an epic debacle, the impact of which reverberates across Asia to this day.

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### **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Without a sharp focus, authors tackle the history of modern India at their peril. French, whose first book, *Younghusband*, won the 1995 Somerset Maugham Award, tries to do a bit too much. It's difficult to uncover new ground in the well-spaded turf of Indian independence. French is not the first to see Gandhi as a crank obsessed with bowel functions, Winston Churchill as a racist and the 1947 British exit strategy as a case of muddling through. He does, however, succeed at filling in some gaps, especially about British intelligence operations. French (who ran for Britain's parliament as a Green candidate and is currently director of the Free Tibet Campaign) nagged the Foreign Office to declassify 92 "bottle-green boxes" of files, and his analysis reveals a dying Raj under severe financial stress held together by undercover operations. Although his criticisms of Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre's *Freedom at Midnight* are unlikely to dethrone that classic, he argues persuasively that the authors swallowed an elderly Lord Mountbatten's egocentric recollections and inaccurately made the creation of Pakistan a cliff-hanger dependent on the health of Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Noteworthy also are glimpses of various British viceroys, perspectives on the amalgamation of the princely states into the nation and an update on the increasing adulation in India of Axis ally Subhas Chandra Bose. French's travel notes and wit leaven the narrative somewhat, but many readers will find that this demanding journey covers too much territory too quickly.

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### Review

From the reviews of *Liberty or Death*: 'A huge, crowded and kaleidoscopic canvas, which the author handles with remarkable authority. It is also enormous fun to read' Philip Ziegler, *Daily Telegraph* 'Well-researched, beautifully written and immensely scholarly' Andrew Roberts, *Sunday Times* 'Delightful! quite hilarious' Swapan Dasgupta, *India Today*

### About the Author

Patrick French studied English and American literature at Edinburgh. His first book, *Younghusband: The Last Great Imperial Adventurer*, won the 1995 Somerset Maugham Award and the Royal Society of Literature Heinemann Prize. He lives in Dorset.

### **Users Review**

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#### **Ronald Moffatt:**

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