NEGOTIATIONS AND COMMUNAL RIOTS

I. THE BEGINNING OF PARTITION

The Cabinet Mission arrived in India in March 1946. In the next three months there were hectic discussions between the Mission and the representatives of various political parities and groups, particularly with the leaders of the Congress and the League. Though not as part of the Congress leadership, Gandhi also actively participated in the discussions.

The talks were centred round a long-term scheme to frame a constitution for India as well as a short-term scheme to form an interim government at the Centre to carry on the administration of the country till the adoption of the constitution. From 1st to 17th April, 182 discussion sessions were held involving 472 political leaders. This many sessions had to be arranged because separate interviews had to be
held with a number of organizations, apart from the Congress and the League, claiming to represent different interests, including several small parties without any appreciable popular support and even organization which remained only on paper.

The members of the Mission left for Kashmir on 17th April to evaluate the different views presented before them during the interviews. Soon after their return on 24th April, Pethick-Lawrence as the leader of the Mission addressed separate letters to the Congress and the League suggesting one more attempt to obtain an agreement between these parties. He also invited the representatives of the Congress and the League for a conference at Simla with a view to discussing the possibility of agreement upon a scheme based upon the following "fundamental principles".

"The future constitutional structure of the British India to be as follows: A Union Government dealing with the following subjects: the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications. There will be two groups of provinces, the one of the predominantly Hindu provinces and the other of the predominantly Muslim provinces, dealing with all other subjects which the provinces in the respective groups desire to be dealt with in common. The provincial governments will deal with all other subjects and they will have all the residuary sovereign rights."  

Soon after receiving this letter, the Congress President Azad sent a reply stating that the scheme was acceptable to him and hoped that it would be acceptable to his Party too. However, the members of the Congress Working Committee were unaware of such a reply having been sent by Azad. Consequently, the Working Committee in a resolution stated that it was difficult for the Congress to accept the scheme suggested by the Cabinet Mission. The resolution also specified its objections with regard to the scheme. The Mission thereupon clarified that acceptance of the scheme was not a condition for participation in the proposed conference. On

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the basis of this clarification, the Working Committee decided to participate in the Conference. The League also decided to participate reserving the ‘freedom to accept or reject the proposed scheme’.

Accordingly, a week-long conference was held at Simla. The Mission had already introduced certain changes in the light of the earlier discussions to meet the objections raised by the Congress and the League. It was this revised scheme that was presented before the conference. However, even this revised scheme was not acceptable either to the Congress or to the League. It was decided to hold consultations between Nehru and Jinnah to find if it was possible to leave matters on which there was difference of opinion to arbitration and in that case who should be the arbitrator. Since these consultations also failed, the Second Simla Conference broke down.

The Viceroy and the Mission claimed that they were trying to bring conciliation between the Congress demand of freedom and sovereignty for an undivided Indian and the League demand of two separate constitution-making bodies for Pakistan and Hindustan.

It may be recalled that the Communist Party had pointed out that the only practical solution to the problem was to set up a system with wide autonomy to the people speaking different languages by treating them as separate nationalities and a federal government at the Centre to deal with a limited number of subjects like foreign relations, defence, communication, etc. The nationalists at that time accused the party of encouraging “disintegration” of the country. However, when confronted with the problems of framing a constitution for the country, the Congress was forced to move along the same way. The Congress leaders made it clear that they were not against the Cabinet Mission’s proposal for dividing the provinces into groups. But they forcefully opposed the attempt to the forcible merger of a province in either of these groups against its will. They demanded that after the adoption of a constitution for India, each province should be given the right to join either group of its choice.
The League was totally opposed to it. They wanted a separate constitution-making body for the Muslim majority provinces of NWFP, Sind, Baluchistan, Bengal and Assam to frame a constitution for a federal government of Pakistan.

In other words, the Congress stood for a federal constitution for India with autonomous provinces and for the right of the Muslim majority provinces within the Indian federation to frame a common group constitution if they so desired. The League, on the other hand, demanded the formation of Pakistan comprising the Muslim majority provinces with the right to any province to keep away from it only after the adoption of a constitution for Pakistan. It was due to the irreconcilability of these demands of the Congress and the League that the Second Simla Conference broke down.

Soon after the conference, the Cabinet Mission announced its own proposals without introducing any basic change in the proposals presented by the Mission before the conference. These proposals included the following.

1. There should be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States, which should deal with the following subjects: Foreign affairs, Defence, and Communications; and should have the powers necessary to raise the finances required for the above subjects.

2. The Union should have an Executive and a Legislature constituted from British Indian and State’s representatives. Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as a majority of all the members present and voting.

3. All subjects other than the Union subjects and all residual powers should vest in the Provinces.

4. The States shall retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union.

5. The Provinces should be free to form groups with Executives and Legislatures and each group could determine the provincial subjects to be taken in common.
6. The Constitutions of the Union and of the groups should contain a provision whereby any Province could by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution after an initial period of ten years and ten yearly intervals thereafter."

If item 5 above was brought into operation, it was obvious that the NWF Province and Assam which did not accept the leadership of the League could opt out of Pakistan. But there was another provision contrary to this included in the scheme. It was provided that the Muslim majority provinces of NWFP and Assam would be included in two different "Sections" comprising the Muslim majority provinces in the west and the east, respectively, "which shall proceed to settle the Provincial Constitutions for the Provinces included in each section, and shall also decide whether any Group Constitution shall be set up for those provinces...." and that the provinces would have the power to opt out of the groups in accordance with the provision that "such a decision shall be taken by the new legislature of the Province after the general election under the new constitution."

The Congress opposed these provisions and argued that any province should have the right not to participate in the meetings of the sections and that no province should be forcibly brought under a group. The Working Committee pointed out that the scheme prepared by the Cabinet Mission was ridden with contradictions in that in one clause it provided the provinces with the right to opt out of groups while in another it forcibly included them in groups. Therefore the Working Committee gave the interpretation that the provinces had the right not to participate even at the first meeting of the sections. Accordingly, the Committee informed the Cabinet Mission that its scheme was acceptable subject to this interpretation. However, the Cabinet Mission pointed out that this interpretation was wrong and clarified that the provinces were bound to participate in the initial proceedings of their respective sections.
In the light of this clarification, the Working Committee of the League accepted the scheme of the cabinet Mission on the ground that in the very provision which was criticized by the Congress lay the foundation of Pakistan. As soon as the League declared its acceptance, the Cabinet Mission announced that both the Congress and the League had accepted the scheme. But the Congress had accepted the scheme only subject to its own interpretation of the provision as stated above, which was, however, rejected by Mission. The General Secretary of the Congress J. B. Kripalani has put it in record that his argument that the Mission's announcement of the acceptance of the scheme by the Congress was contrary to facts was rejected by other members of the Working Committee.

This was, in fact, the beginning of Gandhi and a section of his disciples taking an attitude against the opinion of the majority of the Congress Working Committee. The latter were guided by the fear that unless the long-term scheme was accepted, the short-term scheme would not come into operation. They feared that if the Congress did not participate in the formation of the interim government, the anti-Congress forces including the League would form the government creating a political situation which would be most dangerous to the Congress. Consequently, they were prepared to deviate a bit from their own principled stand with regard to the long-term scheme to avoid this danger. Gandhi's disciples were of the opinion that this amounted to presenting the provinces like the NWFP and Assam and also the entire national Muslims throughout the country who had been resisting the pressures from the British rulers and the League and opposing a demand of Pakistan, as a gift to the Muslim League. They were not afraid of the anti-Congress forces forming a government, because they had with them the instrument of satyagraha which could be used in all circumstances. It was with this view that Gandhi proposed to the Cabinet Mission to invite Jinnah to form a government at the Centre.
If Gandhi and his disciples had gone ahead with this stand challenging the majority of the Congress Working Committee and rallied the people against the scheme of the Cabinet Mission, it would have changed the course of Indian politics. For, an anti-imperialist people’s upsurge which was conducive to this change was taking shape in the country since the end of the War. This upsurge of revolutionary struggles had been steadily gaining in strength while the discussions with the Cabinet Mission were going on. Large sections of the people including workers, peasants, the intelligentsia, students and the youth, and the people of the princely states were entering in these struggles with great enthusiasm. These broad sections of the people were not affected either by the Congress-League conflicts or the quarrels between the Hindus and Muslims. If Gandhi and his followers were prepared to lead these people, a broad mass upsurge would have developed throughout the country on an unprecedented scale.

But Gandhi and his followers were not prepared for it. As ever before, they were led more by the neglect and opposition on their part to revolutionary struggles than by anti-imperialism. Consequently, they left the majority of the Working Committee alone by merely expressing dissent to the decisions taken by them.

II. LEAGUE TOWARDS ‘DIRECT ACTION’

Both the Congress and the League tried equally well during the discussions with the Cabinet Mission to turn the short-term aspect of the scheme (i.e., formation of an interim government) to their advantage, while adhering to their respective stands on the framing of the future constitution.

The Cabinet Mission declared that the Viceroy would take steps to form an interim government with the participation of the representatives of the Congress and the League with powers of all the subjects including Defence, if these two
parties accepted the long-term aspect of the scheme with regard to constitution-making. That is, acceptance of the long-term aspect of the scheme was an essential condition for the participation in the interim government. That was why the Congress accepted the scheme with their own interpretation and by the League with out any interpretation of their own. Accordingly, the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy decided that it was time to start discussion on the interim government.

In the third week of June the Viceroy asked the Congress to suggest the names of six Hindus, including a representative of the Scheduled Castes, and the League to suggest the names of five Muslim members to the proposed interim government. He had also informed them that, in addition to these 11 Hindu and Muslim members, there would be three more members in the government representing the Sikh, Christian and Parsi communities. Accordingly, the Congress and the League submitted their lists and the Viceroy accepted the list of the League but struck off the names of Sarat Chandra Bose, Dr. Zakir Hussein and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur from the Congress list. Since the latter two belonged to Muslim and Christian communities, he refused to accept them in the Congress list. The Viceroy insisted that all the representatives of the Congress including the Scheduled Caste representative should be caste-Hindus.

This was objected to by the Congress. It also took objection to the inclusion of Abdur Rab Nistar who had been defeated in the 1946 elections in the League list which was accepted by the Viceroy. The Congress was also opposed to N.P. Engineer, who was the public prosecutor in the INA trial, being included in the list representing the Parsi community.

Gandhi was clearly opposed to Congress participation in such an interim government. In a letter drafted by him on behalf of the Congress Working Committee and intended to be sent to the Viceroy, Gandhi placed particular emphasis on the following points.
1. Since the League was openly a Muslim organization, no non-Muslim should be included in the League list of members of the interim government.

2. Since the Congress was a national organization, its list could include Muslims.

3. Except in the case of five members allotted to the League, it should not have the right to express opinion on the selection of anyone else.

4. The interim government should be responsible to the elected members of the Central Assembly.

The Working Committee, however, did not even consider this draft letter. Although the Working Committee was not in agreement with the list prepared by the Viceroy, it was not willing to reject it. The Committee thought it possible to eliminate the ill-effect of the alterations made by the Viceroy in the Congress list.

But the Working Committee had a firm opinion with regard to the right and status of the interim government. The Congress was not prepared to make compromise on the principle that the interim government should be able to function as a government of a free, sovereign country without interference from the Viceroy. On 30th May, President Azad wrote a letter to the Viceroy to this effect. Azad received a favourable reply from the Viceroy stating that the interim government would be treated with considerations given to a Dominion government. With this, the Working Committee on 18th June took a tentative decision to accept the proposal of the Cabinet Mission with regard to the interim government. It did not, however, communicate this decision to the Viceroy.

The decision to accept the proposal with regard to the interim government, however, widened the difference that had existed within the Congress leadership. For example, Kripalani has stated that Sardar Patel had become angry when he said that, whatever be the decision of the Working Committee, he would resign his position in the Congress, if it approved of the scheme to compulsorily merge some of the
Muslim majority provinces in Pakistan against their wishes. On 19th June, Gandhi told the members of the Working Committee in clear terms that if the Committee gave approval to a list which did not include a national Muslim and which included N. P. Engineer, he would have nothing to do with it.

In the meantime, an incident took place which was likely to wreck the entire decision of the Congress with regard to the acceptance of the scheme of the Cabinet Mission. The contents of a letter which Jinnah had sent to Wavell appeared in the Statesman. In that letter Jinnah sought from Wavell a number of assurances with regard to the interim government, which were not at all acceptable to the Congress. Soon after, the Congress President demanded from the Viceroy a copy of Jinnah’s letter as well as his reply to Jinnah. The reply contained an assurance that no change in principle in the list of members of the interim government would be made without the approval of both the Congress and the League. The meaning of this was clear. A national Muslim should not be included in the Congress list without the permission of the League. Besides, the selection of the representatives of the minority communities including the Scheduled Castes would also require the approval of the Congress and the League.

In addition to giving this assurance to Jinnah, the Viceroy informed the Congress President on 22nd June that it was not possible to include a national Muslim in its list. Thereupon the Congress Working Committee decided against participation in the interim government subject to this condition. It may be stated that Maulana Azad did not agree with this decision—another instance to show that the difference within the Congress leadership was getting sharper.

The Congress decision against participation in the interim government brought the work of the Cabinet Mission to a deadlock. As the final effort to resolve the crisis, the Mission invited Gandhi and Sardar Patel for a talk. During the talks, differences of opinion between Gandhi and Patel
surfaced even on the question of the approach the Mission had adopted in the talks.

Gandhi emphatically stated that he was suspicious about the Mission's long-term and short-term schemes and that he was not in agreement with the acceptance of the schemes. Following, the Working Committee declared its rejection of the Viceroy's proposals with regard to the interim government, but stated at the same time that it accepted the long-term scheme of the Cabinet Mission with its own interpretation.

According to Jinnah, this meant rejection of the Cabinet Mission's long-term scheme by the Congress. Since his Party had accepted the scheme, he expected the formation of an interim government without the Congress. But the Cabinet Mission maintained that if the Congress and the League were not prepared to join the interim government, the entire scheme for constitution-making would fail. Besides, the Mission interpreted the decisions of the Congress and the League as if both had accepted its proposals unconditionally.

As the Congress has rejected the proposal with regard to the formation of an interim government, the Cabinet Mission decided not to proceed with its scheme and left India leaving the Viceroy to hold discussions on the formation of the interim government and to take steps to form the constitution-making body. This made the League leadership highly discontented. They demanded that since the question of forming the interim government had been deferred, the steps being taken to form the constitution-making body also should be put off. When the British Cabinet refused to concede this demand, Jinnah accused the Cabinet of "bad faith". The League also decided to withdraw its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's scheme and to resort to "direct action" to achieve its objective of Pakistan.

Now it was the first time in the history of the League that it was renouncing the constitutional method of struggle and contemplating direct action. This had far-reaching consequences in Indian politics as can be seen in the following chapters. Here it is worth noticing the fact that hitherto
only one section of the Indian bourgeois leadership (i.e., the Congress) had resorted to the method of open mass agitation as an integral part of the politics of bargain. For the Congress, the final form of direct action was reached in 1942. They were now engaged in the final stage of the bargain making use of the popular support they had gained in the 1942 struggle. It was at this stage that another section of the bourgeois leadership (i.e., the League) was resorting to the method of direct action. While the Congress had been engaged in direct action to achieve swaraj, the League was now resorting to direct action to achieve Pakistan. The League also decided to observe 16th August as ‘Direct Action Day’ which together with the events that followed the observance the Day changed the entire course of the political history of India.

III. KASHMIR

While the Congress and the League leaders were engaged in discussions with the Cabinet Mission, the problem of the place of the princely states in the future constitution of India had started coming to the fore. The attitude of the British government towards this problem was thoroughly undemocratic. The relationship between ‘British India’ and the princely states was governed by a treaty entered into between them. Consequently, in the event of the British relinquishing power in India, the princely states would become free. The British government had been maintaining that the states had the right to decide their own future.

The League had never openly expressed an opinion about it. Their only concern was the place of the Muslims as a community in India’s future constitutional set-up. The attitude of the Congress was different. They wanted to establish democratic rule in the princely states as well as in British India. This was not merely because they were more committed to democracy than the League; establishment of
democracy in the princely states was essential for them to keep in their proper place those forces which were opposed to them in the future constitutional set-up of the Indian Union. If the representatives of the Maharajas of the states happened to go to the Central Assembly and the cabinet, there was a possibility of them joining hands with the representatives of communal and caste politics facilitating the British vested interests to continue their dominance in a new form. It was therefore natural for the Congress to extend its support to the demand for ending the autocratic rules in the states.

However, as we have seen earlier, the Congress was never prepared to help without reservation the struggles for responsible governments in the princely states and to give these struggles a revolutionary character. In the earlier days, the Congress kept away from these struggles in accordance with the policy of “non-interference in the internal affairs of the princely states”. Later, when organizations like Praja Mandal and state Congress started emerging in the states, Congressmen came forward to occupy leadership positions in these organizations. However, they looked upon the mass agitations in the states as a mean to bargain with the rulers of the states.

The discussion on India’s future constitutional set-up which started with the First Simla Conference gave an added strength to the agitations for responsible governments in the princely states. The movements in certain states like Travancore, Cochin, Hyderabad and certain states in Orissa were under the leadership of leftists. Even in those states where they were not in leading positions, their influence in the movement was evident. Particular mention must be made in this connection of Kashmir in which a majority of the population was Muslim and the Maharaja a Hindu. Consequently, the early form of the movement for responsible government in Kashmir had the characteristics of Muslim politics. Started in the name of ‘Kashmir Muslim Conference’, the movement transformed itself into ‘National Conference’, via ‘Muslim Conference’. Its leaders like Sheikh Abdullah
and G. M. Sadiq came under the influence of left-wing nationalism and socialist-communist ideologies. They engaged themselves in the task of rallying the people irrespective of their religious affiliations against autocracy and landlordism. Thus, the National Conference became part of the left front comprising communists, socialists and left-wing Congressmen in British India.

These developments before and during the war influenced the post-war politics in Kashmir, strengthening the movement for responsible government there. Following the slogan of ‘Quit India’, the National Conference raised the slogan of ‘Quit Kashmir’, meaning thereby that the Maharaja should quit Kashmir and transfer power to the people.

The democratic movements in no other Indian state had raised such a radical slogan with far-reaching consequences. The demand raised in most other states was confined to the establishment of a government responsible to an elected legislative body with the Maharaja remaining as the formal head of the state. The significance of Kashmir was that, as distinct from this, a native organization representing bourgeois nationalism came forward to raise the demand of ending the rights of the Maharaja.

An equally significant feature of Kashmir was the communal character of the leadership of the National Conference. It was a mass organization comprising people of all communities with a leadership composed of the representatives of all communities under the overall leadership of Sheikh Abdullah who belonged to the Muslim community. The very existence of such an organization constituted a challenge to the League’s ‘two-nations theory’. The only organization matching to this was the mass movement led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the NWF Province, which was a source of constant irritation to the League. Consequently, the democratic movement in Kashmir appeared as a problem which was in a sense connected with the discussions at the Simla Conference and with the Cabinet Mission.
The Kashmir problem worsened when the talks with the Cabinet Mission were in progress. The League leadership made an attempt to get the National Conference merged in the League with a view to strengthen their bargain with the Congress and the Cabinet Mission. But it did not succeed. Like the Khan Brothers in the NWF Province and the national Muslims elsewhere in the country, the National Conference took a firm stand against Muslim sectarianism. As its slogan was ‘Quit Kashmir’, the Maharaja and his government started taking actions against it. Leaders of the National Conference, including Sheikh Abdullah, were arrested. The Sheikh was arrested while he was on his way to Delhi to meet and hold discussions with Nehru who was then the president of the All-India States People’s Conference. This provoked Nehru who proceeded to Kashmir, but he was also arrested on his entry into the state. The situation was brought under control by the intervention of the Viceroy and the Indian government, on the one side, and the Congress Working Committee, on the other.

This was a shining example of the attitude of the British government and that of the rulers of the princely states as well as the leaders of the Congress and the League towards the problems of the states. The Maharaja tried to suppress the democratic movements in the state by putting under arrest even Jawharlal Nehru who was widely known to become the prime minister of the country within the next few weeks. Neither the Viceroy nor the British government did anything worthwhile to dissuade the Kashmir government from taking such repressive actions. The Viceroy who suggested the Kashmir government to avoid Nehru’s arrest and to postpone the trial of Sheikh Abdullah received a reply from the Maharaja offering to “abdicate and his prime minister to resign if the Government of India compelled them to take no action against Jawharlal”. Thereupon the Viceroy withdrew his suggestion. It was only after the arrest of Nehru that the trial of Sheikh Abdullah was adjourned and Nehru brought back to Delhi at the instance of the Viceroy, the Cabinet Mission and the Congress Working Committee.
It is worth noticing that the Muslim League was completely indifferent to the Kashmir issue. The National Conference accepting the general political outlook of the Congress and under the leadership of a national Muslim who had been maintaining relations with Nehru, had been irritating to the League and its leader, Jinnah. But they were helpless. They were placed themselves in a position in which they were unable to protest against the actions taken even by a ‘Hindu ruler’ against such an organization like the National Conference and its leaders. On the other side, the leaders of the Congress which had been characterized by the League as a Hindu political party had been coming forward to protest against the repressive actions of this Hindu ruler. Although this was contrary to the ‘two-nations theory’ of the League, it could not have taken any other stand in the background of the bargain with the British and the Congress in which it had been engaged.

On the other hand, although the Congress and Nehru acted in a manner helpful to the National Conference, they found that the only way to solve the Kashmir problem was through consultations with the Viceroy and the Cabinet Mission. Nehru’s biographer has stated that on hearing the news of the arrest of the Sheik “his (Nehru’s) first impulse was to leave Simla to Kashmir to support his friends, but he curbed himself so as to give the Viceroy a chance to intervene and not to worsen the situation by disobeying any restraining order which might be served on him. ....By the middle of June, Jawaharlal felt he had waited long enough and decided to enter the State....” ¹ He added that “it was the adjournment of the trial of Sheikh Abdullah and the insistence of the Working Committee which led Jawaharlal to return to Delhi on the clear understanding that he would be back in Kashmir”²

² Ibid p. 323.
The Kashmir incident was only one of the events which had been taking place in the princely states all over India. Following the efforts made by the leftist organizations to link the mighty struggles of workers, peasants, government employees and other sections of the people that were going on across the country with the people’s movements in the princely states, these movements had begun to take a revolutionary form. Some of these movements took a still higher form as that of Punnapra-Vayalar and Telangana.

The movement in Kashmir under the leadership of the National Conference also had taken a revolutionary form. The ‘Naya Kashmir’ programme formulated by the National Conference had been considerably influenced by the ideologies of communism and socialism. However, the partition of India and the developments that followed caused the democratic movement in Kashmir to deviate from this path and made it a problem preparing the ground for disintegration of India. The British rulers, the Muslim League (later the rulers of Pakistan) and the Hindu communalists alike utilized the democratic movement based on secularism and the ‘Naya Kashmir’ programme as part of the Hindu-Muslim problem which was later turned into an India-Pakistan problem.

The Congress, though it had adopted an approach relatively more democratic and secular, regarded, on the other hand, the problems of the princely states, including that of Kashmir, as a part of its bargain with the government and the Muslim League. The dreadful results of this attitude adversely affected the future not only of Kashmir, and other princely states but also of the entire country.

IV. BEFORE AND AFTER THE CALCUTTA RIOTS

We have noted earlier that the League had unconditionally accepted the long-term scheme of the Cabinet Mission.
They regarded the provision contained in the scheme to group the provinces into sections with the right to every section to decide by majority votes the future of the provinces included in the respective sections would lead to the formation of Pakistan. The Congress, on the other hand, accepted the long-term scheme subject to its own interpretation of this provision. The League leaders maintained that the acceptance of the scheme by the Congress with interpretation was, in fact, a rejection of the scheme and accused the Cabinet Mission of hiding this fact.

As we know, the essence of the short-term scheme of the Cabinet Mission was the formation of an interim government at the Centre with the representatives of the parties accepting the long-term scheme. Thus, the leaders of the Muslim League thought that the interim government would be formed including the representatives of the League which had accepted the long-term scheme but excluding the Congress which had rejected the scheme. They also thought they would be able to utilize such a political situation to strengthen their activities for the formation of Pakistan. But the Cabinet Mission's declaration that both the Congress and the League had accepted its long-term scheme believed their hope.

When the problem of the formation of interim government came up, it became necessary for the Congress to introduce certain changes in the organization. Nehru took over the presidency from Azad. Subsequently, the AICC which met at Bombay in July ratified the Working Committee's resolution accepting the long-term scheme of the Cabinet Mission with the interpretation that the provinces irrespective of which section they were placed in would have the right of autonomy. Besides, in the speech he made as the Congress President, Nehru rejected League's interpretation and declared that neither the British government nor the Cabinet Mission had the right to impose limitations on the sovereignty of the Constituent Assembly. This angered the League leaders. The efforts made by the British government to appease them also failed. The Council of the League which met
at Bombay on 27th July decided to resort to the method of 'direct action' in protest against the attitudes of the Congress and the British government. A resolution adopted by the Council called upon the Muslims to renounce forthwith the titles conferred upon them by the "aleign government". In the words of Jinnah, "never have we in the whole history of the League done anything except by constitutional methods and by constitutionalism. But now we are obliged and forced into this position. This day we did goodbye to constitutional methods." Jinnah said that the British and the Congress had been holding pistols in their hands, the former the pistol of authority and arms and the latter that of mass struggle and non-cooperation. "Today we have also forged a pistol and are in a position to use it."

The council directed the lower units of the League to organize processions and public meetings as part of the observance of the 'Direct Action Day' on 16th August to explain the League stand on the scheme of the Cabinet Mission. Although it was suggested that the observance of the Protest Day should be peaceful, it turned out to be the beginning of terrible the events (Hindu-Muslim riots) to come.

Meanwhile, certain developments took place before the observation of the Direct Action Day, which gave it an added impetus. The Viceroy had been taking steps with regard to the formation of an interim government in accordance with the short-term scheme of the Cabinet Mission. He presented before the Congress President Nehru and the League President Jinnah a proposal to form a 14-member interim government with six Congress members (including one Scheduled Castes member), five League members and three representatives of other minority communities including one Sikh. But since the League had withdrawn its acceptance of the long-term scheme of the Cabinet Mission when it decided to resort to direct action and also since the Congress had already declared acceptance of it, the British government had taken a decision to form the interim government without the representation of the League. Accordingly, the Viceroy sent
a letter to the Congress President Nehru inviting him to form an interim government. In the same letter the Viceroy indicated that he would appreciate Nehru reaching an agreement with Jinnah and asked him to consider whether he should discuss the matter with Jinnah before submitting his proposals in this regard. In reply to this Nehru stated that he would approach the League and urge their cooperation if a public announcement was made to the effect that he had been invited to constitute an interim government and that he had accepted the invitation. Accordingly, an announcement was made on 22nd August.

This announcement naturally angered the League leaders. Consequently they carried out vigorously the observation of the Direct Action Day. The observation of the Day in Calcutta deserves particular mention. The League government of Bengal declared 16th August a holiday. In the background of extremely provocative speeches and other forms of agitation adopted by the League, the action of the provincial government created a situation of great tension in Calcutta. The observation of 'Direct Action Day' culminated in mass killings and other acts of violence. Although an accurate account is not available, it has been generally admitted that about 5000 people were killed and 15,000 seriously injured. Human corpses piled and blood spilled all over the streets. Among the killed were women and children. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were all among the victims of violence.

Even while these brutal acts were going on, the provincial government did not take any action to put down the violence. The Governor who was particularly responsible for the maintenance of law and order did not move either. He stuck to the attitude that he would not do anything unless asked by his ministers. The military was called in only after the massacre which lasted for about 48 hours. And within a few hours after that all violent activities were stopped and the situation brought under control.

This brief description of events clearly demonstrates the role played by the Muslim League and the British
authorities in the outbreak of the Calcutta riots. Through the "direction action day" observation, the League tried to create the impression that it was capable of creating the kind of 'mass force' that the Congress was able to forge through consistent efforts made during the past quarter of a century. And the League ministry of Bengal tried to convert it into the beginning of the politics of communal riots. The British Governor was not prepared either to dissuade them from this, or to curb the riots with the help of the military. It was a warning to the effect that, like the Congress, the League also was capable of forging the weapon of 'direct action' and that if the League ventured to do it, the entire country would be thrown into a civil war.

The League organized these riots against the Hindus and the Congress. At that stage, the victims were mostly the Hindus. As it was found that the ministers and the Governor who were responsible for putting down the riots were not acting in that way, the Hindus and the Sikhs also started resorting to violence. Among those who were killed and injured at the stage, there were many Muslims. The riots spread to other places too. In Noakhali (now in Bangladesh) the victims of the riots were the Hindus, while in Bihar and other places the victims were the Muslims. Thus the Calcutta riots led to a series of communal riots in many parts of the country.

These riots were reflected in the moves being made to form the interim government. The Viceroy who had taken steps to form an interim government under the leadership of Nehru, now started exerting pressures on him to reach an agreement with Jinnah with a view to bring the League in the interim government. He reminded Nehru that the exclusion of the League from the interim government would only help to spread the communal riots all over the country.

Meanwhile, a new ministry (Executive Council) had taken office on 2nd September. On the very next day, Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan, a member of the cabinet, was stabbed. The attack on him was an expression of wrath of the followers
of the League for allowing his name to be included in the list of Congress members in the proposed ministry. This further worsened the situation and also helped the Viceroy to exert more pressure on Nehru to placate the League and change the composition of the ministry. Finally, on 15th October, Sharat Chandra Bose, Shafaat Ahmad Khan and Syed Ali Zaheer resigned from the ministry to make room for the League nominees in the ministry. Subsequently, Liaquat Ali Khan, Chundrigar, Abdur Rab Nishtar, Glanzanfar Ali Khan, and Jogendra Nath Mandal joined the ministry representing the League. Mandal, belonging to the Scheduled Castes figured in the League quota because Azaf Ali, a Muslim, was included among the Congress nominees in the ministry! Thus, the entry of the League in the ministry sharpened the Congress-League quarrel.

The explanation offered by the League for deciding to join the ministry is significant to note. They considered that the entire Central administration remaining under the control of the Congress was detrimental to the interests of the Muslim and other communities. Further, the presence of certain individuals in the ministry who did not command the confidence and respect of the Muslim community would have serious repercussions. Jinnah wrote to the viceroy that the League was joining the ministry to avoid these problems.

In other words, the entry of the League in the ministry was a continuation of the communal riots raging on the streets of Calcutta and in the villages in Noakhali, Bihar and other places. Two mutually competing parties in the government and two communities cutting the throat of each other in the streets and in the fields—this was the situation. The entire Indian politics had entered a new and more dangerous stage.

V. THE "GREATEST TEST"

The Conflicts that occurred inside the interim government as well as those outside before its formation marked
the beginning of the process of partition of India. All these were known to the public. Certain other developments also were taking place not so publicly during the same period. Although most people could not perceive the significance of these developments at that time, they had a lot to do with the politics of Indian Union which emerged out of the partition.

We have noted earlier that Nehru had taken over the Congress presidency from Azad while the discussions with Cabinet Mission were in progress. Consequently the Viceroy invited Nehru as the Congress President to form the interim government. However, evidence had come to light later to indicate that things might have developed in a different way. J. B. Kripalani, then the General Secretary of the Congress, stated:

The Working Committee meeting held in Calcutta from December 7 to 11, 1945 decided to hold the session of the Congress in the first week of April 1946. Proposals were invited by the AICC office for the election of the president. ... Three names were duly proposed by the provinces—those of Sardar Patel, Pattabhi and mine. Jawaharlal’s name had not been proposed.

Gandhiji had earlier expressed a wish that at that juncture Jawaharlal should be the President. What reasons impelled Gandhiji to recommend his name were not mentioned, so far as I remember. The final date of the proposals to be received by the AICC was drawing near. Only fifteen members of the All-India Congress Committee are required to propose the name of the President. A meeting of the Working Committee was being held in Delhi a few days earlier. I sent a paper round, proposing the name of Jawaharlal. The members of the Working Committee signed it and also some local members of the AICC. It was thus that the name of Jawaharlal was proposed for the presidency. The others thereupon withdrew their names. It was certain that if Jawaharlal’s name had not been proposed, the Sardar would have been elected as the
President. The Sardar did not like my intervention. I have since wondered if, as the General Secretary, I should have been instrumental in proposing Jawaharlal’s name in deference to Gandhiji’s wishes in the matter. But I did not think that the matter was of very great importance. The President of the Congress is the Chairman of the Working Committee. He is first among the equals. No important issue can be decided except by the Working Committee. Also, I do not think that independence, in whatever form it might come, was round the corner. I thought that we had many more struggles ahead. But who can forecast the future? On such seemingly trivial accidents depend the fate of men and even of nations.\footnote{J. B. Kripalani, \textit{Gandhi, His Life and Thought}, New Delhi, Publications Division, 1970, pp. 248-249.}

Kripalani indicates that if he had not proposed Nehru’s name to the presidency at the instance of Gandhi, Sardar Patel would have been called upon to form the interim government as the Congress President. Although Patel and other members of the Working Committee, as the loyal colleagues of Gandhi, approved of Nehru outwardly as the head of the interim government, they were unable to approve of this choice at heart. As the League ministers left the interim government following the partition, the friction between Nehru and Patel became intense. It continued till the death of Patel.

This was hardly a problem of rivalry between Nehru and Patel alone; it was the beginning of factionalism and conflicts at the top level of the Congress. The faction fight appeared again when a new president had to be elected following the resignation of Nehru as the president consequent upon his selection as the head of the ministry in the interim government. Azad, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Kripalani were the candidates to fill the post of the president. When it appeared that Kripalani was most likely to get elected to the liking of Gandhi and Patel, many Congress leaders, including Nehru, approached Gandhi requesting him not to
approve of Kripalani’s candidature. Nevertheless, Kripalani was elected president of the Congress. 2

Briefly speaking, while a wild controversy was raging between the Congress and the League on the question of India’s partition, a serious factional fight was developing within the Congress itself. The contents of both these conflicts were of the same nature. The main question underlying the Congress-League conflict was whether India should be kept united or should be divided into two in order to share the political power which was going to be obtained in the near future. The conflict within the Congress, on the other hand, was over the question of who should occupy the top position in the Congress which was going to wield political power.

Although this was a new development at the Central leadership level in the Congress, it was not a new phenomenon in the Congress organization taken as a whole. Right in 1937 when Congress ministries took office in the different provinces, disputes started at the provincial level over berth in the ministries. The war and the Quit India struggle put an end to these disputes for the time being. But when the Congress ministries again came to power in the provinces following the elections in 1946, the disputes reappeared in the provinces. When the gulf between the ministerial and organizational wings widened on the one side, disputes arose on the other side as to who should be the leader of each of the two wings. The developments that took place in the second half of 1945 only showed that this dispute spread to the Central leadership when the time came to form the interim government.

These developments naturally perturbed Gandhi. But more perturbing developments were taking place in the different parts of the country. The communal riots which started in Calcutta spread to Noakhali and from there to Bihar. Details of the attack on the members of the minority Hindu community in eastern Bengal had been coming in. In one of

his prayer meetings, Gandhi announced that Congress President Kripalani would go to Noakhali and stated that if necessary he himself would visit Noakhali and die there. Accordingly, Kripalani accompanied by his wife, Sucheta Kripalani, and a group of Congress leaders left for Noakhali. They collected details of the ghastly happenings and consoled the victims of these acts and rendered them different kinds of assistance. Following, Gandhi himself left for Noakhali.

Meanwhile communal riots had spread to the Hindu majority province of Bihar. While the Noakhali killings were organized to avenge the attack on the Muslims at a certain stage during the Calcutta riots, the attack on the Muslim minority in Bihar was organized to avenge the attack on the Hindu minority in Noakhali. Pained deeply by these happenings, Gandhi wrote to Patel: “My non-violence is being tested here in a way it has never been tested before.”

As reports from Bihar started pouring in, Gandhi felt the desire to leave Noakhali and go to Bihar. He felt that being a Hindu it was his duty to leave Noakhali where the Hindus were being attacked and go to Bihar where the Muslims were facing the same fate. However, certain Muslim leaders advised him that his presence in Bihar was not an urgent necessity since other leaders from Delhi had arrived there and that it would be better if he continued his work in Noakhali. So, he stayed back.

This was the beginning of the activities in which he was going to engage himself in the next several months. Gandhi had been staying in the capital city of Delhi to assist other Congress leaders in their discussions with the British authorities on the transfer of power. He felt deeply disturbed by the fact that the Congress leaders who were considered to be his loyal disciples were not working according to his advice. He saw for himself that Nehru, Patel, Rajagopalachari and other top leaders were eager to get hold of power by any means. Further, they were fighting among themselves over the sharing of the political power after its transfer to
the Congress. Above all, there was the problem of the country-wide communal riots. He described this as "the most complex and difficult problem which he had to face in his life."

The (Congress) organization which he was able to build through consistent efforts for a quarter of a century had begun to crack. The leaders who had been engaged in selfless service to the people had now begun to engage themselves in factional struggles over the sharing of power. On the other side, the Hindu and Muslim communities were brutally attacking each other in such a way as it appeared impossible to ever realize the goal of Hindu-Muslim unity and friendship which he had been consistently advocating. In the circumstance, Gandhi thought that his place of activities was not the capital city but in the villages of East Bengal and Bihar where people belonging to the two communities were killing each other and that his work was not to advise and assist the Congress leaders in their discussions with the British government on the transfer of power, but to solace and assist those who fell victim to communal riots. Thus, while Nehru, Patel, Rajagopalachari and other disciples of Gandhi began to wield power as ministers, Gandhi took up the work of saving the people from the horror of communal riots as the last mission of his life.

As we shall see in the following chapters, the gulf between Gandhi and the leaders who were known to be his disciples was widening. Two groups were emerging: a ministerial group playing all kinds of tactics with a view to acquire political power as early as possible, on one side, and Gandhi and his closest associates feeling disturbed by the sight of these manoeuvres and engaged themselves in implementing constructive programmes, including communal unity.

How did this happen? How did the Congress which was considered to have been built on the principles of nonviolence and selfless service to the people turn itself into a centre of rivalries for political power? How did the ideology of communal unity ceaselessly propagated for about a quarter
of a century get destroyed in this manner? Gandhi was unable to find answers to these questions. But he had recognized the truth that such a situation had emerged. This was what distinguished him from other Congress leaders.
LAST DAYS OF THE WAVELL REGIME

I. STRIKES AND PEASANT STRUGGLES

The arguments and counter-arguments centring around the formation of the interim government and the communal riots that followed did not complete the picture of Indian politics in the later half of 1946 and in 1947. While the tragic drama of communal riots was being enacted in the different parts of the country, and in parallel to it, certain other developments also were taking place.

We have dealt earlier with the mass upsurge which had emerged throughout the country following the end of the war. Strikes by workers, demonstrations and other forms of protest action by workers, students and other sections of the urban masses were widespread in the country. These were linked with political agitations, too. This was how agitations embracing all sections of the people developed
against the trial of the INA leaders. It was in the same atmosphere again that people in thousands came out in support of the naval mutiny against imperialist domination.

It was, in fact, to stem the tide of this mass upsurge that the British imperialists devised the evil design to prepare the grounds to intensify the Hindu-Muslim conflicts leading them to communal riots, while, at the same time, creating the impression that efforts were being made to transfer power to Indians. As a result, communal feelings began to get strengthened among the poor sections of the people like workers and peasants leading the less class conscious among them to actively participate in the communal riots. However, the rulers could not completely stem the tide of strikes and peasant struggles as evident from the following.

In August-September 1946, workers of the South Indian Railway went on a strike. The authorities let loose cruel repressions against the striking railwaymen as a result of which nine were killed and more than a hundred injured in the police firing. Over 400 workers were arrested. The AITUC gave a call to observe 18th September as a day of solidarity with the striking railwaymen. In response to this call, rallies and demonstrations were held in the different parts of the country and funds collected to help the workers on strike. The strike which brought the railway traffic to a standstill for about a month was withdrawn only after Asaf Ali, the Minister of Railways in the interim government, gave assurances to the workers on their demands.

Workers of the North Eastern Railway also launched a strike almost during the same period. As was the case with the strike in the South Indian Railway, communists and the AITUC were in the forefront of this strike. Although there was a union led by the Muslim League in the NW Railway, the union led by the Communists was able to surge ahead of all other unions, including the one led by the League. Later, workers under its leadership courageously fought against the communal riots in the north western region until the partition of the country.
Among the strikes launched in other sectors during the 1946-47 period, the strikes of the textile workers in Bombay, Nagpur and Kanpur and those of the workers of the coal mines in Giridih in Bihar, workers of the Kolar gold mines in Mysore, the port workers of Calcutta deserve particular mention. In many of these strikes several workers were killed and several more injured in police firing.

A notable feature of the series of strikes launched during the post-war years was that a large section of middle class employees including government servants had entered in the strike movement. The country-wide strike of the employees of the Post and Telegraph Department was, in fact, the forerunner of the strikes of the government employees in Madras and in other provinces. Neither the trade union workers nor the government employees had ever thought that it was possible to link the agitations and struggles of the government employees with those of the organized working class. The special feature of the 1946-47 strike movement was that it marked the beginning of the efforts in that direction.

It was an upsurge of the working class embracing the movements in the princely states more extensively than ever before. The strikes which were launched by the working class in the states like Travancore, Hyderabad, Mysore, Indore, etc., were linked with the political movements being conducted by the democrats in the respective states. Working class struggles in Travancore and Hyderabad had played significant roles in the development of the movements of Punnapra-Vayalar and Telangana, respectively, which represented the highest form of the people’s struggles in the princely states.

A revolutionary upsurge was witnessed also among the peasantry during the same period. In April 1945, immediately before the end of the war in Europe, a conference of the All-India Kisan Sabha was held in the Netra Kona Village in the Mymensingh district of East Bengal (now in Bangladesh). In the conference and also in the meetings of the Kisan Council that followed, the problems affecting the
peasants as well as the common problems affecting the people were discussed elaborately and a call was given to build a broad-based mass movement with a view to find solutions to these problems. These developments prepared the ground for mass based peasant struggles in all the provinces side by side the working class strikes.

Even before the Netra Kona session of the Kisan Sabha, the peasants in Bengal had been raising the slogan of reducing the share of the landowners (jotedars) to one-third instead of the existing one-half of the crops raised by the cultivating peasants (share-croppers). The resulting movement known by the generic name of the Tebhaga movement received a new impetus from the Kisan conference. Thus, while the discussions with the Cabinet Mission and other political developments were taking place, the tide of the Tebhaga movement in Bengal was rising high.

Peasant struggles based on similar partial, immediate demands of the peasantry were going on in many other provinces. But the Tebhaga movement was distinct from the peasant movements in other parts of the country on two counts. First, in all other provinces the peasant movement was confined to certain regions, whereas in Bengal the movement was spread all over the province. For example, in Kerala the movement of the peasants to establish their right to pay the rent to the landlord in cash was confined to the northern part of the erstwhile Malabar district. Similarly, in Andhra, the peasant movement (except the Telangana movement) was largely confined to the Krishna, Guntur and Godavari districts. Again, in Maharashtra the peasant movement was purely confined to the centres of the Warli peasants embracing one or two taluks.

Second, peasants in both the Muslim majority East Bengal and the Hindu majority West Bengal equally participated in the struggle. It may even be stated that the movement in the East was somewhat more powerful than in the West. It may be noted that the entire peasantry, irrespective of religious affiliations, were fighting against the
jotedars in the Muslim majority region of a province in which a political party (the Muslim League) functioning on the basis of the argument that the Muslims are a separate nation, was in power. And it was the Muslim League ministry which resorted to repressive actions against these struggles with a determination to suppress them. The Hindu and Muslim jotedars who were quarrelling with each her on the issues of future constitution and the interim government extended full support to these repressive actions of the League government.

The Tebhaga movement and the Kisan Sabha played a unique role in resisting the communal riots in Bengal and Bihar. It may be specifically noted that the riots did not break out in those areas in the Noakhali-Tippera districts of Bengal in which the Kisan Sabha had considerable influence. In such areas the Kisan Sabha and the activists of the Tebhaga movement organized relief camps for the refugees from the riot affected neighbouring areas. Similarly, in Moghpur in the Monghyr district of Bihar, the Communist Party, Kisan Sabha and other mass organizations organized relief activities to protect the people in the riot stricken areas and to provide relief to the victims of the communal riots. In the urban areas, the trade unions and students organizations were active in the relief operations. Both in the rural and urban areas the Communist Party was in the forefront in giving leadership to these activities.

This and the activities of Gandhi in Noakhali were apparently the same. Both were pained by the sight of people, who ought to have lived as brethren, cutting each other's throat and both expressed their intense desire to stop it. However, they were poles apart on the answer to the question as to how such a situation came about and how to get out of it. The Communist Party regarded that the way to stop all quarrels and to forge unity among the different communities was to wage an uncompromising struggle against the British rulers and organized struggles of workers and peasants against capitalists and landlords based on their
grievances and demands. Gandhi, on the other hand, had been engaged in giving advice and directions to the Congress leaders in their negotiations for a compromise with the British government. He had no sympathy towards workers' and peasants' struggles.

But the atmosphere of communal riots did not cease to exist, as desired by Gandhi and the Communist Party; on the contrary the conflicts were getting sharper day by day. Finally, in the midst of the worst kind of human tragedy, two independent countries, Indian Union and Pakistan, emerged.

Could this have been avoided? It is difficult to answer this question. But the Communist Party, one among those which tried to avoid it, was not powerful enough to effectively challenge the policies pursued by the leaders of the Congress and the League. Gandhi without being conscious of the need to challenge these policies was, on the other hand, blessing the politics of compromise of the Congress leaders. The political approach of the top bourgeois leadership of the Congress and the League, including Gandhi, and the policy of disintegration pursued by the League leadership together with the efforts made by the British rulers to utilize both these factors to preserve their dominance made Indian partition and the widespread communal riots inevitable.

Gandhi could not do anything other than feeling pained to have to see the mission of his life failing. The Communist Party, on the other hand, was not strong enough to bring into action what it thought correct and clear. Thus, Indian politics which had been the plaything of the British rulers as well as of the leaders of the Congress and the League moved from one crisis to another.

II. PUNNAPRA-VAYALAR AND TELANGANA

The struggles in Punnapra-Vayalar in Travancore and in Telangana in Hyderabad represented the highest from of the post-war revolutionary struggles. In many respects, these
struggles were similar in nature. For example, both Travancore and Hyderabad were princely states and in both the states agitations for responsible government were making great strides. In both the states there was a developed Communist Party. The princely rulers of both the states were striving to safeguard their status in the background of the discussions being held among the representatives of the British government, the Congress and the League. The Communist Party which had been playing a decisive role in developing popular agitations against these manoeuvres had been able to enhance its influence among the non-communist democrats in both the states.

In many other respects these struggles were also dissimilar. In Travancore, the ruler and a majority of the population were Hindus whereas in Hyderabad the ruler was a Muslim and a majority of the population were Hindus. The Muslim League had been trying to include Hyderabad in Pakistan in the event of Indian partition. Whether it joined Pakistan or it was maintained as an independent state, a state of Hyderabad which was not part of India would constitute a danger to the security of India. Therefore, the Congress wanted to make Hyderabad a part of India. That is, Hyderabad occupied a vital place in the conflicts between the Congress and the League. As for Travancore, there was no question of joining Pakistan. But the rulers declared their intention to remain an 'independent' country without joining Hindustan, either. Based on this, an "Independent Travancore" movement had come into existence there. Besides, in place of the democratic demand of a responsible government in the sense that it should be responsible to an elected legislature, the rulers of Travancore raised the issue of establishing a constitutional system with a government not responsible to a legislature which may be an elected one. Since the contemplated system was on the model of the presidential system of America, it was named "American Model".

If the contemplated system of "Independent Travancore" in the "American Model" was to come into force, it
would be extremely dangerous to the entire bourgeois
democratic movement, for the "American Model" was a
negation of the democratic objective which the freedom
movement had been upholding from its very inception. In
addition, the existence of an independent country with a
long sea coast at one end of India would bring danger to
India's security. Therefore, a state-wide agitation arose
against the ideas of 'Independent Travancore' and 'American
Model' with the Communist Party in the forefront.

Another factor which distinguished Travancore and
Hyderabad from one another relates to the social organiza-
tions and class relations existing in the two states. In
Travancore, there was a fairly organized working class.
Right from the agitations for responsible government in 1938,
the working class had effectively used general strike, a
weapon characteristic of that class. As the strike helped the
agitation for responsible government, the agitation in turn
helped the growth of the working class. In Travancore, the
Communist Party was born in the background in which
democratic struggles of the people and the independent work-
ers' struggles were helping and relying on each other. Conse-
sequently the Communist Party in Travancore was the political
party of the working class as well as the vanguard of the
democratic movement in the full sense.

That was not the position in Hyderabad. True, there
was a kind of trade union developed in the capital city of
Hyderabad and there were militant strikes immediately
before the beginning of the Telangana struggle. But the
Communist Party had no influence in the trade union move-
ment to any considerable extent. The main strong-holds of
the Party were in the rural areas and that, too, in the Telugu
speaking Telangana region. Although there were democratic
movements against the princely rule in the Marathi and
Kannada speaking regions in the state, these movements were
under bourgeois leadership. The influence of the Communist
Party was weak in these movements. Thus, the Party in
Hyderabad was confined to the Telugu speaking region of
Telangana relying mainly on the peasantry. The peasant unions and the Andhra Mahasabha were the mass organizations involved in the Telangana struggle.

The distinction between Travancore and Telangana in regard to the class relations that had existed amongst the people and the mass base of the Communist Party may be found reflected in the nature and development of the Punnapra-Vayalar and Telangana struggles. The coir workers in the Ambalappuzha ane Sherthalai taluks with a fighting tradition of over a decade and their fighting organizations together with the repressive actions taken by the rulers to suppress the workers constituted the political background which led to the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle. In Hyderabad, on the other hand, the discontent of the Telugu speaking peasantry towards the feudal elements, called the Deshmukhs, and the aspirations of the Andhra nationality led to the Telangana struggle.

Although the workers in Alleppey and the Communist Party in the whole of Kerala had taken part in the mass upsurge against the feudal-jenmi elements in the Ambalappuzha-Sherthalai taluks only weeks before the outbreak of the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle, the Communist Party there could not rise to the position of the leader of the peasant masses. (In Kerala, the peasant movement emerged and peasant struggles fought in the erstwhile Malabar district of Madras and its influence did not extend to Travancore.) In contrast to this, the working class had no direct role in the Telangana movement, although the communist movement there, like elsewhere, was based on working class ideologies and outlook.

There was also a difference in the course of these two struggles. The Punnapra-Vayalar struggle developed rapidly into a conflict between the armed volunteers of the working class and the state army and got suppressed—all in the matter of a few weeks. The Telangana struggle, on the other hand, was a peasant revolutionary struggle lasting for about five years during which more than 4000 communists and peasant activists were killed and over 10,000 communists and
workers of mass movements were thrown behind the bars for long periods. As a result of this long drawn out struggle, ‘Gram Raj’ was established in 3000 villages covering an area of 10,000 square miles with a population of about three million. The people’s organizations and the volunteer force seized about a million acres of land from the landlords and distributed them among the peasants. Minimum wage of agricultural workers was fixed and they were liberated from the social-feudal oppressions. Such a long drawn out revolutionary movement with far-reaching effects of this kind had never taken place anywhere in India before. What was expressed in these two struggles was the efforts made by the princely rulers of these states to sustain their autocratic rule in the background of the negotiations on the future constitution being carried on by the leaders of the Congress and the League and the protests of the democratic minded people against these efforts. Consequently, the impact of the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle remained in the politics of Travancore even after it was suppressed. Although the armed conflict had ended, the democratic minded people in the state, inspired by the struggle, continued their political struggles raising the slogans of “End the Dewan Rule”, “Dump Independent Travancore and the American Model in the Arabian Sea”, etc. Until the rulers, isolated from the people, retraced their steps, the politics of Punnapra-Vayalar remained relevant in the state.

The rulers of Hyderabad held on for about another year after the establishment of a responsible government in Travancore. Finally, the Indian army had to intervene to force the rulers to surrender, following which Hyderabad joined the Indian Union and a responsible government established there. The political situation changed after these developments. As the bourgeois democrats withdrew their support to the movement following these developments, the Telangana movement lost the popular support of an important section which had remained behind the movement until the surrender of the Nizam.
From this brief description, it will be clear that Punnapra-Vayalar and the Telangana struggles formed an integral part of the post-war revolutionary upsurge in India. Therefore, as the Indian political situation which formed the basis of this revolutionary upsurge underwent a fundamental change with the establishment of a bourgeois democratic system at the centre and in the provinces including the princely states, the political base of these struggles disappeared.

Since the Communist Party had been playing a leading role in both these struggles, the march to the revolutionary future as visualized by the Party became more unhindered. The bourgeois parliamentary elections held after these two struggles demonstrated the premier position of the Communist Party in the Andhra districts including the Telangana region and in the districts of Kerala including the Ambalappuzha-Shethalai taluks. It became clear that the Communist Party was one of the foremost political parties that emerged in the post-independent Indian political scene.

We have explained earlier the circumstance which led to the suppression of the naval mutiny of February 1946. The same can be applied to the Punnapra-Vayalar and Telangana struggles as well. The different streams of people’s actions and feelings like the discontent among the ranks of the British Indian armed forces, the wide-spread workers strikes and peasant struggles of 1945-46, the agitations of the people in the princely states throughout the length and breadth of the country and the preparedness of the people to carry on armed struggles as witnessed in the Punnapra-Vayalar and in Telangana—each of these streams passed through little channels and finally petered out, rather than joining together to make up a mighty turbulent river of revolution. Each of these struggles was isolated and suppressed as and when it occurred.

The leftist parties including the Communist Party were not strong enough to unify them and convert them into a single comprehensive revolutionary upsurge. The bourgeois leadership of the independence movement, on the other
hand, adopted the course of bargain and compromise, instead of revolutionary struggles. The result? The British rulers could convert the popular feelings into Hindu-Muslim riots.

III. CRISES IN THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

For over six months after the formation of the interim government, Wavell remained as the Viceroy. This period was marked by constant conflicts between the Congress and the League, on the one hand, and between the Congress and the British authorities, on the other. As a result, the functioning of the interim government often came to a standstill. The events that took place during this period were such that everyone was convinced that a united independent India was impossible to realize.

At the provincial level, in Sind and Bengal where League ministries were in power, the Viceroy and the Governors were in full cooperation with the provincial ministries and the ruling party, whereas in the provinces ruled by the Congress, they were indifferent if not hostile to the ministries. The Viceroy even ventured to prevent Nehru’s protest note being forwarded to the Secretory of State and openly defended the Governors of the League-rulled provinces. A more important incident was the attempt made by the British authorities to prevent Nehru’s visit to the NWF Province after the formation of the interim government.

The subject of tribal affairs in the interim government was directly under Nehru and the NWF Province was ridden with tribal problems. As such, no one could object to his visiting the province. But his visit to the NWF Province had a political significance. Although the Muslims constitute 97 percent of the population of the NWF Province, the League was polled less than 30 percent of the votes. In the circumstance, his visit to the province would not remain purely official; it would change into a political visit challenging the claims made by the League. Therefore, the Governor
himself proceeded to Delhi to request Nehru to defer his plan to visit the province. When this became of no avail, the British officials encouraged the League in organizing anti-Nehru demonstrations during his visit. Later, in a letter to Mountbatten, Governor Olaf Caroe blamed Nehru’s holding the portfolio of tribal affairs for the whole trouble.

This was by no means an isolated incident. This and similar other incidents were part of the scheme consciously devised by the British authorities to put as much obstructions as possible before the Congress after the formation of the interim government. They fully utilized the anti-Congress feelings of the League for this purpose.

With the entry of the League in the interim government, the problem of distribution of portfolios came up. Wavell supported the League in its claim either to external affairs or to home, which were being handled by Nehru and Patel, respectively. When the Congress refused to part with either of these subjects, it was feared at one stage that the entire plan of Wavell would break down. Finally the League had to be contented with the finance portfolio. What prevented the interim government from breaking up at that stage was the thinking among the League leaders that to have a share in the government was far more important than getting hold of this or that portfolio, lest the Congress be the sole ruling party in the country.

When the League joined the government, the Congress-League conflicts were extended to the level of administration also, providing opportunity for the Viceroy to act as an arbiter. In order to avoid it, it was suggested that the ministers meet informally and arrive at an understanding and based on this understanding take decisions formally at the Cabinet meeting. But this arrangement did not work. Instead, the Congress and League ministers met separately in groups. It may be noted that the ministers who did not belong to either of the parties attended the Congress group meetings. Thus the interim government turned into a scene of conflicts between these two camps. The Viceroy got the opportunity to
sharpen the conflicts between the Congress and the League by functioning as an arbiter between the two.

The League had made it clear earlier that they were joining the interim government as it would facilitate the formation of Pakistan. And they adopted an approach towards the Constituent Assembly suited to service this purpose. They argued that the members elected to the Constituent Assembly from the west should be grouped into two sections and the members in these two sections should frame the constitution for their respective sections and that the provinces belonging to these sections would be bound by the decisions taken by the sections by a majority vote. According to the League, this was the essence of the scheme prepared by the Cabinet Mission.

This was not acceptable to the Congress. They demanded that each province belonging to these sections should have the right to decide its own future. They further demanded that any dispute arising out of this should be referred to the Federal Court for its decision.

Since the two parties could not reach an agreement on this issue, the Viceroy had not called for the Constituent Assembly to meet. Finally, under the pressure from Nehru, he called for the session of the Assembly. The League strongly protested against this.

The first session of the Constituent Assembly was scheduled to be held on 9th December. But it was made clear that the League would not participate in it. It had also become clear that even if the League did not participate, the work of the Constituent Assembly would proceed with the participation of all the non-League members of the Assembly. The dispute between the Congress and the League on this issue led to a political deadlock. Outside the government and the Assembly, the people who had rallied behind these parties had begun to move in the direction of communal riots.

The British government once again intervened in the Indian affairs. Prime Minister Attlee invited the leaders of the Congress and the League to London for a discussion.
The Sikh minister Sardar Baldev Sing was also invited to join the talks. Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan went to London to participate in the discussions representing the League. The Congress first declined the invitation, but later agreed to participate in the talks in London.

The talks in London did not help solve the problem. The British government made a declaration accepting the interpretation given by the League with regard to the provisions of section meetings contained in the scheme of the Cabinet Mission. As an attempt to solace the Congress, the British government further declared that any dispute over interpretations on this issue could be referred to the Federal Court. This decision naturally left the Congress dissatisfied.

The situations in India began to deteriorate again. The AICC met in January 1947 and adopted a resolution to the effect that there should be no compulsion on a province to join a section and that the rights of the Sikhs in Punjab should not be endangered. The resolution also declared that if there was an attempt to compel a province to join a section, then a province or a part of a province should have the right to take whatever action as required to give effect to the wishes of the people concerned.

Following, a meeting of the Working Committee of the League was held and adopted a resolution stating that the Congress had now openly rejected the scheme of the Cabinet Mission and demanding dissolution of the Constituent Assembly constituted in accordance with the scheme of the Cabinet Mission which had been rejected by the Congress as well as the Sikhs and the Scheduled Castes who stood with the Congress. The Congress, on the other hand, demanded removal from the interim government the ministers of the League who not only refused to attend the Constituent Assembly but also demanded its dissolution. The Congress raised the complaint that the Viceroy and other British officials were rendering all kinds of assistance to the League. As a protest against this attitude of the British authorities, the non-League ministers threatened to resign from the
interim government. The Congress leaders tactfully suggested
the British government the removal of Wavell from the
viceregal position.

While the Congress and League leaders were in London
in December, certain moves were made by the British
government to change the Viceroy. We shall see more
about it in the next section. Here, it may be noted that
the Viceroy came to realize that things in India were not
moving the way he wished. He had thought that after the
formation of the interim government: first without the League
and later with League's participation, he would be able to
control the situation by acting an arbiter between the two
contending parties. That hope had now belied. On the
contrary, it became obvious now that the policy of 'divide
and rule' which the British authorities, including himself,
had been pursuing might lead to a civil strife in India. He
feared that the responsibility for such a situation would rest
solely upon the British authorities. In order to avoid it,
Wavell formulated a plan to phase out the British forces
from India. The British government, however, rejected his
plan thinking that it would constitute an admission of
defeat. They came to the conclusion that it was essential to
formulate a new approach towards India and to have a
new Viceroy capable of functioning in accordance with it.

IV. WAVELL AND MOUNTBATTEN

The announcement made by Prime Minister Attlee on
20th February, 1947 was in recognition of the need to adopt
a new approach to find a solution to the problems arising
out of the rapidly deteriorating situations in India. The
announcement which was often considered "historic" expressed
their "definite intention to leave India" by a date not later
than June 1948 handing over power to a Central govern-
ment formed on the basis of a constitution agreed upon by
the parties concerned or in the absence of it, to "some form
of Central Government” as a whole or “in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments....” Attlee also announced the appointment of Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander in the South-East Asia, as the new Viceroy.

The news media had from the beginning tried hard to build the image of Mountbatten as a person lacking the faults which Wavell had and possessing the merits which he lacked. The admirers of Mountbatten have praised the “unusual abilities” of Mountbatten and Lady Mountbatten, the part played by the new Viceroy in the British efforts to “free India” as a whole, if possible, otherwise in two parts, etc. Conscious efforts have been made to create the impression that “Freedom at Midnight” became a reality because the “unimaginative” Wavell was replaced by the “imaginative” Mountbatten as the Viceroy. This was reinforced by the fact that the Congress requested Mountbatten to continue as the first Governor-General of Free India.

It is not true to state that Wavell was against the idea of Britain leaving India handing over power to the Indians. It many be recalled that Wavell had placed the proposal before the Secretary of State for India that since it would be futile to attempt to bring about an agreement between the Congress and the League, the British should be ready to leave India in a phased manner. Although different in form and details, the same idea was contained in the announcement made by Attlee. It is thus clear that the “imaginative” Mountbatten and Attlee and the “unimaginative” Wavell alike recognized the fact that the British rulers would not be able to hold on to power in India for long.

It was widely propagated that Wavell was inimical to the Congress and friendly to the League, while Mountbatten was the other way round. This was baseless. For, as we have seen earlier, it was Wavell who took the initiative to form the interim government under the leadership of the Congress but excluding the League and also convened the Constituent Assembly on the face of opposition from the League. At the same time, it was the British government
that made an announcement in favour of the League when the dispute arose between the Congress and the League over the right of the provinces grouped in the different sections in accordance with the scheme of the Cabinet Mission. Mountbatten was, in fact, appointed Viceroy to implement the decision taken in favour of the League.

All this, however, does not mean that there was no distinction between Wavell and Mountbatten or between Wavell and Attlee. Nor does it mean that differences in personalities and their approaches did not affect political developments. There were, however, certain approaches of fundamental nature adopted by the ruling classes of Britain above personal characteristics and approaches. Wavell, Mountbatten, Attlee, Cripps, Pethick-Lawrence and all others, including the out and out conservative Winston Churchill, were handling the Indian question subject to this fundamental approach of the ruling classes. None could deviate from this approach. The central point of this approach was that the British would not be able to hold on to power for long after the war. How to get out of India was the only question over which they had differed from one another. Wavell was of the opinion that it was futile to hold negotiations with Indian political leaders and that Britain should withdraw from India in a phased manner. Attlee and his colleagues who did not agree with this thought that Britain should consult with Indian political leaders and leave India with their consent. In taking the decision to change the Viceroy, they were led by the understanding that Wavell was incapable of getting their consent by negotiating with them in accordance with this new approach, whereas Mountbatten would be able to do it.

The British rulers were unanimous in the opinion that in the event of the British leaving India, power should be handed over to a coalition government of the Congress and the League by bringing about an agreement between them, or, if this was not possible, to two governments by dividing India into two.
Some among the British rulers like Attlee, Cripps, and Mountbatten had closer relations with Nehru and certain other Congress leaders. For that reason, the League leaders looked upon them with suspicion. All the schemes formulated by the British beginning from the 1942 Cripps Mission contained the dichotomy of Hindu India and Muslim India. Autonomy to the Muslim majority provinces and the right to from groups constituted the common factor of all these schemes. The League had the hope and the Congress the fear that this would lead to the realization of the League’s objective of Pakistan. The Cripps Mission and other schemes formulated by the British government reinforced this feeling. Further, as we have repeatedly stated, the central point of dispute between the Congress and the League since the formation of the interim government was the problems relating to the ‘sections’ and the rights of the provinces grouped into these sections. The judgement awarded by the British government on this dispute went in favour of the League.

In other words, the British rulers were unanimous in the view that they would not be able to hang on to power in India for long and that in the event of their leaving India, no Muslim majority province should be allowed to opt out of Pakistan even if it decides that way. The difference of opinion among them was over the question of how to hand over power to the Congress and the Muslim League. Here Mountbatten had certain advantages over Wavell.

First, Mountbatten was a new comer to Indian politics and government. Unlike Wavell who had to deal with the Congress during the Quit India struggle as the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in India, Mountbatten was free from being the object of people’s prejudice. His appointment as the Viceroy at the juncture helped him to create the impression as ‘an administrator to implement a new policy’.

Second, his relation with the British royal family, the stories that got around about his experience of leadership in a vital area during the war and his ability to deal with people had raised expectation that he would be able to face
complex political situation in India. The personal behaviour of Lady Mountbatten added strength to this expectation.

Third, the friendship which had developed between Nehru and Mountbatten while he was the Supreme Commander stationed at Singapore had helped the conduct of negotiations later when he became the Viceroy.

Finally and more importantly, perhaps, he did not attract the hatred of Jinnah as the personal friend of Nehru. This was mainly because Jinnah was conscious of the nature of the scheme Mountbatten was going to implement. Jinnah was certain that whatever Mountbatten might do while maintaining friendship with Nehru, he would be able to turn it in his favour. Both before and after the arrival of Mountbatten, Jinnah acted as a lawyer-politician proficient in negotiations. Consequently, Mountbatten was able to adopt an approach based on the friendship with Nehru and avoiding confrontations with Jinnah.

It must, however, be stated that these personal qualities and capabilities might not have shone but for the political situation prevailing then. The Congress leaders had accepted the partition of India as a reality. They had accepted the sections system contained the long-term scheme of the Cabinet Mission. They had only insisted that the provinces which are grouped into the different sections should not be forcibly merged either in India or Pakistan. They had also recognized the reality that India would have to be divided as a logical extension of the operation of this provision. They now only insisted that just like the division of India, the provinces of Punjab, Bengal and Assam should also be divided.

In other words, while opposing Jinnah's slogan of 'Divide India and Quit', the Congress had adopted the state of mind in effect to bring this slogan in force. Mountbatten had only to accomplish the task of determining the details of Indian partition which was being realized through bargains between the Congress and the League.
I. THE SCHEME OF PARTITION

Mountbatten was sworn in as Viceroy as 24th March 1947. For more than a month after taking office, he held separate discussions with leaders of the various political parties, analyzed their opinions and communicated his conclusions to the British government in early May. Based on an amended version of Mountbatten’s report, on 3rd June, the British government made an announcement which formed the basis for the establishment of two independent sovereign countries, India and Pakistan, on 15th August 1947.

Based on a vast body of documents comprising notes and letters giving the details of the discussions which Mountbatten had held with Indian leaders in this brief period, many books have been written, some of which, like Freedom at Midnight, have been highly controversial. At any rate, these
documents indicated that the question being discussed at that stage was not whether India should be divided or not, but how should India be divided.

The Congress demanded that, like India, the provinces of Punjab and Bengal should also be divided and the League demanded division of Assam also. The Akalis, on the other hand, wanted a separate Sikh state comprising areas in both wings of Punjab. Different sections put forward different proposals in this manner before the Viceroy.

Top leaders of the Congress which was supposed to oppose partition, like Nehru, Patel, Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Azad and Kripalani, proposed, though individually, in one voice to the Viceroy that since the partition of India had become inevitable, the Hindu majority areas of Punjab and Bengal should not be included in Pakistan. Jinnah, on the other hand, argued that these two provinces should "wholesale" become part of Pakistan. If there was justification in the demand for the division of India, what was unjust in the demand for the division of Punjab and Bengal? Jinnah had no answer to this question. He requested Mountbatten not to render Pakistan unviable. At the same time, he insisted on the point that the Muslims must get a separate state, however small and weak it might be. His only request now was that like Punjab and Bengal, the Muslim majority areas of Assam should be made part of Pakistan.

These discussions revealed one thing which is of importance for students of the history of freedom struggle. This was the fact that Gandhi, the undisputed and supreme leader of the Congress for over a quarter of a century remained isolated from his colleagues. Pyarelal, a close associate and secretary of Gandhi, has described an incident which revealed his state of mind in those days. Pyarelal writes:

On...the 1st June (1947), mistaking the hands of his watch, he (Gandhi) woke up earlier than usual. As there was still half an hour before prayer, he remained lying in bed and began to muse in a low voice: 'The purity of my
striving will be put to test only now. Today I find myself alone. Even the Sardar and Jawaharlal think that my reading of the situation is wrong and peace is sure to return if partition is agreed upon. They did not like my telling the Viceroy that even if there was to be a partition, it should not be through British intervention or under the British rule. They wonder if I have not deteriorated with age. Never the less, I must speak as I feel.... I see clearly that we are setting about this business the wrong way. We may not feel the full effect immediately, but I can see clearly that the future of independence gained at this price is going to be dark'.

In the midst of spreading the message of communal amity in Bihar, Gandhi reached Delhi on the invitation of Mountbatten. In his first interview with the Viceroy, Gandhi repeated his earlier suggestion to hand over power to a new government headed by Jinnah in order to solve the complex communal problems. This suggestion, however, was not acceptable to Nehru, Patel and other Congress leaders who told the Viceroy that it was an impracticable proposal. Nor was it acceptable to Jinnah who wished to establish a separate state for the Muslims, and not to become the prime minister of a Hindu majority country.

Meanwhile, a serious difference of opinion arose between Jinnah and certain League leaders in Bengal. The latter thought that a separate undivided Bengal would be better than dividing Bengal and presented this opinion before the Viceroy. Reacting to this, Jinnah said that there was no wonder if they did not like a Bengal without Calcutta. But soon they gave up the position and favoured a Muslim Bengal within Pakistan.

Thus, the Congress decided, unhappily though, to divide India, and the League to divide Punjab and Bengal. The future of the Congress majority NW F Province and that of the Muslim majority areas of Assam had to be determined.

Similarly, the choice of the personnel of the Indian armed forces had to be made as to which country they would like to go. Actions had to be taken to solve these problems through mutual discussions. These and other matters were contained in the 3rd June announcement of the British government. We shall examine this and its repercussions in the next section. Before that we have to find answers to a number of questions. Specifically, why did Gandhi, the supreme leader of the Congress for a quarter of a century, remained isolated? Why did the League leaders in Bengal try even at the last moment to avoid the division of Bengal? Why did their efforts fail?

The description of events and the social analysis we have attempted to make in the earlier chapters based on these events provide answers to these questions. Let us recapitulate.

The Indian bourgeoisie which began to emerge in the later half of the 19th century steadily gained strength in the 20th century. A Muslim section also gradually emerged within the same class. The British tried to safeguard their own interests making use of the competition and conflicts between these two sections within the Indian bourgeoisie.

Thus the Congress worked for the realization of the demand of independence for the whole of India and the Muslim League for an independent Muslim state along with Indian independence. The masses rallied themselves behind both the sections of the bourgeoisie.

Gandhi’s personality as well as the programme of struggle he formulated were beneficial to the bourgeoisie in rallying the masses in the movement for India’s independence. Gandhi’s method of struggle strengthened them enormously in their efforts to bargain with the British on the economic and political planes. The strict adherence to non-violence in Gandhi’s method of struggle provided guarantee to the effect that the anti-British struggles of the people did not turn against the interests of their (the bourgeoisie and their feudal allies) interests. Consequently they were thrilled by the leadership of Gandhi in the continuous struggles and negotiations.
The situation as a whole changed by 1946-47. As a result of the struggles launched under the leadership of Gandhi as well as the development that took place at the international level, it appeared possible for the bourgeoisie to establish their regime in India comprising at least the Hindu majority regions and take the country along the path of capitalism by utilizing the new political power that was going to be acquired. It may be recalled that the leading section of the bourgeoisie had already formulated a plan, known as the Tata-Birla plan, even before the end of the war. The bourgeoisie also had started entering in the field of international relations as evident from the Asian Relations Conference conceived by Nehru in 1945 and held at Delhi in March-April 1947. In the circumstances, it was unthinkable for the bourgeoisie to launch another national struggle to win freedom maintaining the integrity of India as proposed by Gandhi. Thus the Indian bourgeoisie ignored Gandhi, the ‘impractical dreamer’ and stood firm behind the Nehru-Patel wing of the leadership handling ‘practical politics’.

It was during the war time that the Muslim bourgeoisie achieved the most notable development. Calcutta was one of their principal strongholds. As a Bengal, and for that matter a Pakistan, without Calcutta was unthinkable for them, they made a last minute attempt to retain a united undivided Bengal comprising the Hindu majority west and the Muslim majority east. Jinnah who understood this ‘sentiment’ did not stand in their way, either.

But the campaign of ‘two-nations theory’ launched throughout the country for about a decade and the communal riots that followed had altered the very thought processes of the people belonging to the two communities. Although an undivided Bengal had continued to remain a dream for the Calcutta-based Muslim bourgeoisie, ordinary Muslims throughout the eastern part of Bengal including Calcutta had started thinking in terms of forming Pakistan even with a divided Bengal.

It is interesting to note that the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, Kiron Sankar Roy, had lent support to
the efforts of the League leaders in Bengal to maintain the unity of Bengal. Thus, when he had held discussions with the Viceroy the proposal of undivided Bengal had the support of both the ruling and opposition parties in the Bengal legislature. On further discussing the proposal with his colleagues after his return to Calcutta, he realized that the idea was not going to work. Thereupon, the idea of an undivided Bengal was abandoned.

Whatever the differences in details, the contents of all the proposals initiated by the British government from the 1942 Cripps proposals to the 1947 Mountbatten Plan were the same. The essence of all these proposals was that power would not be transferred exclusively to the Congress and that if the Congress was prepared to accept a Central government to the satisfaction of the League, and agreed to partition India under its aegis, it would obtain power; otherwise independence would be postponed indefinitely.

The Congress was not prepared to accept this position in 1942. But after five years it became eager to accept it and to get hold of power. All the Congress leaders except Gandhi were united on this issue, leaving Gandhi a solitary traveller.

II. THE SURGICAL OPERATION

The three sides, the British rulers, the Congress and the League, which took part in formulating the scheme of partition tried to justify their action by comparing the partition of India with a surgery performed on a patient who would have died otherwise.

Whatever the cause, the Hindus and the Muslims had become two communities unwilling to live together. If India had to be maintained undivided in such a condition, the Hindus had to reconcile to the reality of power passing to the Muslims in some provinces, and the Muslims to the reality of power passing to the governments under the control of the Hindus in other provinces and at the Centre. In both the
Hindu and Muslim majority regions there should be governments striving to run the administration consciously above communal considerations.

A situation had now come to prevail under which none of these was possible. The relation between the communities had become one of tension and mutual annihilation. Nehru, Mountbatten and all others concerned recognized the disease for which there was no remedy other than surgery. Besides, once surgery had become inevitable, it had to be performed as early as possible. Accordingly, the British decided to advance the date of departure to 15th August 1947 from June 1948 as announced earlier. It was also decided that power would now be handed over not to the leaders of undivided India but to the leaders of India and Pakistan. Servicemen in the military and police forces, members of the civil service and other government employees would be given the opportunity to opt for India or Pakistan. The assets and liabilities of undivided India would be equitably divided between India and Pakistan. Arrangements were made to work out the details of partition at the official level and at the ministerial level to superintend the work. With all these arrangements it was expected that the process of partition would proceed peacefully and amicably.

But the result was the other way round. 15th August which should have been illuminated with the bright light of independence was darkened by the shadow of the communal riots. It was the day on which Gandhi, the ‘commander-in-chief’ of the freedom struggle was afflicted with deep sorrow.

The main points of the announcement made by the British government on 3rd June with the approval of the Congress and the League are as follows.

1. Although the representatives from the provinces of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces, Berar, Assam, Orissa and the NWF Province as well as those from Delhi, Ajmer-Mewar and Coorg had been participating in the existing Constituent Assembly, a majority of the representatives from Bengal, Punjab, Sind
and Baluchistan and the League members from other provinces were not participating in the Assembly. As such, it had to be decided whether the existing Constituent Assembly should continue and whether there should be a separate Constituent Assembly consisting of the representatives of those provinces, who had kept away from the existing Constituent Assembly.

2. In the NWF Province from which a majority of the representatives had been participating in the existing Constituent Assembly and in the Sylhet district of Assam contiguous to Bengal, a referendum would be held to determine whether they would like to join India or Pakistan.

3. Members of the provincial Legislative Assemblies from the Muslim majority districts of Bengal and Punjab would meet separately to decide which country they would like to join.

4. The members of the provincial Legislative Assembly of Sind would decide which state to join.

5. Appropriate actions would be taken by the Viceroy to enable Baluchistan to make a choice.

6. The above provisions apply only to the 'British Indian' territories and not to the 'Indian States'. In the event of the British leaving the country, the princes who had been ruling these states in accordance with the treaties with the British government, would have the right to decide their future. All the earlier declarations in this regard would remain in force.

The whole scheme appeared to Gandhi, Nehru and other Congress leaders as Balkanizing the country and they were deeply disturbed by it. The reaction of Nehru to the first draft of the scheme was unfavourable. But he found no alternative to it. Thus, the final version of the scheme had his approval.

Gandhi had opposed the scheme at every stage. He thought that the surgery, rather than saving the life of the patient would kill him. The difference between him and the Congress reached its full form.
The full meaning of the surgery started becoming clear as the arrangements to implement the scheme were in progress. Not only India, but also the three provinces of Punjab, Bengal and Assam were going to be partitioned. Not only the people in these provinces but also in all other provinces, who had been living together, speaking the same language, sharing the same culture and traditions in every village and town were going to become the citizens of two different countries. Where should they stand? Should they leave their village or town where they had been living for generations and settle down in unknown villages and towns of another country? Should they regard their friends bound by family and social relations enemies just because they happened to hold faith in another religion and choose a new place and a set of new friends with whom they have no relation except that of religion? These and similar other questions arose before several thousands of families and individuals.

We might feel that there is no justification for thinking in these terms and that it is completely illogical. If a country is divided politically and administratively into two, is there a need for the people in one part to leave their homes and go to the other part immediately after the division? Is it not absurd and unjust to insist that just because Pakistan has been formed, the non-Muslim in Pakistan must necessarily go the Indian Union and the Muslims in the Indian Union to Pakistan? Can’t the Hindus in Pakistan and the Muslims in the Indian Union continue to live as citizens in their respective countries?

However, there had emerged in India a situation under which these questions were irrelevant. A situation under which the Hindus and Muslims considered each other enemies had already come to exist in the country. The Muslim League had already formulated the ‘two-nations theory’ to provide a theoretical basis for the emergence of this situation. The Congress which had been opposing this theory, on the other hand, had reflections of certain elements of Hindu communalism.
Besides, certain organizations like the R.S.S arguing that India was a Hindu nation and that the non-Hindus in India should be 'Indianized', had been fomenting communal riots. The instigators of riots had been encouraged by the British rulers and had been receiving assistance from the vested interests in India.

It was in the soil fertile for the growth of communalism that the British rulers, the Congress and the League jointly decided to sow the seeds of partition. This made the Hindus and Sikhs in the Muslim majority provinces feel extremely anxious. The conditions of the Muslims in the Hindu majority provinces also were bad. The religious fanatics and their organizations on both sides subjected the people belonging to the minority communities who wanted to live in their own country to cruelties unheard-of in normal times. Government officials and ordinary employees who were expected to protect the people from such acts began to function keeping communal considerations in mind.

This was an indication to the new stage of the communal riots which started with the observation of the 'direct action day' on 16th August 1946 with the connivance of the League government in Bengal as well as the British authorities and subsequently spread to Noakhali and Bihar. The political conflicts that took place at the higher level during and after the formation of the interim government provided strength and extent to the communal riots at the lower level. The Congress gave approval to Indian partition and to the partition of Punjab and Bengal thinking that this 'surgery' would help to end this situation and to restore the peace.

But the decision to partition and the news that the Congress and the League gave approval to it brought about a situation quite contrary to this optimism. As it became clear that India would be partitioned soon and along with it the provinces of Punjab, Bengal and Assam, the people who were going to be directly affected by it started feeling agitated. Their emotion began to ferment. For them, the Mountbatten plan was not a document of detached theoretica
interest; it was rather a life issue that puts upside down all their personal and family relationships. The feelings of each of them merged together to form two parallel streams of emotion: Hindu and Muslim. As an inevitable result of it, in the days immediately preceding and following 15th August, hundreds of thousands of people left their homes and moved to the neighbouring country as refugees. Taking whichever mode of trasportation available and carrying whatever domestic effects and other possessions they could collect in hands, people fled form Pakistan to India and vice versa. On the way many were killed at the hands of religious fanatics and many of those escaped murder lost all their possessions and turned destitutes. Women were forcibly carried away and molested and turned victims of forced conversion and marriage. The surgery was performed in this manner on hundreds and thousands of people and families.

It was in this background that the two independent countries, Indian Union and Pakistan, emerged at the stroke of midnight of 14th-15th August 1947. The suggestion came up that there should be a common Governor-General for the new countries and that it should be Lord Mountbatten. The most enthusiastic support to this suggestion came from Nehru, the most radical leader of the Congress which was regarded as more ‘anti-imperialist’ than the League. But the suggestion was turned down by Jinnah and the League. The League emphatically stated that the head of their state should be their Qaid-e-Azam (Jinnah).

Thus, Lord Mountbatten who left for Karachi to administer the swearing in ceremony of Jinnah as the Governor-General of Pakistan returned to Delhi after the ceremony and administered the swearing in ceremony of Nehru as the first Prime Minister of free India.

While the swearing in ceremonies where taking place, the worst kind of man-hunt human history has ever witnessed was going on all over the country. The freedom fighters, (except Gandhi and his close associates) accepted these tragic events as inevitable in the circumstances that led to the emergence of the Indian Union and Pakistan.
III. LEADERS OF FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN POWER

On 15th August 1947, the Union Jack was removed from the Red Fort of Delhi and in its place was hoisted the national flag of India. Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in as the first Prime Minister of India. Millions of Indian people regarded the event as the realization of their long standing dream. They welcomed it with great delight.

But away from these joyous celebrations was Mahatma Gandhi working for the re-establishment of peace in Calcutta, the centre of communal riots. No one in India could have ever imagined an Independence Day celebration without his participation. He was, however, not in a state of mind to participate in these celebrations. To a reporter who approached him and sought for a message to the Indian people, he told: My heart has dried up.

The mass killings that took place immediately before 15th August on either wing of the country disappointed him. He had been led by the conviction that the freedom obtained in this background was not genuine. He decided to devote the rest of his life to liberate the people of both India and Pakistan from the brutal emotions which led to this situation. He celebrated Independence Day with fasting, prayer and the recital of Gita. Congress President Kripalani stated: "Thousands of people had lost their all including their relatives and friends and no adequate arrangements could be made for the rehabilitation of those who had survived. I had on August 14, 1947 issued a statement in Calcutta in which I had said that 'it was a day of sorrow and destruction for India'."

But the communal riot and its disastrous consequences were not the only thing which pained Gandhi and other leaders like Kripalani. In the words of Kripalani: "There were also growing differences between Jawaharlal and Sardar

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Patel. The Sardar and Maulana Azad were also not pulling on well with each other. To add to these difficulties, the country was suffering from a food crisis. The controls which had continued after the end of the war were not working satisfactorily. Further, there were during this time reports of rivalry for positions of power amongst Congressmen and corruption in the administration. Gandhiji’s words carried little weight with the leaders. Partition had not brought peace to the country."  

Indications to this had already started appearing even before Independence. For example, after the 1945 elections Gandhi had proposed Rajagopalachari for the chief ministership of Madras. But the decision in accordance with it could not be carried out. Finally, Gandhi himself had to submit to the decision to make T. Prakasam the Chief Minister. But on account of the infighting, the Prakasam ministry did not survive for more than a year. We have already referred to the rivalry between Nehru and Patel which had started immediately before the formation of the interim government at the Centre. However, it had not come out openly till the end of the negotiations between the British government and Jinnah. By 15th August, this rivalry began to get sharper.

But there was absolutely no difference of opinion either between Nehru and Patel or between them and Azad on the question of the primacy of administration over organization. Later, this became sharper in the form of frictions and conflicts between the administrative and organizational wings of the Congress. This has been described by J. B. Kripalani who was the Congress President at the time of transfer of power, as follows.

My position as Congress President was embarrassing. The leaders in the Government took important decisions without consulting me or the Working Committee of which they were important members and wherein the opinions would

3. ibid, 296.
have prevailed.... In one meeting of the Working Committee Jawaharlal said, 'The historical role of the Congress is finished with independence.' My reply was: 'Then your Government will hang in the mid-air'. I was not called to the conference where the draft of the Independence Bill, to be passed by the British Parliament, was discussed. I did not like to lower the status which had been occupied before me by the most distinguished patriots of the country....'4

Thus, Kripalani resigned the presidency of the Congress. He stated that he wrote a letter giving the reason for his resignation, which were approved by Gandhi as genuine. In other words, the approach adopted by the organizational wing of the Congress against the administrative wing had the general approval of Gandhi.

Another incident which Kripalani has cited is noteworthy. He states: "Jawaharlal and the Sardar then approached Rajendra Babu to resign his Food portfolio in the Interim Government and take up the work of the Congress. Rajendra Babu did not approve of this idea. He went to consult Gandhiji. He was against his leaving the portfolio of Food and Agriculture.... However, Jawaharlal and Vallabhbhai ultimately prevailed upon him to become the Congress President. In the final decision that Rajendra Babu took, he had not consulted Gandhiji."5

Gandhi had been disturbed by the feeling that most of his trusted followers were moving away from him. Besides, as the Congress which was a fighting organization became the ruling party, its activists at all levels started falling victim to power-hunger, arrogance, selfishness and other evil habits. Considering all this, Gandhi proposed to disband the Indian National Congress as a political organization and "flower into a Lok Seva Sangh", an instrument for serving the people above politics. Since there were many groups among the Congress leaders with distinct views and perspectives, let each of

5 Ibid p. 297
of them form a political party in accordance with its views and perspective—this was what he had suggested to the Congress leaders. He thought that if the Congress transformed itself into an organization for service to the people, the entire political atmosphere in India would change. Accordingly, Gandhi prepared a draft constitution for the Congress to convert it into a Lok Seva Sangh.

Since the draft constitution was prepared a few hours before Gandhi was assassinated, no action was taken in pursuance of it. The Congress continued as a political party. The conflicts and competition between the administrative (ministerial) wing and the organizational wing and between the leaders belonging to these wings became sharper. Certain sections among the different groups within the Congress at times even came close to the forces of Opposition. A description of the consequences of these developments is, however, beyond the scope of the present volume.

However, it must be indicated here that, as pointed out by Gandhi and many other Congress leaders including Kripalani, the assumption of power by the leaders who had been in the forefront of the freedom struggle had changed the nature of Indian politics. The leaders who were looked upon as symbols of service to the people turned themselves into a group of people who considered their personal interests above the interests of the country. The Congress lost its tradition of service to the people which it had built over a long period of struggle.

Gandhi and Kripalani could not examine these developments; nor could they find a real answer to the question why such developments took place at all. An answer to this question may be easily found if we examine, as we have attempted to do in this volume, the emergence and growth of the Congress in the light of Historical Materialism.

The constant economic and political progress achieved by the Indian bourgeoisie lay behind the emergence and growth of the Congress. The objective of this class was the achievement of political power and continued development of capitalism.
Once the objective was achieved, with limitations though, the ideals which had been leading the political representatives of this class in the struggles to achieve the objective disappeared. In place of these ideals, selfishness characteristic of capitalist society—filling one’s own pocket by exploiting the people and competing with each other for the purpose—came out in naked forms.

Leaders like Gandhi who continued to uphold the old ideals to a great extent even at this stage expressed dissent to the policies of their colleagues and began to move along their own path.

It must be noted here that Gandhi, despite the disagreements, never opposed publicly the decisions taken by the leaders working in the administration of the country. Although Gandhi was fundamentally opposed to all the schemes, including those of Wavell, the Cabinet Mission and Mountbatten, he never came forward to organize the masses against them. If the people had known generally that Gandhi was opposed to these schemes and if they had been called upon by Gandhi to oppose them, the Mountbatten Plan would not have come into force so easily.

In other words, the British plan with regard to the division of India as well as the communal riots which broke out raised a number of complex questions before the non-Muslim bourgeoisie represented by the Congress: Was it necessary to acquire power by giving approval to partitioning India, or whether the struggle for freedom should be continued without making compromise over the question of partition? How to normalize the relations between India and Pakistan at the state level and between the Hindus and Muslims in the country after Independence?

Each of the top Congress leaders, including Gandhi, had his own views on these problems. It was, in fact, the conflicts among them that kept Gandhi away from other Congress leaders. At the same time, despite the divergence in views, all of them represented basically the same class interests.
Besides, the controversies between the Congress and the League had divided the Indian people into the Hindu and Muslim camps. The Hindu fanatics believed that the speeches and activities of Gandhi who was disturbed by the frictions and conflicts arising out of these controversies, were encouraging the unjust claims of the Muslims. They openly gave expressions to their feelings. There were reports to the effect that Gandhi might fall victim to the physical attack of this section.

There was a bomb attack on Gandhi's prayer meeting ten days before he was assassinated. There were complaints later that the ruling Congress leaders behaved thoroughly indifferently without taking the incident seriously.

In any case, Gandhi was assassinated on 30th January 1948. With this ended the era which can be called "Gandhian" in the history of Indian people.
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