Two basic strands emerge from the maze of events during the last two years of British rule: tortuous negotiations between British, Congress and League statesmen, increasingly accompanied by communal violence, and culminating in a freedom which was also a tragic partition; and sporadic, localized, but often extremely militant and united mass actions—the I.N.A. release movement and the R.I.N. Mutiny in 1945-46, numerous strikes throughout the period, and, in 1946-47, the Tebhaga upsurge in Bengal, Punnnapra-Vayalar in Travancore and the Telengana peasant armed revolt in Hyderabad. A mass of historical literature exists on the first theme, along with some collections of documents: the books of V.P. Menon, Campbell Johnson, H.V. Hodson, Penderel Moon, Wavell's Journal, Mansergh's volumes, Pyarelat's detailed study of Gandhi's last years, Sardar Patel's correspondence from 1945—to mention only the leading works. On popular movements, in very sharp contrast, there are some useful accounts by participants but hardly any systematic historical research so far. Yet, as always throughout the history of modern India, the decisions and actions of leaders, British or Indian, cannot really be understood without the counterpoint provided by pressures from below. Popular action, above all, made continuance of British rule untenable; fear of popular 'excesses' made Congress leaders cling to the path of negotiation and compromise, and eventually even accept Partition as a necessary price; and the limits of popular anti-imperialist movements made the truncated settlement of August 1947 possible.

1945-46: 'THE EDGE OF A VOLCANO'

Prelude to Negotiations

The prelude to post-war negotiations was staged during the last months of the War, with occasional British efforts to obtain Congress and League participation in the existing structure of central government, as well as some abortive talks between Gandhi and Jinnah on the Pakistan issue. Tentatively in September 1943, even before assuming office, and more definitively after Gandhi had been released on 5 May 1944 on grounds of ill-health, Wavell urged the need to set up 'a provisional political government' at the centre based on a Congress-League coalition, to ensure fuller Indian cooperation in the war effort and, much more important, the diversion of Indian energies into some more profitable channel than agitations (cf his letter to Churchill, 24 October 1944, already cited on p. 404). As correspondence between Gandhi and Wavell quickly confirmed in July-August 1944, the Viceroy's offer fell very much short of the minimum Congress demands of a 'genuine national government' responsible to the Assembly, with only war operations temporarily under British control, and an immediate and unambiguous promise of post-war independence. In any case, Wavell's proposals, like Cripps' in 1942, would almost certainly have been torpedoed at some stage by Churchill if they had shown signs of achieving anything. Churchill on 5 July 1944 sent 'a peevish telegram to ask why Gandhi had not died yet', displayed repeatedly what Amery in private called a 'Hitler-like attitude' on Indian matters and in March 1945 told Wavell that the problem should 'be kept on ice' for as long as possible. 'He seems to favour partition into Pakistan, Hindustan; Princetan, etc...?' (Viceroy's Journal, pp. 78, 89, 120).

In July 1944, Gandhi braved bitter Hindu Mahasabha opposition and proposed talks with Jinnah on the basis of the 'Rajagopalachari formula' enunciated the previous April: a post-war commission to demarcate contiguous districts in N.W. and N.E. India where Muslims had an absolute majority; plebiscite of all inhabitants in such areas to decide whether they would prefer a separate Pakistan, mutual agreement in case of separation to run certain essential common services like defence or communications; and implementation of the whole scheme only after full transfer of power by the British (with the League endorsing the Congress demand for Independence and cooperating with it in forming an interim government in the transition period). Jinnah on 30 July, however, reiterated the demand for the separation of the whole of six provinces (Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, N.W.F.P., Bengal and Assam), subject to minor adjustments, and attacked the formula as offering only 'a shadow and a husk, a maimed,
mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan'. He also argued that separation could not be deferred till after Independence, considered common services to be unnecessary, and felt that plebiscites with both Muslims and Hindus voting contradicted the basic principle of Muslims being a distinct nation with an inherent right of self-determination. The Gandhi-Jinnah talks of September 1944 consequently broke down, but this did not prevent growing cooperation between the League and Congress Central Assembly parties, and the spread of strong rumours (later repudiated by Jinnah) in January 1945 of an agreement between the two Assembly leaders, Bhulabhai Desai and Liaquat Ali Khan, by which the Congress and the League would form coalitions in the Centre and the province under the existing constitution as a war-time measure. The League position, it must be remembered, had become rather weak in early 1945. With the release of Congress M.L.A.s., the League ministry in N.W.F.P. was replaced by a Congress one under Dr Khan Saheb, Khizar Hayat Khan's Punjab Unionists had openly broken with Jinnah in mid-1944, and the Nazimuddin ministry in Bengal fell in March 1945, to be succeeded by Governor's rule; even the League ministries in Sind and Assam existed precariously on Congress sufferance. So far (till August 1946, in fact), there was little evidence also that the League would be able to organize real mass sanctions against its Pakistan demand. Mass action had never been the League's forte, and the oft repeated slogan, larke lenge Pakistan, (we will fight and take Pakistan) still seemed largely verbal.

**Simla Conference**

With British elections just a month ahead, Churchill in June 1945 at last permitted Wavell to start negotiations with Indian leaders. On 14 June, Wavell ordered the release of all Congress Working Committee members, and proposed talks to set up a new Executive Council which would be entirely Indian except for the Viceroy himself and the Commander-in-Chief. ‘Caste Hindus’ and Muslims would have equal representation, the Executive would work within the existing constitution (i.e., it would not be responsible to the Central Assembly), but the door would be kept open for discussions on a new Constitution once the War had been finally won. At the Simla Conference (25 June-14 July 1945), the Congress naturally objected to what it felt was an attempt to reduce it to the status of a purely ‘caste Hindu’ party, and insisted on its right to include members of all communities among its nominees for the Executive. But the Conference really broke down due to Jinnah’s intransigent demands that the League had an absolute right to choose all the Muslim members and that there should be a kind of communal veto in the Executive, with decisions opposed by Muslims needing a two-third majority. Given the existing political situation, the first demand was quite fantastic, for even apart from Congress claims (its Simla delegation, incidentally, was headed by Maulana Azad), the British had no intention of sacrificing the Unionists, who still controlled the Punjab government and had been in addition consistently loyalist and much less troublesome than the League. Yet by dissolving the Conference ip face of these two demands of the League, Wavell in effect gave Jinnah the veto he was asking for, as no attempt was made to call the League’s bluff and go ahead with forming an Executive excluding it if necessary.

The massive Labour victory of July 1945 swept into power politicians associated with the Fikins talks with Nehru of 1938, as well as with the Cripps offer of 1942. Wavell initially expressed some nervousness: the majority was ‘too big’, Labour might try to hand over ‘India to their Congress friends as soon as possible’, and it might become necessary for the Viceroy to shift from the ‘accelerator’ to the ‘brake pedal ... gently but firmly’. (Viceroy’s Journal, pp. 159, 169-71). He realized soon enough that the subjective difference in attitudes was little more than marginal, with many Labour leaders—Foreign Secretary Bevin, for example—being ‘in reality imperialists’ who ‘like everyone else hate(s) the idea of leaving India but like everyone else ... (have) no alternative to suggest’. (Entry for 24 December 1946, Ibid., p. 399). What was changing fast was the total objective situation, worldwide, as well as Indian. Nazi Germany had been destroyed, Japan surrendered after Hiroshima in August 1945, socially-radical regimes with Communist leadership or participation were emerging throughout Eastern Europe and seemed on the point of doing so even in France and Italy, the Chinese revolution was forging ahead, and a tremendous anti-imperialist wave was sweeping through South-East Asia, with Vietnam and Indonesia resisting efforts to restore French and
Dutch colonial rule. With a war-weary army and people and a ravaged economy, Britain would have had to retreat; the Labour victory only quickened the process somewhat.

Despite Wavell's fears, the initial steps he was asked to take by the Attlee ministry were by no means very radical. The announcement of new elections in the coming winter which was made on 21 August 1945 was inevitable once the war had ended, for the last elections had been held in 1934 for the centre and in 1937 for the provinces. It was also essential, as the U.P. Governor, Hallet pointed out to Wavell on 14 August, as the 'first step' towards providing 'constitutional activities for the agitators' (Mansergh, Vol. VI, p. 68). After talks in England, Wavell on 19 September merely reiterated the promise of 'early realisation of full self-government' (the term 'independence' being still avoided). Post-election talks were promised with M.L.A.s and Indian States for setting up a 'constitution-making body' (a considerable step back, this, from the Fikkins acceptance of a constituent assembly based on universal franchise), and renewed efforts would be made to set up an Executive Council which will have the support of the main Indian parties'. (Viceroy's Journal, pp. 170-71).

I.N.A. Trials

The decisive shift in British policy really came about under mass pressure in the autumn and winter of 1945-46—the months which Perderel Moon while editing Wavell's Journal (Chapter VIII) has perceptively described as 'The Edge of a Volcano'. Very foolishly, the British initially decided to hold public trials of several hundreds of the 20,000 I.N.A. prisoners (as well as dismissing from service and detaining without trial no less than 7000; Mansergh, Vol. VI, pp. 49-51). They compounded the folly by holding the first trial in the Red Fort, Delhi in November 1945, and putting on the dock together a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh (P.K. Sehgal, Shah Nawaz, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon). Bhuban Dass, Tejabadur Sapru and Nehru appeared for the defence (the latter putting on his barrister's gown after 25 years), and the Muslim League also joined the countrywide protest. On 20 November, an Intelligence Bureau note admitted that 'There has seldom been a matter which has attracted so much Indian public interest and, it is safe to say, sympathy... this particular brand of sympathy cuts across communal barriers.' A journalist (B. Shiva Rao) visiting the Red Fort prisoners on the same day reported that 'There is not the slightest feeling among them of Hindu and Muslim... A majority of the men now awaiting trial in the Red Fort is Muslim. Some of these men are bitter that Mr Jinnah is keeping alive a controversy about Pakistan'. (Ibid., pp. 514, 564). The British became extremely nervous about the I.N.A. spirit spreading to the Indian army, and in January the Punjab Governor reported that a Lahore reception for released I.N.A. prisoners had been attended by Indian soldiers in uniform. (Ibid., p. 807).

A second issue was provided by the use of Indian army units in the bid to restore French and Dutch colonial rule in Vietnam and Indonesia. The impact this had on popular (at least urban) sentiments as well as on sections of the army bore vivid testimony to the tremendous advance in anti-imperialist consciousness brought about by the War. Wavell was very nervous about such use being made of the Indian army, but was overruled in October 1945 by Supreme Allied Commander Mountbatten (Ibid., pp. 305-6, 360). Meanwhile the usual post-war problems of unemployment and high prices were being sharply aggravated by a major food crisis, with partial crop failures in Bombay and Bengal, a cyclone in Madras, and inadequate procurement in the surplus province of Punjab. Wavell on 29 January 1946 estimated a deficit of three million tons, while imports from the U.S.A. remained uncertain, and a drastic cut in rations reduced its calorie value to 1200 per head (wartime London in 1943 had got over 2800 calories, Ibid., pp. 868-9, 1006).

What the officials feared in the autumn of 1945 was another Congress revolt, a revival of 1942 made much more dangerous this time by the likely combination of attacks on communications with widespread agrarian revolt, labour trouble, army disaffection, and the presence of I.N.A. men with some military expertise (cf. for instance, C.P. Governor Twynham to Wavell, 10 November 1945, and C-in-C Auchinleck's appreciation of the internal situation, 1 December 1945, Ibid., pp. 468, 577-83). Wavell bitterly complained about violent speeches by Congress leaders (Nehru above all, but also at first Patel and regional leaders in Bihar, C.P., U.P. and elsewhere), glorifying the heroes and martyrs of 1942, demanding stern punishment for official
atrocities, and calling for immediate release of I.N.A. prisoners. The British began to realize fairly quickly, however, that this sabre-rattling was essentially election propaganda combined with the need to accommodate the popular mood. 1942 after all was the electoral trump-card of the Congress, and as for the I.N.A., Asaf Ali in a private conversation in October was reported to have exclaimed that his party 'would lose much ground in the country' unless it took up their cause, but if the Congress came to power it would certainly remove the I.N.A. men from the army and might even put 'some of them on trial' (Ibid., p. 387).

'Another indication was the bitter campaign against the Communists, in which Nehru played a very active role, culminating in the resignation of the C.P.I. members from the Congress on 5 October and the formal expulsion of Communist A.I.C.C. members in December. There were cases of assault on Communists, and a Congress mob inflamed by a speech by Nehru attacked the Party headquarters in Bombay. That more was involved here than legitimate anger about the C.P.I.'s war-time role is indicated by the fact that there was no such concerted campaign against the Hindu Mahasabha, some of whose leaders had actually been in ministries in August 1942, while Rajagopalachari, whose attitude on the Quit India and Pakistan issues in 1942 had been very similar to that of the Communists, remained a top Congress leader.

The forces which had restrained Congress militancy in the past were soon at work once again. The Governor of Sind on 3 November, Finance Member Rowlands on 17 November, and Secretary of State Pethick-Lawrence on 30 November independently referred to G.D. Birla as getting 'alarmed at the virulence of Congress speeches' (Viceroy's Journal, p. 185; Mansergh, Vol. VI, pp. 438, 572)—and Sardar Patel had by now largely 'taken the place of Bapu' in Birla's hot line with the Congress High Command. (In the Shadow of Mahatma, p. 328). 'There have recently been indications that the Congress leaders want to reduce the political tension by making it clear that there must be no mass movement until after the elections', Wavell informed Pethick-Lawrence on 3 December—'the strong capitalist element behind Congress... is becoming nervous about the security of its property'. And Birla the next day himself assured a London official: 'There is no political leader including Jawaharlal who wants to see any crisis or violence... Popular impatience and the prevalent atmosphere are responsible for these strong speeches. Even leaders are often led. But I think unrestrained language will be heard less and less in the future'. (Mansergh, Vol. VI, pp. 602-3, 615).

The 'turning-point', which 'caused at least a temporary detente' (Wavell to George VI, 31 December, Ibid., p. 719), came with the popular explosion in Calcutta on the I.N.A. issue on 21-23 November 1945, which set a pattern of periodic upheavals in that city which went on for about a decade and are reminiscent in some ways of the famous journées or 'days' of Paris during the French Revolution. A student procession demanding release of I.N.A. prisoners and initially organized by the Forward Bloc sat down on Dharamtala street for the whole night on being prevented from entering Dalhouse Square. They were joined by Communist Student's Federation cadres—so long considered their bitter enemies—as well as by students from Islamia College carrying the green flag of the League. Sarat Bose in sharp contrast, who had been adored as the brother of Subhas, refused to come to address them and later blamed the Communists for instigating violence. Spontaneously the students tied together the Congress, League, and Red Flags as symbol of all-in anti-imperialist unity. After the first round of police firing which killed two students (a Hindu and a Muslim), trouble spread all over the city on 22 and 23 November with strikes by Sikh taxi-drivers and Communist-led tramway-men as well as in many factories (Calcutta Corporation employees were already out on economic demands), burning of cars and lorries, crowds blocking trains, and barricades on streets. The police enquiry later noted as a new feature the fact that 'the crowds when fired on largely stood their ground or at most only receded a little, to return again to the attack'. (Governor Casey to Wavell, 2 January 1946, Ibid., p. 725). Order was restored only after 14 cases of firing, in which 33 were killed and about 200 civilians injured; 150 police and army vehicles had been destroyed, and 70 British and 37 American soldiers suffered injuries. The reactions were very significant. Patel on 24 November at a Bombay election rally condemned the 'frittering away' of energies in 'trifling quarrels' with the police (Indian Annual Register). Gandhi began a fairly friendly dialogue with the Bengal Governor, and the Calcutta
Working Committee session of 7-11 December strongly reaffirmed its faith in non-violence in significant contrast to the September AICC session where many members had glorified every aspect of the by no means non-violent 1942 struggle. The British on their part realized the need for some concessions. On 1 December, it was announced that only I.N.A. members accused of murder or brutal treatment of fellow-prisoners would henceforward be brought to trial (instead of the sweeping charge of 'waging war against the King' used in the first case) and imprisonment sentences passed against the first batch were remitted in January. By February 1946, Indian soldiers were withdrawing from both Indo-China and Indonesia. On 28 November the British Cabinet sub-committee on India decided on a Parliamentary delegation; on 22 January 1946 the much more significant decision was taken to send a Cabinet Mission to negotiate with Indian leaders. Wavell meanwhile had started preparing a 'breakdown plan'. As presented to the Cabinet Mission in May 1946, this visualized as a 'middle course' between 'repression' and 'scuttle' a withdrawal of the British army and officials to the Muslim provinces of N.W. and N.E. India, handing over the rest of the country to the Congress. Though superseded by the Cabinet Mission proposals, the 'plan' is still interesting evidence of the British recognition that it would be impossible to suppress any future Congress-led rebellion, as well as of the desire in some high official circles to make of Pakistan an Indian northern Ireland.

The British had to face a second major crisis in February 1946 before they succeeded in finally bringing Indian leaders to the safer shore of negotiations. Between 11 and 13 February, Calcutta exploded again in protest against the seven years' rigorous imprisonment sentence passed on Abdul Rashid of the I.N.A. The League student wing gave a strike call, the Students Federation joined in, and as in November, there quickly developed a remarkable unity in the streets between students and workers, Muslims and Hindus. A Communist-led general strike paralyzed industrial Calcutta on 12 February, and a massive rally on the same day at Wellington Square was addressed by League leader Suhravady, Satis Dasgupta the Gandhian Congressmen, and the Communist Somnath Lahiri. The police and army could restore order only after two days of street clashes in which 84 were killed and 300 injured according to official estimates (Gautam

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Clattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution', Essays in Honour of S.C. Sarkar, New Delhi, 1976). Meanwhile the all-India organizations of railway workers and postal employees, soon to be followed by government employees, were threatening strikes in the context of rising prices and the ration-cut imposed in January. The development of such effective country-wide labour organizations in strategic sectors gave a new muscle-power to the Indian trade union movement—strikes in the 1920s and '30s had been mainly confined to single industrial centres, primarily Bombay or Calcutta textiles. Though both the League and the Congress leadership accepted the ration cut (Azad on 3 March even welcomed it as 'far-sighted', and declared that strikes were 'out of place today', as the British were 'now acting as caretakers', Mansergh, Vol. VI, p. 1117), this did not prevent popular outbursts like a demonstration of 80,000 in Allahabad in mid-February which attacked ration-centres. (Ibid., p. 1006)

R.I.N. Mutiny

The greatest threat of all, however, was the naval mutiny in Bombay on 18-23 February 1946—one of the most truly heroic, if also largely forgotten, episodes in our freedom struggle. Wartime expansion of the Royal Indian Navy had brought in men from all parts of the country, weakening the old military tradition of recruitment from politically undeveloped 'martial races'. Racial discrimination continued unabated in this last bastion of Empire, while service abroad brought contact with world developments and the I.N.A. trials and the post-war popular upsurge in India had a growing impact. On 18 February, ratings in the Signals training establishment Tahwar went on hunger-strike against bad food and racist insults. Next day the strike spread to Castle and Fort barracks on shore and 22 ships in Bombay harbour, and the tricolour, crescent, and hammer-and-sickle were raised jointly on the mastsheads of the rebel fleet. The ratings elected a Naval Central Strike Committee, headed by M.S. Khan, and formulated demands which combined issues of better food, equal pay for white and Indian sailors, etc., with the national political slogans of release of I.N.A. and other political prisoners and withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia. The men hesitated fatally, however, on the border-line of peaceful strike and determined mutiny, obeying orders to return to their respective
ships or barracks on the afternoon of 20 February, only to find themselves surrounded by army guards. Next day fighting started at Castle Barracks when ratings tried to break out of their encirclement, with the ships providing artillery support, while Admiral Godfrey flew in bombers and threatened to destroy the navy. The same afternoon also saw remarkable scenes of fraternization, with crowds bringing food for ratings to the Gateway of India and shopkeepers inviting them to take whatever they needed. The pattern of events in fact unconsciously echoed the course of the mutiny on the Black Sea Fleet during the first Russian Revolution of 1905: that too, had begun over inedible food, and fraternizing crowds had been shot down in a scene immortalized later on in the ‘Odessa steps’ sequence of Eisenstein’s film classic Battleship Potemkin. By 22 February, the strike had spread to naval bases all over the country as well as to some ships on sea, involving at its height 78 ships, 20 shore establishments, and 20,000 ratings. At Karachi, the Hindustan surrendered that morning only after a gun battle, while Hindu and Muslim students and workers demonstrated their support through violent clashes with the police and army.

At Bombay as well as elsewhere, two sharply different attitudes towards these dramatic developments became evident among Indian political groups by 22 February. The Bombay C.P.I. called for a general strike, which was supported by Congress Socialist leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali and Achyut Patwardhan. Sardar Patel in sharp contrast advised people 'to go about their normal business as usual', and S.K. Patil and Chundrigar, heads of the provincial Congress and League units, even offered volunteers to help restore order. Despite Congress and League opposition, 300,000 downed tools in Bombay on 22 February, closing down almost all mills, and violent street fighting with crowds 'erecting road blocks and covering them from nearby buildings' continued for two days particularly in the proletarian districts of Parel and Deisle Road. Two army battalions were needed to restore order in Bombay city, and the official casualty figures were 228 civilians killed and 1046 injured (plus 3 police deaths and 91 wounded). *(The R.IN. Strike, by a group of victimized ratings, Delhi, 1954, p. 93; Munsrgh, Vol. VI, pp. 1082-3).*

Patel, helped for once by Jinnah, managed to persuade the ratings to surrender on 23 February giving an assurance that the national parties would prevent any victimization—a promise soon quietly forgotten, for, as Patel wrote to Andhra Congress leader Viswanathan on 1 March 1946, 'discipline in the Army cannot be tampered with... We will want Army even in free India' *(Sardar's Letters, Vol. IV, Ahmedabad 1977, p. 165).* Nehru accepted Aruna Asaf Ali’s invitation to come to Bombay, but quickly allowed himself to be 'impressed by the necessity for curbing the wild outburst of violence'—though he did later on hail the R.I.N. strike for breaking down the 'iron wall' between army and people. *(Munsrgh, Vol. VI, pp. 1084, 1117-18).* Gandhi was as unequivocally hostile as Patel. On 22 February he condemned the ratings for setting 'a bad and unbecoming example for India', advised them to peacefully resign their jobs if they had any grievances, and made the very interesting statement that 'a combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy...' Aruna Asaf Ali made the pertinent comment in reply that 'It simply does not lie in the mouth of Congressmen who were themselves going to the legislatures to ask the ratings to give up their jobs.' She also made a tragically accurate prophecy that it would be far easier to 'unite the Hindus and Muslims at the barricade than on the constitutional front'. *(Sardar’s Letters, pp. 162-3).* It is tempting to set beside Gandhi’s statement of 22 February Wavell’s private comment of 30 May 1946: 'We must at all costs avoid becoming embroiled with both Hindu and Muslim at once' *(Viceroy’s Journal, p. 485).*

The R.I.N. ratings of February 1946, in sharp contrast to the men of the Azad Hind Fauj, have never been given the status of national heroes—though their action involved much greater risk in some ways than joining the I.N.A. as alternative to an arduous life in Japanese POW camps. The last message of the Naval Central Strike Committee deserves to be remembered far better than it is: 'Our strike has been a historic event in the life of our nation. For the first time the blood of men in the Services and in the streets flowed together in a common cause. We in the Services will never forget this. We know also that you, our brothers and sisters, will not forget. Long live our great people! Jai Hind!' *(The RIN Strike, p. 75).*
Elections

Firmly rejecting mass confrontations, Congress leaders during the winter of 1945-46 concentrated all their energies on fighting the elections. As in 1937, Nehru was the star speaker, but Patel really controlled the machinery for selecting candidates. The former occasionally had misgivings 'that people who have played us false in the past' were being given nominations, but did little about it: 'I have no time and no inclination to enter into local squabbles' (Nehru to Patel, 31 October 1945, Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 66). The Congress did win massively in the general (i.e., non-Muslim) constituencies, capturing 57 out of 102 seats in the Central Assembly (against 36 in 1934) and 91.3% of non-Muslim votes. In the provinces, it won majorities everywhere except Bengal, Sind and Punjab. The Hindu Mahasabha was routed and the Communists, too, did badly, capturing only a handful of provincial seats (3 in Bengal, including Jyoti Basu from a labour constituency, 2 in Bombay, and 2 in Madras). But it was significant that the Communists had emerged as the principal contenders of the Congress in several provinces: Patel congratulated an Andhra Congress leader for 'defeating the Communists everywhere' after 'a very stiff contest' (Patel to A. Kaleswar Rao, 27 March 1946, *Ibid.*, p. 243), and the Madras Governor reported that 'Congress right-wingers' were 'gloomily predicting' a Communist majority next time (Knight to Wavell, 5 April 1946, *Mansergh*, Vol. VII, p. 152).

The League's success in the Muslim seats was equally spectacular—all 30 reserved constituencies in the centre with 86.6% of Muslim votes, and 442 out 509 Muslim seats in the provinces. Unlike 1937, it had now clearly established itself as the dominant party among Muslims. But despite major advances in the Punjab (from 2 to 79 out of 175), a majority still eluded it in that key province, and Khizar Hayat Khan was able to strike a bargain with the Congress and the Akalis to remain in power for another year. The Congress won handsome majorities in two other provinces being claimed for Pakistan, N.W.F.P. and Assam, and the two League ministries that were set up—in Bengal and Sind—remained dependent on official and European support.

The most significant feature of the elections, however, was the prevalence of communal voting, in sharp contrast to the sporadic but very striking anti-British unity forged often in these months in the streets of Calcutta, Bombay, or even Karachi. Apart from the logic of separate electorates, it is possible that the extremely limited franchise (about 10% of the population in the provinces, less than 1% for the Central Assembly) may have had something to do with this disparity. The N.W.F.P. Governor, for instance, reported to Wavell in February 1946 that while Muslim officials and the 'bigger Khans' or landlords were all for the League, the Congress was still getting the support of the 'less well-to-do' Muslims due to its promises of economic reforms—promises, however, which were not implemented either after 1937 or in 1946-7. (Mansergh, Vol. VI, p. 1083). In this context, the tacit giving-up by the Congress of its central slogan of the late-1930s—a Constituent Assembly elected on universal franchise—acquires crucial significance in understanding the course of events. Of all Indian political groups, only the Communists in 1945-46 pressed this demand seriously—in P.C. Joshi's election pamphlet *For the Final Bid For Power* (1945), for instance, which posed as its key political slogan 'sovereign national constituent assemblies' elected by universal suffrage on the basis of linguistic regions and electing in their turn an all-India Constituent Assembly, with each region or 'nationality' retaining a right of secession. While sharply critical of Congress and League 'liberal illusions' about British good intentions, the pamphlet ended with a passionate call for 'Congress-League-Communist united front' in a 'last battle against the British rulers, against our common shame, for our common glory!' P.C. Joshi repeated the same demand for universal franchise in his meeting with the Cabinet Mission on 17 April 1946 (Mansergh, Vol. VII, pp. 291-3). Congress leaders, in sharp contrast, quietly accepted the election of the Constituent Assembly by the existing provincial legislatures based on limited voting rights. Much more was involved here than a question of abstract democratic principle. The League won its demand for Pakistan without its claims to represent the majority of Muslims being really tested, either in fully democratic elections or (as Congress claims had been) in sustained mass movements in the face of official repression (as distinct from occasional communal riots not unaccompanied often by official complicity). While the Congress
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after 1947 would win all-India elections for 30 years, the League was routed in East Pakistan in the very first vote held on the basis of universal franchise (in 1954), and failed to provide political stability even in W. Pakistan.

Cabinet Mission

From 24 March to June 1946, three members of the British Cabinet—Secretary of State Pethick-Lawrence, Cripps and Alexander—carried on together with Wavell long and often very tortuous negotiations with Indian leaders on the two issues of an interim government and principles and procedures for framing a new constitution giving India freedom. Attlee on 15 March raised Congress hopes considerably by a Commons statement promising speedy and full freedom and declaring that 'though mindful of the rights of minorities... we cannot allow a minority to place their veto on the advance of the majority'. (V.P. Menon, Transfer of Power in India, p. 237). Wavell was very suspicious of the Cabinet Mission being over-friendly with the Congress—Cripps for instance once horrified him by bringing a glass of water for Gandhi personally, and the Viceroy's Journal even accused the Mission of 'living in the pocket of Congress' Viceroy's Journal, pp. 236, 324-5). Yet if the Cabinet Mission at times seemed to lean marginally towards the Congress, this was not basically due to Labour pro-nationalist sympathies or Cripps' old ties with Nehru, but to what Wavell himself on 29 March described as 'the necessity to avoid the mass movement or revolution which it is in the power of the Congress to start, and which we are not certain that we can control'. (Ibid., p. 232).

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Congress leadership once again spiked its own guns in its eagerness for quick and easy power and desire at all costs to preserve social order. There were widespread police strikes in April (in Malabar, the Andamans, Dacca, Bihar and Delhi), threats of an all-India railway stoppage throughout the summer, a postal strike in July, and on 29 July—less than three weeks before the Great Calcutta Killing of 16 August—a total, absolutely peaceful, and remarkably united bandh in Calcutta under Communist leadership in sympathy with postal employees. The Home Member on 5 April warned that he had doubts 'whether a Congress rebellion could be suppressed', particularly because 'a call to a general strike would be widely obeyed... labour is amenable mostly to Communist and Congress leadership'. (Mansergh, Vol. VII, p. 151). The strike-wave of 1946 in fact surpassed all previous records, with 1629 stoppages involving 1,941,948 workers and a loss of 12,717,762 man-days. The Congress High Command's attitude was well summed-up by a Working Committee resolution in August condemning the growing lack of discipline and disregard of obligations on the part of the workers. (Note on Labour by J.B. Kripalani, AICC 1946). Yet the Congress leadership allowed itself to get engrossed in negotiations and ministry-making. Nehru much to Wavell's relief 'seemed to realize the unreasonableness of the (railway) men's demands and the danger of giving way to them', and Sarat Bose on becoming a minister in the Interim Government in September amused the Viceroy by calling for troops and British technicians at the first hint of a strike threat by Delhi electricity workers. (Viceroy's Journal, pp. 279, 352). And in the end the Cabinet Mission Plan and Interim Government manoeuvres became no more than stepping-stones on the road to a communal holocaust and Partition.

After initial negotiations had been stalled as usual on the rock of Jinnah's insistence on Pakistan, the Cabinet Mission on 16 May came out with a plan which for a brief moment promised to break the deadlock. This confronted Jinnah with a choice between a 'moth-eaten' Pakistan and a loose, three-tier confederal structure in which Muslims would have the chance of dominating the N.W. and N.E. province of a still-united country. A full-fledged Pakistan was impossible, the Mission pointed out, since it would include a very large number of non-Muslims (48.3% in Bengal and Assam, for instance); the very principle of communal self-determination being urged by the League would demand the separation of Hindu-majority West Bengal (including Calcutta, where Muslims numbered only 23.6%) and the Sikh and Hindu-dominated Ambala and Jullundur divisions of the Punjab. (Some Sikh leaders had already started demanding a separate state for themselves if the country was really partitioned). A Partition of Bengal and Punjab would go against deep-seated regional ties, raise any number of economic, administrative and military problems, and still fail to satisfy the League. The alternative suggested was a weak centre controlling only foreign affairs, defence and communications, with the existing
provincial assemblies being grouped into three sections while electing the constituent assembly: Section A for the Hindu-majority provinces, Section B and C for the Muslim-majority provinces of the north-west and north-east (including Assam). The Sections would have the power to set up intermediate-level executives and legislatures of their own.

Maulana Azad later described the acceptance of this long-term plan by both the major parties (the League on 6 June, the Congress on 24 June), as a 'glorious event' (India Wins Freedom, p. 151). Actually the agreement was bound to be short-lived, as it was based on mutually-opposed interpretations of the plan. The League wanted grouping to be compulsory, with Sections B and C developing into solid entities with a view to future secession into Pakistan. Jinnah in addition had thought that the Congress would reject the plan, in which case the British might ask the League alone to form the Interim Government at the centre—a hope fully shared by Wavell, who was deeply disappointed when the Congress accepted the long-term proposals (Viceroy's Journal, 25 June, p. 305). The Congress argued that compulsory grouping contradicted the otherwise oft-repeated insistence on provincial autonomy, and was not satisfied with the Mission's clarification (on May 25) that grouping would be compulsory at first, but provinces would have the right to opt out after the constitution had been finalized and new elections held in accordance with it. It was also critical of the absence of any provision for elected members from the princely states in the proposed Constituent Assembly. The new Congress President, Nehru, declared at a press conference on 10 July that the only commitment made by his party was to participate in Constituent Assembly elections. 'The big probability is that ... there will be no grouping', as N.W.F.P. and Assam would have objections to joining Section B and C. The League responded on 29-30 July by withdrawing its earlier acceptance of the long-term plan and calling on the 'Muslim Nation' to go in for 'Direct Action' from 16 August to achieve Pakistan (Mansergh, Vol. VIII, pp. 25-6, 139).

Meanwhile Wavell's parallel efforts to set up a short-term coalition Interim Government at the centre had also broken down. Jinnah wanted a ratio of five Congress Hindus, five League Muslims, one Sikh, one Scheduled Caste. The Congress rejected such 'parity' as a step back from even the Simla Conference, wanted the right to include Muslims and Harijans among its nominees, and demanded, as in 1942, that the new government should approximate to a genuine Cabinet, and not be a mere continuation of the old Viceroy's Executive. Wavell consequently had to set up a caretaker government of officials alone on 4 July. But within a few weeks the Viceroy began insisting on the need for somehow getting the Congress into the Interim Government, even if the League stayed out—a major departure from his stand at the Simla Conference, as well as from his preferences only a month earlier. The explanation once again lay in fear of possible mass action: July was the month of a threatened all-India strike in the railways and an actual postal walk-out. 'If Congress will take responsibility they will realize that firm control of unruly elements is necessary and they may put down the Communists and try to curb their own Left Wing. Also I should hope to keep them so busy with administration that they had much less time for politics.' (Wavell to Secretary of State, 31 July 1946, Mansergh, Vol. VIII, pp. 154). The Director of the Intelligence Bureau made the same point on 9 August: '... the labour situation is becoming increasingly dangerous. Until a responsible Indian government is introduced at the centre, there is little that can be done... I am satisfied that a responsible government, if one can be achieved, will deal more decisively with Labour than is at present possible.' (Home Poll (I) 12/7/1946). Once again the Congress walked into the trap. By 5 August, Wavell had received information that Patel was 'convinced that the Congress must enter the Government to prevent chaos spreading in the country', and was even prepared to threaten resignation from the Working Committee if his views were not accepted (Viceroy's Journal, p. 329). The Viceroy did try to bully the Congress into accepting compulsory grouping by holding out the threat of not summoning the Constituent Assembly in an interview with Nehru and Gandhi on 27 August, but when the latter reacted strongly against Wavell's 'minatory' tone ('We are all plain men though we may not all be soldiers and even though some of us may know the law', Gandhi to Wavell, 28 August: Mansergh, Vol. VIII, p. 322) the Secretary of State in a 'panic-striken telegram' insisted on avoiding any break (Viceroy's Journal, p. 343). On 2 September a Congress-dominated Interim Government was sworn in headed by Nehru—who had made it clear that his party was still oppos-
ed to compulsory grouping, though he did offer to refer the matter to the Federal Court envisaged by the Cabinet Mission plan.

1946-47: COMMUNAL HOLOCAUST AND PEASANT REBELLION

Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar, Punjab

From 16 August 1946, however, the whole Indian scene was rapidly transformed by communal riots on an unprecedented scale: starting with Calcutta on 16-19 August, touching Bombay from 1 September, spreading to Noakhali in east Bengal (10 October), Bihar (25 October), Gauhati in Assam (November), and engulfing the Punjab from March 1947 onwards. While inflamed communal passions provided everywhere the common factor, the riots also showed significant variations so far as their form, extent or question of immediate responsibility was concerned. In Calcutta, where the League ministry had declared a holiday on Direct Action Day, large-scale Muslim attacks began after a Maidan rally where Chief Minister Subhawaryd had promised immunity from police and army interference. Subhawaryd 'spent a great deal of time in the Control Room in Lall Bazar, often attended by some of his supporters', and showed 'an exasperating pre-occupation with the sufferings undergone by members of his own community'. (Governor Burrows to Wavell, 22 August, Mansergh, Vol. VIII, pp. 297-300). Hindu and particularly Sikh toughs hit back strongly in what became 'a pogrom between two rival armies of the Calcutta underworld', leaving by 19 August at least 4000 killed and 10,000 injured, with 'the removal of the very large number of decomposed bodies' lying in the streets posing a major problem (Ibid., p. 302). Murder was the primary objective in the Calcutta riots, not—as often in earlier communal outbreaks—desecration of temples or mosques, rape, or attacks on the property of relatively privileged groups belonging to the opposite community. More Muslims seemed to have died than Hindus, a point made not only by Wavell (Ibid., p. 274) but also by Patel (‘In Calcutta the Hindus had the best of it. But that is no comfort’, letter to Cripps, 19 October, Ibid., p. 750). The British responsibility is equally clear: the army, in sharp contrast to November 1945 or February 1946, moved into action only after 24 hours, though the Governor was reminded of his

First World War experiences in course of an early morning tour of the city on 17 August. There was a second round of riots in Calcutta between 26 March and 1 April 1947, followed by chronic disturbances and stabbing incidents till the very eve of independence, while many areas of the city remained out of bounds for members of one or other community for months.

In Bombay city, stray stabbing rather than largescale riots was the pattern from the beginning, though these were extensive enough to kill 162 Hindus and 158 Muslims in course of September 1946 (Mansergh, Vol. VIII, pp. 532, 648). A distorted social content was evident in Noakhali and Tippera, east Bengal districts with a tradition of agrarian unrest, where peasants were mostly Muslims while Hindus predominated among landlords, traders, and professional groups. In the October disturbances in north-west Noakhali and the adjoining south-west corner of Tippera, attacks on property and incidents of rape figured more prominently than murder in sharp contrast to the Calcutta riots. There were about 300 deaths, but loss of property amounted to crores of rupees, and in initial Hindu complaints attacks on zamindars, lawyers and other notables figured prominently. Burrows reported that the ‘Trouble in South-East Bengal is not a general rising of Muslims against Hindus but activity (apparently organized) of a body of hooligans who have exploited existing communal feeling'; casualties were relatively ‘low', but ‘damage to property will probably prove heavy'. The League administration once again showed blatant bias: of the 1074 arrested only 50 were in jail by April 1947. (Mansergh, Vol. VIII, pp. 725, 745, 753; N.K. Bose, My Days with Gandhi, p. 33, 48, 302).

The Bihar riots in the wake of observance of ‘Noakhali day' on 25 October revealed yet another pattern, more difficult to explain: a mass upsurge of Hindu peasants against Muslims, resulting in a massacre far more terrible really than Noakhali, with at least 7000 deaths. A horrified and bewildered Nehru reported that ‘a madness has seized the people' in what was an old Congress (as well as Kisan Sabha) stronghold; he suspected some landlord instigation, 'to divert the attention of their tenantry from agrarian problems’, and noted that the Congress-run administration and many party members had also succumbed to Hindu communalism. "The real picture that I now find is quite as bad, and even worse than anything that they (the League leaders)
had suggested" (Nehru to Patel, 5 November 1946, Durga Das, Vol. III, p. 165). Bihar was followed by Garhmukteswar in U.P. where Hindu pilgrims slaughtered a thousand Muslims. News of such massacres rapidly weakened the so long unassailable Congress position in the N.W.F.P. Nehru faced hostile tribal demonstrations during his tour of that province in late-October 1946, and riots in Hazara in January 1947 were followed by a Congress defeat in a crucial bye-election in Mardan.

Meanwhile Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs alike were preparing for what proved to be the greatest holocaust of all—that in the Punjab. The Unionist bloc had been weakened by the death of the Haryana Hindu Jat leader Chhotu Ram in January 1945, and Baldev Singh’s manoeuvre of propping up Khizar Hayat Khan’s ministry through Congress and Sikh support even after elections had given the Unionists only 10 seats against the League’s 79 only inflamed Muslim communalist and pro-Pakistan attitudes. A League campaign of civil disobedience from January 1947 brought down the Khizar ministry on 3 March. Next day a provocative Sikh demonstration in front of the Assembly Chamber in Lahore (with Tara Singh brandishing a sword and raising the slogan Raj Karega Khalsa: the Khalsa will rule) was followed by largescale riots in Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Attoke and Rawalpindi, as well as in the rural areas of the last three districts. The main targets in these Muslim-majority regions were Sikh and Hindu traders and moneylenders. About 5000 had been killed by August 1947, but even this proved just a curtain-raiser to the war of extermination which began after independence on both sides of the border. When refugee trains sometimes arrived carrying only dead bodies. Penderel Moon estimates that approximately 180,000 had been killed, of which 60,000 were from the west and 120,000 from the east. By March 1948, six million Muslims and four and a half million Hindus and Sikhs had become refugees, bringing about a virtually complete and forcible exchange of population, and leaving behind 4.7 million acres of land in east Punjab and 6.7 million acres in the west. On the whole ‘Muslims lost the most lives, Hindus and Sikhs lost the most property’—thus in Bahawalpur in south-west Punjab where Moon was working in 1947, the ‘Muslim population (mainly peasant) was less interested in blood than in the quiet enjoyment of Hindu property and Hindu girls’. Physical liquidation was more impor-

tant in central and east Punjab where the opposite communities were more evenly matched, and the Sikhs in particular showed a grim determination in wiping out or driving out Muslims so that land could be found for the two million Sikhs migrating from the West. (Penderel Moon, Divide and Quit, Ch. XIV).

The British, who as late as June 1946 had been making plans to bring five army divisions to India in the context of a possible Congress movement, (Mansergh, Vol. VIII, pp. 13-15) made no such move while presiding over this awesome human tragedy. Two examples, both taken from British sources, may suffice to indicate the extent of official passivity—if not deliberate connivance. Wavell commented on 9 November 1946 in the context of Bihar Muslim requests to use aerial bombardment to stop the riots: ‘Machine-gunning from the air is not a weapon one would willingly use, though the Muslims point out, rather embarrassingly, that we did not hesitate to use it in 1942’. (Viceroy’s Journal, p. 374). In March 1947, the two main bazaars of Amritsar were destroyed, while ‘not a short was fired by the police’—and this, Penderel Moon pertinently recalls, was the city of the Jalianwala-bagh massacre. (Moon, pp. 78, 80-1).

The Interim Government of Nehru found itself presiding helplessly over this growing communal inferno. Despite the title, it was really little more than a continuation of the old Executive Council of the Viceroy, and Wavell overruled the ministers on the question of release of I.N.A. prisoners in his very last cabinet meeting on 19 March 1947. Collective, or for that matter any kind of functioning became all but impossible when Wavell persuaded Jinnah to join the government on 26 October on the basis of a League scheduled caste nominee (Jogen Mandal) balancing a Congress Muslim. The League was allowed to join without giving up its Direct Action programme, its rejection of the Cabinet Mission long-term plan, or its insistence on compulsory grouping with decisions being taken by majority vote by a section as a whole (which would in effect reduce opponents of Pakistan in Assam and N.W.F.P. to the position of a helpless minority. It refused also to attend the Constituent Assembly which had started meeting from 9 December, and which consequently had to confine itself for the moment to passing (in January 1947) a general ‘Objectives Resolution’ drafted by Nehru stating the ideal of an ‘independent sovereign republic’ with
autonomous units, adequate minority safeguards, and having social, political and economic democracy as its fundamental aims. League obstructionism, in Congress eyes at least, included refusal to attend Nehru's 'tea-party Cabinets' (informal sessions to coordinate policies before meeting the Viceroy), and a rather demagogic budget moved in February 1947 by Finance Minister Liaquat Ali Khan imposing heavy taxes on big business (the major part of which was Hindu). Wavell considered this to be 'a clever move', since it 'drives a wedge between Congress and their rich merchant supporters like Birla, while Congress cannot object to its provisions' (Viceroy's Journal, 28 February 1947, p. 424).

Confronted by Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and Punjab, the secular ideals of many within the Congress ranks and leadership tended to evaporate. If Nehru consistently denounced Hindu communalism in Bihar and elsewhere, and Azad branded Wavell for not calling out troops promptly in Calcutta to suppress 'the hooligans of Calcutta's underworld' unleashed by Suhrawardy (interview with Wavell, 19 August 1946, Mansergh, Vol. VIII p. 261), Patel sympathized with hostile Hindu reactions to Nehru's condemnation of Bihar. 'We would be committing a grave mistake if we expose the people of Bihar and their ministry to the violent and vulgar attacks of the League leaders.' (Patel to Rajendra Prasad, 11 November 1946, Durga Das, Vol. III, p. 171).

Communal riots, combined with the evident unworkability of the Congress-League coalition at the centre, compelled many by early 1947 to think in terms of accepting what had been unthinkable so far—a Partition, and these soon included Nehru as well as Patel. The most insistent demands for this surgical solution had now started coming from Hindu and Sikh communalist groups in Bengal and Punjab, alarmed by the prospect of compulsory grouping into Muslim-dominated sections which might very well later form themselves into Pakistan. The Hindu Mahasabha, for instance, set up a committee to investigate the feasibility of a separate Hindu province in West Bengal (V.P. Menon, p. 348). By 10 March 1947, Nehru was telling Wavell in private that though 'the Cabinet Mission Plan was the best solution if it could be carried through—the only real alternative was the partition of the Punjab and Bengal' (Viceroy's Journal, pp. 426-7). A month later, Congress President Kripalani informed Mountbatten: 'Rather than have a battle we shall let them have their Pakistan, provided you will allow the Punjab and Bengal to be partitioned in a fair manner.' (H.V. Hodson, The Great Divide. London, 1969, p. 236).

The Mahatma's Finest Hour

To one man, however, the idea of a high-level bargain by which the Congress would attain quick power in the major part of the country at the cost of a Partition on religious lines still seemed unimaginably shocking and unacceptable. Gandhi had increasingly taken a back seat in the tortuous negotiations going on since 1945, apart from a few abortive moves through his personal emissary Sudhir Ghosh, and the suggestion—quixotic in the eyes of other Congress leaders—which he made to the Cabinet Mission and later to Mountbatten that Jinnah should be offered the Indian Prime Ministership with the British remaining for some time to protect, for a change, the interests of the majority community. Increasingly isolated from the Congress leadership, the old man of 77 with undiminished courage decided to stake his all in a bid to vindicate his life-long principles of change of heart and non-violence in the villages of Noakhali, followed by Bihar and then the riot-torn slums of Calcutta and Delhi. He lived with a handful of companions in hostile Muslim dominated villages, held out the threat of a fast unto death if Bihar Hindus did not mend their ways (6 November 1946), and from January 1947 set out barefoot through Noakhali village roads, once sweeping away with his own hands garbage strewn on his path by angry Muslims, and starting every morning with what had become his favourite hymn, Rabindranath's 'If there is none to heed your call, walk alone, walk along'. Gandhi's unique personal qualities and true greatness was never more evident than in the last months of his life: total disdain for all conventional forms of political power which could have been his for the asking now that India was becoming free; and a passionate anti-communalism which made him declare to a League leader a month after Partition, while riots were ravaging the Punjab: 'I want to fight it out with my life. I would not allow the Muslims to crawl on the streets in India. They must walk with self-respect'. (Khaliquzzaman, Pathway to Pakistan, p. 404). A Calcutta
resident who is otherwise very far from being an adherent of Gandhi still recalls how at prayer meetings he used to brush aside the very idea of Hindus and Muslims belonging to different nations with a gently-deprecating smile.

At times the presence of Gandhi really seemed to work miracles, as peace returned to Calcutta on the eve of 15 August after he had persuaded Suhrawardy to stay with him in riot-torn Beliaghat, and when a revival of communal strife in the city on 31 August was abruptly halted by a fast unto death from 1 to 4 September 1947. Riots began in Delhi soon afterwards, with a Hindu massacre of Muslims as revenge for Punjab, and once again Gandhi's fast in January 1948 had a temporary impact. This last fast seems to have been directed in part also against Patel's increasingly communal attitudes (the Home Minister had started thinking in terms of a total transfer of population in the Punjab, and was refusing to honour a prior agreement by which India was obliged to give Rs 55 crores of pre-Partition Government of India financial assets to Pakistan). 'You are not the Sardar I once knew,' Gandhi is said to have remarked during the fast. On 27 January 1948 the man whom a generation of Muslims had been taught to hate as the most dangerous Hindu leader was invited by them to speak from the platform of a religious shrine near in Delhi. Three days later the Mahatma was dead, murdered by a Hindu fanatic, Nathuram Godse, as a climax to a conspiracy hatched by a Poona Brahman group originally inspired by V.D. Savarkar—a conspiracy which, despite ample warnings, the police of Bombay and Delhi had done nothing to foil.

Intense moving and heroic, the Gandhian way in 1946-47 was no more than an isolated personal effort with a local and often rather short-lived impact. It is futile and dangerous to speculate about what might have been, but one might still argue that the only real alternative lay along the path of united militant mass struggle against imperialism and its Indian allies—the one thing which, as we have repeatedly seen, the British really dreaded. Despite the obvious disruption caused by the riots, this possibility was by no means entirely blocked even in the winter of 1946-47. Five months after the August riots, the students of Calcutta were again on the streets on 21 January 1947 in 'Hands off Vietnam' demonstrations against the use of Dum

1945-1947

Dum airport by French planes, and all communal divisions seemed forgotten in the absolutely united and ultimately victorious 85-day tram strike under Communist leadership which began the same day, followed soon afterward by port employees and Howrah engineering workers. January and February in fact saw a new strike wave, with 100,000 out in Kanpur textiles, a threat of a coal stoppage, and strikes in Coimbatore, Karachi and elsewhere due 'largely to Communist agitation' (Wavell, quoting Labour Minister Jagjivan Ram, 14 January 1947, Viceroy's Journal, p. 410). 'There are strikes everywhere... everybody wants wages and less work', Birla complained to Gandhi's secretary Pyarelal on 18 January (G.D. Birla, Bāpu, Volume 1 p. 434). The strikes, however, were all on purely economic demands; what remained lacking was a sufficiently influential and determined political leadership.

The new development in 1946-47 was an upsurge in the countryside in several regions, most notably Bengal, parts of Kerala, and Telengana in Hyderabad state. Everywhere the Communist-led Kisan Sabha was moving towards more militant forms of action, and reaching out below the level of the revenue- or rent-paying landholding peasantry towards share-croppers, landless labourers, and tribals.

From 1945, Communist cadres like Shamrao and Godavari Parulekar had started living among the wretchedly exploited and backward Warli tribes of Umbargaon and Dahanu talukas of Thana district near Bombay. They organized a series of successful movements against forest-contractors, merchant-money-lenders and outside landlords on issues like debt-slavery, veth or vethi (forced labour), and low wages for harvesting and cutting trees and grass.

Tebhaga

In September 1946, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha gave a call to implement through mass struggle the Foul Commission recommendation of tebhaga: two-thirds of the crop, instead of half or even less, for the sharecropper ( bargadar, bhagechasi, or adhyar) working on land rented from jotedars. Communist cadres, including many urban student militants, went out into the countryside to organize bargadars, who had become a major and growing section of the rural population as poor peasants
lost land through depression and famine and were pushed down to the level of share-croppers—they numbered 60% of villagers in some pockets which became tebhaga strongholds. The movement caught on suddenly from harvest-time in November, with the central slogan of *niij-khamare dham tolo*: sharecroppers taking paddy to their own threshing floor and not to the *jotedar*’s house as before, so as to enforce *tebhaga*. North Bengal became the storm-centre, particularly Thakurgaon sub-division of Dinajpur and adjoining areas of Jalpaiguri, Ranagpur and Malda. *Tebhaga* pockets also developed in Mymensingh (Kishoreganj), Midnapur (Mahisadal, Sutahata and Nandigram) and 24 Parganas (Kankdweep), while the Hajongs in north Mymensingh who had won a reduction in their *tanka* (produce rent) in 1937-38 now demanded its conversion into cash so as to gain from higher prices. The North Bengal base was principally among Rajbansis, a lowly caste of tribal origin, mostly *adhyar* and poor peasant, but also including some big *jote dar*, among whom organization along class lines had already undercut a previous Sanskritizing movement claiming Kshatriya status (the Communist Rupnarayan Roy had won the Dinajpur seat in 1946, defeating both Congress and a Kshatriya Samiti candidate). Muslims did participate in considerable numbers in the *tebhaga* bases, despite Calcutta and Noakhali, producing leaders like Haji Muhammed Danesh, Niamat Ali, and even some *maulis* who quoted the Koran to condemn *jotedar* oppression. But throughout south east Bengal, significantly and understandably enough, remained untouched, including the old Kisan Sabha stronghold of Tippera. *Jotedar* and (increasingly) police violence was sought to be countered by volunteers with *lalhti*—‘Dumb through past centuries...it is inspiring to see him (the * bargadar*) marching across a field with his fellows, each man shouldering a lathi like a rifle, with a red flag at the head of the procession.’ (*Statesman*, 19 March 1947, quoted in Sunil Sen, *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-47* p. 38).

But *lalhti* are not rifles, and when the League ministry balanced its sop of a * bargadar* bill (not made into law before 1950, and even then seldom implemented) with intensified repressions from February 1947, the movement faced a crisis which proved fatal. 20 Santals were killed near Balurghat in a clash with the police, and Sunil Sen lists 49 peasant martyrs in all. Some peasant militants now wanted arms, but the Communists did not have them and in any case had not really envisaged an all-out armed struggle. Socially, too, limitations were emerging: tribal elements pressed for greater militancy (including some tea-garden coolies in the Duars region of Jalpaiguri), but middle and poor peasant support declined, while in north Bengal towns the professional groups which were the mainstay of the national movement were extremely hostile (many had land, usually cultivated by *barga dar*). The Communists planned a general strike on 28 March, but meanwhile the Hindu Mahasabha campaign for Bengal partition was gaining strength, and renewed riots in Calcutta from 27 March ended all prospects of sympathetic actions in urban areas.

**Punnapra-Vayalar**

In the Shertalai-Alleppey-Ambalapuzha area of N.W. Travancore State, the Communists by 1946 had built up a very powerful base among coir-factory workers, fishermen, toddy-tappers, and agricultural labourers (employed by the big * jennis* or landlords of the nearby Kuttanad region). The close proximity of smalldown industries with agricultural occupations made the formula of worker-peasant alliance more of a reality here than in most areas, and trade unions had become powerful enough to control recruitment in coir factories, establish informal but very popular arbitration courts, and even win (after a strike in July 1946) the right to run their own ration shops. Meanwhile an explosive political situation was created by the coincidence of acute food scarcity with the plan announced in January 1946 by Dewan C.P. Ramaswami Iyer of an ‘American-model’ constitution with assemblies elected by universal suffrage but an executive controlled by a Dewan appointed by the Maharaja. The ambitious Dewan was clearly working for an independent Travancore under his own control when the British left, and would in fact announce this as his intention in June 1947. While the State Congress temporized, with some leaders like Pattom Thani Pillai apparently not averse to a compromise with Ramaswami Iyer, the Communists launched a massive campaign with the slogan ‘Amerikkkan modali—Arabyan katali’ (‘throw the American model into the Arabian sea’). From September 1946, the State Government began an all-out campaign against the Communists and trade unions of the Alleppey region, with police camps, mass
arrests, and brutal torture in jails. In self-defence much more than out of any plan for insurrection, camps were set up where persecuted workers took shelter, protected by volunteers who were given some elementary military training. A political general strike began in the Alleppey-Shertalai area from 22 October, and a partially-successful attack was made two days later on Punnappur police camp four miles south of Alleppey, with volunteers armed with wooden spears charging forward despite intense firing to engage the police in hand-to-hand combat. Nine rifles were captured here, but apparently no use could be found for them. Martial law was proclaimed on 25 October, and on the 27th the volunteer head-quarters at Vayalar (near Shertalai), was stormed by the army after a veritable blood-bath. Conservative estimates speak of about 800 killed in this brief but very bloody Punnappur-Vayalar rising. The massacre prevented any allience between the totally discredited Dewan and the Congress, though the latter was careful next year to bring about the integration of Travancore with India through pressure tactics rather than any uninhibited mass struggle—tactics which succeeded because Ramaswami Iyer realized that the alternative to peaceful surrender might well be a violent revolution. In this sense it was Punnappur-Vayalar which really brought about the integration of Travancore into India, blocking the road towards Balkanization. For the Communists, despite great suffering and an immediate setback, Punnappur-Vayalar meant all the prestige of heroic martyrdom, and its symbolic value is indicated by Communist ministers in Kerala, since 1957, making it a point to visit the two villages before taking office. (K.C. George, *Immortal Punnappur-Vayalar*, New Delhi, 1975; Robin Jeffrey’s article in *Congress and the Raj*).

**Telengana**

Where tebhaga and Punnappur-Vayalar had gone to the brink of armed struggle, but failed to cross it, Telengana—between July 1946 and October 1951—saw the biggest peasant guerrilla war so far of modern Indian history, affecting at its height about 3000 villages spread over 16,000 square miles and with a population of three million. Hyderabad under the Asafjahi Nizams was marked by a combination of religious-linguistic domination (by a small Urdu-speaking Muslim elite over predominantly-Hindu

Telegu, Marathi and Kannada language-groups), total absence of political and civil liberties, and the grossest forms of feudal exploitation particularly in the Telengana region, where Muslim and high-caste Hindu deshmukhs (revenue-collectors-turned-landlords) and jagirdars extorted vetti or forced labour and payments in kind from lower caste and tribal peasants and debt-slaves. Landgrabbing by the doras (‘masters’—the usual term for landlord), had worsened peasant conditions from the Depression days. Unlike tebhaga and to a much greater extent than in Travancore, the Communist-led agrarian revolt thus retained, till the entry of the Indian army in September 1948, the broader dimensions of a national-liberation struggle against the Nizam and his Razakar bands, though a limiting factor was the aloofness or hostility of the urban Muslim population, including even a substantial section of the working-class. Another decisive advantage was the slack manner in which the Arms Act had been enforced in the state, in very sharp contrast to British India: ‘Larg numbers of country-guns—muzzle-loaders were available and were in common use,’ Till September 1948, funds for buying arms could be collected more or less openly in the neighbouring Andhra districts of Madras, since everyone—including the Congress—wanted to resist the Razakars and block the Nizam’s bid to set up an independent Muslim-dominated state-Sundarayya recalls Rs 20,000 being raised in three days from Vijayawada alone. (P. Sundarayya, *Telengana People’s Struggle and Its Lessons*, Calcutta 1972, pp. 2, 7-9, 40). The Communists during the war years had built up a very strong base in Telengana villages, working through the Andhra Mahasabha and leading numerous local struggles on issues like wartime exactions, rationing abuses, excessive rents, and vetti. The beginning of the uprising is traditionally dated from 4 July 1946, when thugs employed by the deshmukh of Visunur (one of the biggest and most oppressive of Telengana landlords, with 40,000 acres) in Jangaon taluka of Nalgonda murdered a village militant, Doddid Komaryya, who had been trying to defend a poor washer-woman’s mite of land. The initial centres of resistance were in Jangaon, Surupet and Huzurnagar taluks of Nalgonda, but the movement soon spread into the neighbouring districts of Warangal and Khammam. Peasants organized into village sangams began by using lathis, slings with stones, and
chilli powder. Faced with brutal repression, proper armed guerrilla squads began to be constituted from early 1947, with bands going up to 100 to 120 per squad for a brief while and including at its height 10,000 village defence volunteers and 2000 regular squad members. Between August 1947 and September 1948, the struggle attained its greatest intensity and strength, with Communists making skilful use of and radicalizing the anti-Nizam slogans of the State Congress leaders (who operated mostly from Indian territory, unlike the Communist guerrillas); thus a call for resignation of revenue officials was converted into a campaign to destroy revenue and rent records. On the eve of the police action of September 1948, the Communists were recognized even by their enemies as *cheekati doralu* (‘kings of the night’) of much of the Telengana countryside. In villages controlled by the guerrillas, *vetti* and bonded labour disappeared, agricultural wages were raised (despite opposition from otherwise sympathetic rich peasants), unjustly seized land was returned to their previous peasant holders, and steps were taken to redistribute waste lands as well as land above a ceiling of 100 acres dry and 10 acres wet (a fairly high level, fixed in order not to alienate better-off peasants, but still much lower than the later Congress government ceiling). Sundarayya, a leading figure in the armed struggle, has given a vivid and moving picture of life in the liberated areas; measures to improve irrigation and fight cholera, the amicable settlement of many peasant and family disputes, some improvements in the status of women, a decline in untouchability and superstitions, and the use of folk songs and plays to preach revolutionary values.

The situation changed quickly after September 1948, and indeed the police action was probably undertaken in large part as a move to halt the Communist advance, for otherwise New Delhi and particularly Patel had seemed quite willing to strike a deal with the Nizam—‘I wondered why the Government of India was disproportionately lenient to the Nizam’, comments the State Congress leader Swami Ramananda Tirtha (*Memoirs of Hyderabad Freedom Struggle*, p. 190). The rout of the Razakars gave a lot of arms to the guerrillas, but now they had to face the much better equipped and disciplined regular Indian army, while the slogan of overthrowing the government of newly-independent India naturally had very much less appeal than the earlier anti-Nizam struggle. It might have been wiser, Communists later reflected, to have confined the armed struggle after 1948 to more limited aims of agrarian reform alone and so retained the possibility of a negotiated settlement at some stage; some, like Ravi Narayan Reddi, have even argued that continuing the guerrilla struggle itself had been a mistake once the Indian army had marched in. (Sundarayya, pp. 121-2, 135; Ravi Narayan Reddi, *Heroic Telengana—Reminiscences and Experiences*, New Delhi 1973, p. 60). The Communists now quickly lost the active support of better-off peasants, and energetic and often very ruthless military action drove them out of the settled plains of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam into the deep forests of the Nallamallai hills across the Krishna to the south and the Godavari region to the north-east. Here they established some new bases among Chenchu and Koya tribals, whom they rescued from the oppression of forest officials and trader-moneylenders; but by 1950-1, guerrilla action had degenerated into occasional individual sorties and murders, sharp internal political differences had emerged, and sheer survival had become the overriding problem. It is interesting that the last stand of the Telengana guerrillas was in the Godavari forest zone—where Alluri Sitarama Raju had fought a generation earlier.

Even after defeat, the Communists retained enormous support for some years, winning every Assembly seat from Nalgonda and Warangal in 1952 and returning Ravi Narayan Reddi to Parliament by a majority bigger than Nehru’s. The positive achievements, direct or indirect, of the Telengana struggle were not inconsiderable. Peasant guerrillas, more than any other factor, brought down the autocratic-feudal regime of India’s biggest princely state, frustrating the compromise bid of the November 1947 stand-still agreement made by Patel and V.P. Menon. The destruction of Hyderabad state also cleared the way for the formation of Andhra Pradesh on linguistic lines a few years later, thus realizing another old aim of the national movement in this region. The peasants did win some enduring gains: *vetti* could not be restored, not all the redistributed land was lost, the Congress regime had to abolish *jagirdari* (though with ample compensation) in 1949 and impose at least a theoretical ceiling, and it is significant that Vinoba Bhave’s Bhoomi movement began precisely in Nalgonda. It is true that partial gains tended
to make the better-off Andhra peasants politically conservative from the mid-1950's—but then that is a problem faced by many peasant revolutionary movements.

1947: FREEDOM AND PARTITION

The socially radical movements of which Telengana was the climax never coalesced into an organized and effective countrywide political alternative. The fear they undoubtedly inspired, however, helped to bring about the final compromise by which a 'peaceful' transfer of power was purchased at the cost of Partition and a communal holocaust. V.P. Menon, the senior bureaucrat who was to play a key role in 1947-48 as confidante of Patel and trusted advisor of Wavell and later of Mountbatten, reported to the Viceroy in the wake of the early-1947 strike wave 'that Congress leaders were losing popularity...there were serious internal troubles in Congress and great fear of the Left Wing; and that the danger of labour difficulties was acute'. A week later, Wavell’s *Journal* recorded a conversation with Patel 'about the danger of the Communists. I got the impression he would like to declare the Party illegal'—a desire which the Home Minister would fulfill within a few months of independence, in March 1948. (*Viceroy’s Journal*, entries for 9 and 15 January, 1947, pp. 408, 411). The British Government was also quick to come forward with a dramatic gesture when in February 1947 League refusal to join the Constituent Assembly and cooperate in Cabinet functioning led to a major political crisis, with the Congress demanding resignation of the League ministers and threatening to withdraw its own nominees from the Interim Government if its demands were not met. This was the immediate context of Attlee’s famous speech in the Commons on 20 February 1947, fixing June 1948 as a deadline for transfer of power. Even if Indian politicians had not agreed by that date on a constitution, the British would relinquish power 'whether as a whole to some form of central Government for British India, or in some areas to the existing provincial Governments, or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people'. British powers and obligations *vice-a-vis* princely states would also end with transfer of power, but these would not be transferred to any successor government in British India. The hint of partition and possibly even Balkanization into numerous states was very clear, but the bait of complete transfer of power by a definite and fairly early date proved too tempting to be refused—particularly as the only real alternative for the Congress was to plunge into another mass confrontation, difficult in the context of communal riots and very dangerous socially in view of what appeared to be a growing Left menace. The British Prime Minister’s statement also announced the replacement of Wavell by Mountbatten.

The Mountbatten Plan

Something like a cult has developed around Mountbatten, most obviously in Collins and Lapierre’s journalistic best-seller *Freedom At Midnight* (1976) but also in some British and even Indian circles, depicting him as superstatesman-cum-Prince Charming who solved the sub-continent’s problems in record time through a combination of military forthrightness, sheer personality, and tact. There is enormous exaggeration here. If Mountbatten proved more decisive and quick in taking decisions than previous Viceroy’s like Wavell, this was because he had been informally given much greater powers to decide things on the spot by the British Government than his predecessors. Behind this again lay the firm decision to quit at the earliest, since the only real alternative, as Cripps made clear during the Commons debate on Attlee’s statement, was to go in for total repression and be prepared to station large numbers of British troops in India for years— to which ‘it is certain that the people of this country (Britain)—short as we are of manpower, as we all know—would not have consented’, and which ‘would be politically impracticable, from both a national and an international point of view, and would arouse the most bitter animosity of all parties in India against us’. (‘quoted in V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power In India*, p. 346). Wavell in the final draft of his ‘breakdown plan’ in September 1946 had already suggested total withdrawal by 31 March 1948 (*Viceroy’s Journal*, p. 344). The formula of freedom-with-Partition was coming to be widely accepted well before Mountbatten took over charge. The one major innovation—immediate transfer of power on the basis of grant of Dominion Status (with a right of secession), thus obviating the need to wait for agreement in the Constituent Assembly on new political structures—was suggested not by Mountbatten, but by
V.P. Menon to the Secretary of State in January 1947. Patel, significantly enough, had privately agreed with this idea, even though formally it meant a retreat from the Lahore resolution of 1929, since Dominion Status would ensure a peaceful and very quick transfer of power, win for India influential friends in Britain, and allow for some continuity in the bureaucracy and army: (Menon, pp. 363-4). Mountbatten was responsible to a considerable extent for the break-neck speed at which the whole process of transfer was carried out, but this left many anomalies in arranging Partition details, and totally failed to prevent the Punjab massacre. On the whole one tends to agree with Penderel Moon's statement that Mountbatten's claim 'to great merit for the manner of our departure from Indian rings somewhat hollow, (Divide and Quiet, p. 283)

After a rapid series of 133 interviews with political leaders between 24 March and 6 May, Mountbatten decided that the Cabinet Mission framework had become untenable, and formulated an alternative with the appropriate code-name Plan Balkan. This envisaged transfer of power to separate provinces (or to confederations, if formed before the transfer), with the Bengal and Punjab assemblies being given the options to vote for partition of their provinces; the various units thus formed, along with princely states rendered independent by the lapse of paramountcy, would then have the choice of joining India, Pakistan, or remaining separate. The plan was quickly abandoned, however, when Nehru reacted violently against it after Mountbatten informed him about it privately in Simla on 10 May, and the V.P. Menon-Patel suggestion of transfer to two central governments, India and Pakistan, on the basis of grant of Dominion Status was taken up instead. Accepted by Congress, League, and Sikh leaders on 2 June and announced the next day, this became the basis of the India Independence Act which was ratified by British Parliament and Crown on 18 July and implemented on 15 August. Mountbatten himself, as well as his admirers have been full of praise for the decision, on an 'absolute lunch', of showing the first plan privately to Nehru beforehand. The historically much more significant point surely is that Nehru's opposition was sufficient to make Mountbatten abandon a plan on which British officials had been working for several weeks—once again revealing the potential strength of the Congress position, which its leaders repeatedly, failed to use due to their desire for a quick and peaceful accession to power. It should be added that while Nehru was certainly correct in scenter in the fragmentation proposal an imperialist design to build up in India a number of small client states and so create something like a Northern Ireland problem, the alternative that was adopted also blocked some interesting non-communal regional possibilities. In Bengal, where many in the League were not too eager to be ruled from distant Punjab, Suhrawardy and Abdul Hashem had come forward with a plan for a united, independent Bengal, which a few Congress leaders like Sarat Bose seemed prepared to consider (despite the bitter opposition of Hindu communalist-opinion to what would have to be a Muslim-majority state). In the N.W.F.P., demands were being raised for a free Pathan state, and the local Congress leadership under Abdul Ghaffar Khan felt that only such a slogan could counter the League bid to capture the province for Pakistan, for anti-Muslim riots in Hindu majority provinces had weakened the old sense of identification with Indian nationalism. The 3 June plan halted these developments by compelling provincial assemblies to choose between the two dominions, India and Pakistan, alone. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Congress leadership in 1947 let down very badly indeed the Pathans who had supported the national movement so consistently from the late-1920s. Though the existing N.W.F.P. assembly had a Congress majority and had voted in favour of joining the Constituent Assembly, a plebiscite was still forced on the province on the question of choice between joining India or Pakistan. The Congress High Command protested, but did not make it a breaking point (ds Nehru had successfully done on Plan Balkan); nor did it insist either on a decision by universal franchise, or on inclusion in the choice before voters of the independent Pakthoonistan option. The N.W.F.P. Congress eventually decided to boycott the plebiscite in protest—and N.W.F.P. went to Pakistan by a vote of 50.99% of the total, very limited electorate of 572,798 (i.e., by the decision of just 9.52% of the total population of the province). The Frontier Gandhi would later declare with justice that he and his movement had been 'thrown to the wolves' by the Congress leadership.
Integration of States

With the impending lapse of paramountcy, the question of the future of the princely states became a vital one. The more ambitious rulers or their dewans (like Hyderabad, Bhopal or Travancore) were dreaming of an independence which would keep them as autocratic as before, and such hopes received considerable encouragement from the Government of India's Political Department under Conrad Corfield till Mountbatten enforced a more realistic policy. Meanwhile a new surge of the states peoples' movement had begun in 1946-47, demanding everywhere political rights and elective representation in the Constituent Assembly, and containing in some places considerable socially-radical possibilities—as we have already seen in the cases of Travancore or Hyderabad. The Congress criticized the Cabinet Mission plan for not providing for elected members from states. Nehru presided over the Udaipur and Gwalior session of the All India States Peoples' Conference (December 1945 and April 1947), and declared at Gwalior that states refusing to join the Constituent Assembly would be treated as hostile. But verbal threats and speeches apart, the Congress leadership—or more precisely, Sardar Patel, who took charge of the new States (in place of the Political) Department in July 1947, together with V.P. Menon who became secretary—tackled the situation in what had become the standard practice of the party: using popular movements as a lever to extort concessions from princes while simultaneously restraining them (or even using force to suppress them once the prince had been brought to heel, as in Hyderabad). The pattern had already been indicated in Kashmir in 1946. When Sheikh Abdullah was arrested on 20 May while leading the National Conference's 'Quit Kashmir' movement against the very unpopular and despotic Hindu Maharaja of a Muslim-majority state, Nehru initially rushed to the Kashmiri leader's support and was even briefly arrested on 20 June for defying a ban on his entry into the state. Patel assured Wavell, however, that Nehru had gone again this advice (Wavell's interview with Patel, 27 June 1946, Mansergh, Vol. VII, pp. 1098-9), and very soon began negotiation with Kashmiri's prime minister, Kach, which culminated in the Maharaja's accession to India after raiders from Pakistan invaded the state in October 1947. 'This alters the whole outlook for the States', the Nawab of Bhopal declared on hearing of the appointments of Patel and Menon to head the new States Department, and on 5 July 1947 Patel assured the princes: 'The Congress are no enemies of the Princely Order, but, on the other hand, wish them and the people under their aegis all prosperity, contentment and happiness'. (V.P. Menon, The Story of the Integration of Indian States, p. 96).

The incorporation of Indian states took place in two phases, with a skilful combination of baits and threats of mass pressure in both. By 15 August 1947, all states except Kashmir, Junagadh and Hyderabad had agreed to sign an Instrument of Accession with India (or, in a few cases like Bahawalpur, with Pakistan) acknowledging central authority over the three areas of defence, external affairs, and communications. The princes agreed to this fairly easily, for so far they were 'surrendering' only what they had never had (the three functions had been part of the paramountcy of the Crown), and there was no change as yet in internal political structures. The much more difficult process of 'integration' of states with neighbouring provinces or into new units like Kathiawar Union, Vindhyas and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan or Himachal Pradesh, along with internal constitutional changes in states which for some years retained their old boundaries (Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore-Cochin), was also accomplished within the remarkably short period of little more than a year. Here the principal bait offered was that of very generous privy purses, while some princes were also made into Governors or Rajpramukhs. The rapid unification of India is certainly Sardar Patel's greatest achievement, but we must not forget the considerable role played here, too, by the existence or at least the potential presence of mass pressures. Thus the eastern States Union formed by recalcitrant princes crumbled in December 1947 in the face of powerful Praja Mandal (as well as some tribal) agitations in Orissa states like Nilgiri, Dhenkanal and Talcher. Junagadh in Kathiawad whose Muslim ruler tried to join Pakistan was brought to heel by a combination of popular agitation with Indian police action. The Congress, exceptionally strong in Mysore since the late 1930s, launched a fairly uninhibited 'Mysore Chalo' agitation on its own in September 1947 which forced substantial political changes in a democratic direction by 12 October. V.P. Menon persuaded the Travancore Dewan C.P. Ramaswam Iyer to give up his dream of continued personal power through
came to mean over the years a cruel choice between threat of sudden violence and squeezing of employment and economic opportunities, or a forcible tearing-out of age-old roots to join the stream of refugees—all the manifold human tragedies so movingly portrayed in Balraj Sahni’s last film Garam Hawa. At another, not entirely unrelated level, the economic and social contradictions that had provided the deeper roots of popular anti-imperialism had not been resolved, for the privileged groups in town and country had been able to successfully detach attainment of political independence from radical social change. The British had gone, but the bureaucracy and police they had built up continued with little change, and could prove as oppressive and ruthless as before (or even more perhaps at times). The Mahatma’s isolation and agony during the last months of his life were due not to communal riots alone. On the eve of his murder, he had warned that the country still had to ‘attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of its 700,000 villages’, that Congress had ‘created rotten boroughs leading to corruption and . . . institutions, popular and democratic only in name’, and that consequently the Congress as a political party should be dissolved and replaced by a Lok Sevak Sangh of genuinely dedicated, self-sacrificing constructive village workers (N.K. Bose, My Days with Gandhi, Calcutta 1953, pp. 305, 307). For many committed Leftists, such independence seemed little better than a mockery: ‘The battleships (of the RIN) lie motionless in harbour, disarmed by treachery; in Noakhali, Bihar and Garmukteswar, Hindus and Muslims find unity only after death’, and ‘the passions of youth have become the lust of ageing men’—a savage, but not entirely unjust, comment on the transformation of patriots into power-hungry politicians. (Samar Sen, in the last two poems he has written).

Yet the millions who rejoiced throughout the sub-continent, thrilled to Nehru’s midnight speech on India’s ‘tryst with destiny’, and made of 15 August an unforgettable experience even for someone who was then only a child, had not been entirely deluded. The Communists in 1948-51 learnt to their cost that the slogan Yeh Azadi Jhuta Hai (‘this freedom is a farce’) cut little ice. Indian freedom was the beginning of a process of decolonization which has proved irresistible, at least so far as political independence is concerned. Far from becoming a puppet of
Britain or the U.S.A., India under Nehru did gradually develop an independent foreign policy, based on the then novel concept of non-alignment and friendship with socialist countries and the emerging Third World. A broadly democratic constitution was promulgated in January 1950—despite many limitations, a big advance on British Indian institutions which had avoided universal suffrage till the very end. Princes and zamindars were gradually eased out, land ceilings imposed (though seldom implemented), the old ideal of linguistic reorganization of states was achieved in 1956, basic industries were built up through planned development of a public sector, and food production increased considerably in sharp contrast to the near-stagnation of the first half of the century. None of this happened automatically due to August 1947, for much of it was only realized through bitter popular struggles—yet the winning of political independence has surely been an essential prerequisite. The contradictions remain, however, perhaps more glaring then ever before, and rooted in the choice of a broadly capitalist path of development—a path determined by the dominant pattern of our freedom movement, over which the bourgeoisie was able to establish and retain its general leadership.

The six decades of India's history that we have surveyed thus find meaning and relevance if considered as a complex process of change through struggle which is still far from complete. Perhaps the reflections of a British socialist writer on history and its contradictions can serve as an appropriate epigraph:

"... pondered how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name." (William Morris, A Dream of John Ball, 1887).

FURTHER READINGS

CHAPTER 1

The N.A.I. and the N.M.M.L. now have between them the private papers of most Viceroys and Secretaries of State in microfilms. For the papers of Governors and lower-level officials, however, the researcher still has to go to the I.O.L. (London) or the Cambridge South Asia Study Centre. The N.A.I. holdings of the Government of India files are in some ways superior to those of the I.O.L.; a useful guide here is Low, Illis and Wainwright, Government Archives in South Asia (Cambridge, 1969). The N.M.M.L. has built up a magnificent collection on 20th Century Indian history, including private papers of Indian politicians and businessmen, the All-India Congress Committee files, documents of the States People's Movement and labour and kisan organizations, recorded interviews of political activists, and microfilms of unpublished theses. Contemporary pamphlets lie scattered in many libraries, and proscribed publications may be read at the N.A.I., I.O.L. and the British Museum. Newspaper preservation leaves much to be desired, though there are valuable collections at the National Library (Calcutta), N.M.M.L., I.O.L. and the British Museum.

Excerpts from contemporary documents, mainly official, may be read in C. H. Philips (ed.) Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858-1947 (London, 1962); see also B. L. Grover (ed.), A Documentary Study of British Policy towards Indian Nationalism (Delhi, 1967), from which I have taken the quotations from Dufferin and Reay. Constitutional documents are easily available, in A. C. Banerji (ed.), Indian Constitutional Documents 1727-1947, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1961), and Gwyer and Appadorai (ed.) Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 2 vols. (London, 1957). The more advanced student will find fascinating material on the last years of British rule in the official papers printed in N. Mansergh (ed.), Transfer of Power 1942-47 (Nine volumes published so far, London, 1970 onwards). The Indian Council of Historical Research has planned two multi-volume series of documents, taken more from non-official sources, on the national movement and on the last decade of British rule (Towards Freedom project) but these are still at the preparatory stage.

The recent spurt in research has rendered largely out-of-date old textbooks and surveys like P. Spear, Oxford History of India (New Delhi, 1974), P. S. Sitaramayya, History of the Indian National Congress, 2 vols. (Bombay, 1946-47) or R. C. Mazumdar (ed.) British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance (Bombay, 1974) and Struggle for Freedom (Bombay, 1969). A similar comment has to be made about the two general histories of the national movement, written from sharply opposed points of view: Tarachand, History of the Freedom Movement in India, 4 vols. (Delhi, 1951-72) and