CHAPTER 6

The 1935 Act and After

The new Government of India Act received the royal assent on 4 August 1935. It was the last major constructive achievement of the British in India; its significance matched both its bulk and the deliberation of its preparation. The consideration of the next constitutional step had begun ten years earlier with the Muddiman Committee’s report; the ill-starred Simon Commission had reached India seven years previously, and its report of 1930 had been anticipated by the Congress counterblast of the Nehru report. The government of India’s own proposals of 1930 (containing the first official suggestion for responsibility at the Centre) had been followed by the three sessions of the Round Table Conference. The Lothian report determined the electoral provisions of the Act; the communal award of 4 August 1932, following on abortive communal discussions between the Indian parties themselves, had fixed communal representation in the provinces and this was given final shape by the Poona Pact of 24 September 1932, which secured general as well as special representation for the scheduled or depressed classes at the point of a Gandhian fast unto death. A government white paper of 1933 set out a first draft of the proposals which were finally embodied in the Act with five major alterations after further consideration by a joint select committee of both Houses presided over by Lord Linlithgow. The Bill had been successfully piloted between the Scylla of British hesitancy expressed by the ‘die-hard’ opposition in Parliament, and the Charybdis of Indian impatience represented by Congress obstruction. As it emerged it probably represented the greatest measure of agreement then possible, if not within India itself, at any rate between current opinion in India and Britain respectively.

The Act continued and extended all the existing features of the Indian constitution. Popular representation, which went back to 1892, dyarchy and ministerial responsibility, which dated from 1921, provincial autonomy, whose chequered history went back to the eighteenth-century presidencies, communal representation, which first received overt recognition in 1909, and the safeguards devised in 1919, were all continued and in most cases extended. But in addition certain new principles were introduced. These were the federal principle, with its corollary of provincial autonomy; and the principle of popular responsible government in the provinces.

Certain administrative changes may first be noted. Sind was separated from Bombay to become a separate province. A new province of
Orissa was formed from the Orissa division of the former province of Bihar and Orissa and adjacent portions of the Madras and Central Provinces. These became governor’s provinces along with the North-West Frontier Province, which had been promoted to the same status in 1932. At the same time Burma was separated from India and a separate constitution on the same lines enacted for it.\footnote{This was re-enacted separately as the Government of Burma Act in the next parliamentary session.} British India thus attained its final administrative form of eleven governor’s provinces, the Chief Commissionships of Delhi, Ajmer-Merwara, Coorg, and the Andamans, and the agency of British Baluchistan. These changes represented in India concessions to growing provincial self-consciousness rather than any specific plan. The well-marked divisions of Gujarat and Maharashtra continued to be united in the Bombay province and the Tamil, Telugu, and Malayali peoples remained united in Madras. The separation of Burma was the recognition of an historic and cultural independence and the correction of an historical accident.

The most striking innovation was the introduction of the federal principle. Indian federation was conceived as a double process by which autonomy was conferred on previously subordinate provinces on the one hand, and the separate princely states, previously bound collectively only by the consultative Chamber of Princes, and individually by direct ties with the Crown, were to be integrated with the rest of India on the other. Federation in the provinces was a matter of legislative enactment, but since the position of the princes was regulated by separate treaties, their adhesion could only be brought about by consent. Accordingly it was provided that the central portion of the scheme would only come into force when rulers representing half the total princely population had acceded to the federation. The princes were to nominate one-third of the representatives of the Lower Federal Chamber and two-fifths of the Upper, and the powers surrendered by them would in each case be regulated by their respective instruments of accession. Until their accession the old central government would continue to operate.

Though the new central executive depended upon princely accession, the federal principle as such existed independently and was enforced without them. The problem of ‘residuary’ legislative powers was solved by the preparation of three detailed lists, one federal, one provincial, and one concurrent. The allotment of powers still unforeseen, a cause of difference between Hindu and Muslim opinion, was not confided to either branch of government, but to the discretion of the Governor-General. The division of executive and financial powers followed broadly that of the 1919 Act, the main difference being the allotment to the provinces of a share in the proceeds of income tax. The importance of the concurrent list of legislative subjects became clear when the second World War compelled the central government to undertake a degree of control of national life undreamt of in pre-war
years. The corollary of federation was provincial autonomy. The reality of this departure was also demonstrated by war experience, notably in the crisis of the Bengal famine of 1943. The federal structure was completed by the creation of a federal court for interpretation and the resolution of disputes and a federal reserve bank.\textsuperscript{1}

The next great innovation was the introduction of responsible government in the provinces. Dyarchy was swept away, to be replaced by a system of popular governments appointed by the governor but responsible to a popularly elected assembly. Chief ministers or premiers became the effective heads of provincial administration and governors were enjoined to act on their advice so long as their reserved powers were not invaded. Dyarchy, which had been banished from the provinces, reappeared at the Centre, where ministers depending upon popular support controlled the whole administration except defence and foreign affairs. For these subjects the Governor-General would appoint counsellors who were analogous to the nominated ‘members’ of governors’ former executive councils.

Other features of the constitution were not new, but represented large developments from previous practice. The provincial assemblies were recast and second chambers were added in six provinces out of eleven. These popular assemblies were backed by popular electorates, which were expanded on the lines recommended by the Lothian Committee to include about 30 million voters. Though a small property qualification was retained nearly a sixth of the adult population of India became eligible to vote. Women received the franchise on the same terms as men. The principle of communal representation, admitted for the quietening of Muslim tender consciences in 1909, and extended as a concession to human weakness in 1919, was accepted as a regular feature in 1935. Muslims in all provinces, Sikhs in the Panjab, Christians in Madras and elsewhere, and Europeans specially in Bengal were all accorded special representation. But though the principle was now openly admitted, it was not applied as part of a reasoned conception of a plural society. It was a permitted deviation from western homogeneous democratic representation, as the new provinces of Sind and Orissa were deviations in deference to public demand from the old tradition of forming provinces on grounds of administrative convenience or historic accident.

The existence of safeguards and special powers was also a ‘carry-over’ from the previous practice. At the Centre the Governor-General had the control of the reserved departments, the power of certifying legislation in the form of ‘Governor-General’s Acts’, and the power to issue ordinances with the force of law for six months at a time. The governors were vested with special powers for the discharge of their ‘special responsibilities’. The most important of these were the prevention of discrimination, the protection of the legitimate interests of minorities, and the continuance of the administration in the event of a

\textsuperscript{1} Set up by the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
breakdown of the machinery of self-government. In this latter contingency they were given legislative authority both temporary and permanent and the power to control the whole administration. These powers may be described as the provision of a reserve engine in the event of the breakdown of the new constitutional machine or a strike of its new engineers. Other safeguards preserved the rights of the all-India services and their control by the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State was retained with a number of advisers in place of the India Council. He remained the symbol of the surviving ultimate control of Parliament. The umbilical cord between constitutional parent and child was not yet severed.

This massive constitutional document, with its elaborate instrument of instructions and its complicated schedules marked a major step towards the goal of dominion status. But it was not that dominion status in itself. It may be briefly described as the establishment of provincial autonomy in relation to the centre and self-government with regard to the local administration together with popular participation in the executive as well as the legislative branch of the central government. To this may be added the federal principle and the projected integration of the princes with the rest of India. British control was largely pared away in the provinces where its principal vestiges were the British-appointed governors, with their reserve powers, and the British-controlled services like the I.C.S. and the police, who could be directed but not dismissed. An imperial official could be transferred or even placed on the unemployed list, but not dispensed with or degraded without the Secretary of State's consent; though definitely subordinate they therefore still retained some degree of independence in relation to the provincial executive.

In certain important respects the new constitution fell short of dominion status. The first was the proposed existence of dyarchy at the Centre. In the reserved part of the administration, which controlled foreign affairs and defence, there was still to be found an executive irremovable by the people of India and responsible to the British Parliament. The Viceroy continued to combine the functions of head of state and prime minister, and to be dependent upon the British cabinet. The transition carried out in Canada by Lord Elgin in 1845 by mere convention had in India still to come, and was for the present barred by legal enactment. The second restriction was the existence of safeguards, which as Professor Coupland states, were without any real parallel in the dominions. They might be disregarded or whittled away in practice, or they might be removed by amending legislation, but for the present they were an advertisement of surviving dependence, and a ready handle for the use of critics disposed to doubt the sincerity of British declared intentions. The third was the surviving subordination of the proposed federal legislature to the British Parliament. Not only would it be the creature of a British Act of Parliament, to which body, in fact, all other dominions owed their constitutions, but its legislation
was subject to ‘refusal of assent or reservation by the Governor-
General, acting under the control of the Secretary of State, and to
disallowance by the Crown acting under the Secretary of State's
advice’. This, like the other restrictions, could be removed in the
course of development without injury to the scheme as a whole, but
while it lasted was an impediment to India’s aspiration of indepen-
dence, or serious comparison to the status of the dominions, still
basking in the declaratory warmth of the Statute of Westminster.

The pivots of the new constitution were federation with its implica-
tion of princely co-operation, responsibility of government to the
elected representatives of the people, the communal principle which
regulated the form of that representation, and the existence of safe-
guards. It was around these points that constitutional discussion and
political tactics revolved during the twelve remaining years of British
rule.

We may here anticipate later developments to some extent by con-
sidering the success of the new constitution as a whole. It would be
easy to conclude, from the failure of the central federal structure to
materialize, and the eventual establishment of the Republic of India,
that the new constitution was a failure. But this would be far from the
truth. The Act of 1935 formed an organic connecting link between the
old and the new. It contained within itself the seeds of independence.
The irresponsible elements were no longer the essence of the system;
they formed, so to say, no longer the trunk or roots of the political
roof tree of India, but branches which could be lopped away without
injury to the whole. Or the new elements could be likened to the
branches of the banyan tree of India, which take root in the ground so
that the original stem can be cut away without injury to the tree as a
whole. Secondly, the element of continuity, the vitality in development,
may be held responsible for the avoidance of violent revolution in
India. The leading political party in India was continuously dissatis-
fied with the constitution and more than once attempted to force
development by unconstitutional means. But there was always hope of
achieving the end of independence without violence. It was this con-
sideration which restrained the Congress, for all its apparent intransi-
gence, from deliberately violent courses. If it was not the cause of
Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violence policy, it was an important factor in
enabling him to impose that policy on numbers of not always willing
followers. The ‘rising’ of August 1942 and the naval mutiny of 1946
showed that the advocates of violence had been reduced, if not below
danger point, at any rate well below the strength needed for successful
revolution. The pressure was there, rising and falling with changing
circumstances, but it never reached the level of explosion. The Act
proved to be adequate not only for the strains of political transition but
for the additional stresses of war and a world crisis.

Thirdly, the Act formed a monument to the sincerity of declared

1 Sir R. Coupland, *Constitutional Problems of India*, vol. i, p. 146.
British intentions. It represented concessions to the national principle from strength, instead, as could be represented in the case of the Montford reforms, through weakness after a world war. The very deliberation of its construction was evidence of firmness of intention. This was not recognized at the time in many quarters, and still less in the fevered months preceding Lord Mountbatten's declaration. But when the fact of independence scattered the mists of suspicion formed by impatience and a sense of frustration, it was seen that new independence was but the conception of 1935 developed and completed. The Act, therefore, played its part, not only in tiding over the transition without resort to violence, but in the restoring of feelings of goodwill between the Indian and British peoples which was so marked a feature of the post-1947 atmosphere. There was no death-bed repentance on the part of the British; the heir found his heritage drawn up and a testament prepared more than twelve years previously. The regard with which the Act has come to be held in responsible quarters was shown by its treatment by the constitution makers of the Indian Republic. Long sections were taken over entire and the shape of the new Constitution as a whole bears the same sort of relationship to the Act of 1935 as the British land settlements in north India to Todar Mal's bandobast in the time of the great Akbar. Not a little of this respect was due to the work of clarification and interpretation of the first Chief Justice of India, Sir Maurice Gwyer. Never was flattery of the British in India more sincere than in the imitation of their final constitutional arrangements.

The new Act was not, however, free from defects, and these had their consequence no less than its merits. It depended on the princes for the implementation of its central federal provisions; it did not prevent partition. The provision that not less than one-half of the princes representing half the princely population must accede to the federation before the central sections became operative proved in fact a fatal obstacle. The still slender powers of aristocratic co-operation were too severely strained and the ever latent centrifugal forces were unduly stimulated. The absence of princely co-operation involved the stillbirth of the central federal legislature and executive, and the continuance of its irresponsible predecessor. This in its turn made the control of communal and the conciliation of national forces much more difficult than it might have been.

Partition, if not provoked, was certainly encouraged by another defect in the Act. While provision was made for minority representation by means of communal electorates, and devices such as weightage and second chambers, the theory of sovereignty was that of a homogeneous democratic and national state. Majority decision was the ultimate criterion of all questions, be their nature what they might. There was no recognition in the new political institutions of the fact of plural society in India. The fact that two cultures as well as two religions existed side by side in India (to consider only the two major Indian
societies) was overlooked, and it was assumed that one society would be willing to accept direction from a government based on a majority from a different society. This was in fact a retreat from the British attitude in the nineteenth century, which, for all its paramountcy in the purely political sphere, recognized that there were social and cultural as well as purely religious realms in which the government would interfere at its peril. Cultural non-interference was the complement of political absolutism. The new constitution gave to any majority the power of cultural as well as political dominance over any minority. The suspicion of a similar tendency on the part of the British in the mid-nineteenth century helped to create the atmosphere which made the Mutiny possible; the fear of such dominance by one community over another after 1933 created the atmosphere which made partition inevitable.

The new era opened with new personalities as well as new institutions. Lord Willingdon was succeeded in 1936 by Lord Linlithgow, who united encyclopaedic knowledge with an ambition to implement the whole Act within his term of office. He had toured India as Chairman of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and had presided over the deliberations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee which had considered the draft constitutional proposals. Lord Zetland, who had (as Lord Ronaldshay) inaugurated the Montford reforms in Bengal, succeeded Sir Samuel Hoare as Secretary of State, and Sir Maurice Gwyer, who had played a large part in the drafting of the 1935 Act, became the first Chief Justice of India.

In India itself the Act was received critically but not altogether unhopefully. The Liberals and other 'splinter parties' were prepared to work the reforms as an instalment towards full responsible government. The criticism of the Muslim League was louder, but the Muslims were also ready to give the Act a trial. The Congress condemned the Act as a whole, but hinted that they might be prepared to work the provincial part under protest. There seemed some hope that Hindus and Muslims might work together as at the time of the Lucknow Pact in 1916. The elections to the Central Assembly in 1935 showed that the Congress was the dominant party in Hindu India.

In this atmosphere Lord Linlithgow set to work. Personal representatives were dispatched to major states to discuss terms of accession. These discussions and the collation of their reports lasted until 1939, by which time new events had occurred to alarm the princes and the outbreak of war was about to preoccupy the government. The golden moment passed, and was never to return. To anyone who does not think that the practical extinction of princely India was a consummation to be welcomed, it is difficult not to regard the patience and deliberation displayed in this matter as excessive. Here was pre-eminently a case for striking while the iron was hot, but it was cold indeed before the viceregal hammer began to descend in 1939.

The next step was the holding of provincial elections. These took
place in February 1937, and resulted in striking Congress successes. In five of the eleven provinces they secured clear majorities; in Bombay they could form a ministry with the help of fellow travellers, while in the North-West Frontier Province their ‘Red Shirt’ Pathan allies under the ‘frontier Gandhi’ Abdul Ghaffar Khan, secured a majority. The two important exceptions were Bengal and the Panjab. In Bengal a Muslim coalition ministry under Mr. Fazl-ul Huq took office. In the Panjab the Unionist party, re-created by Sir Fazli-Husain on the eve of his death, secured a majority and took office under Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan. This was the only important non-communal party in the country; it represented the rural as opposed to the urban interest, and while dominantly Muslim in composition, it included an important section of Hindu Jats under the forceful Lala Chothu Ram as well as a group of Sikh agriculturists. Under Sir Sikandar and his successor Sir Khizr Hayat Khan it governed the Panjab for nine years.

Immediately a difficulty arose. The Congress leaders asked for assurances from the governors that they would not use their special powers to override ministers ‘in regard to their constitutional activities’. The governors could not bind themselves not to exercise powers they were bound by law to use in certain contingencies. But the desire for office amongst the provincial Congress parties was strong, and the difficulty was overcome by an explanatory declaration by the Viceroy. In July Congress ministries were formed in seven provinces and responsible government in the provinces was fairly launched.

The ministries lasted until the outbreak of war just over two years later. With one or two exceptions they proved remarkably stable and they lasted long enough to demonstrate the existence of constructive statesmanship in the Congress ranks. If Mr. C. Rajagopalachari of Madras was the most distinguished figure amongst the Congress premiers, he had worthy colleagues in Pandit G. B. Pant of the United Provinces and Mr. B. G. Kher of Bombay. Order was maintained, communal outbreaks were dealt with, and the administrative machine, after a few initial jolts, continued to function smoothly. The tendency of provincial Congress committees to regard themselves as parallel governments was discouraged. Congressmen began to think constitutionally. Developments such as Gandhi’s scheme of ‘Basic education’ were undertaken, and experiments like that of prohibition were initiated. Relations with the British governors and officials were often surprisingly good, and there was widespread regret on both sides when the experiment came to an end. But this was not the whole of the picture. National politics did not cease because the federal centre had not yet come into being. The Congress was strongly represented in the old Central Assembly1 and continued to campaign against the irresponsible central executive. Above all it retained its national organization. The principal leaders of Congress did not assume provincial office. Instead they formed the Congress ‘High Command’ which, through the

1 Congress held 44 out of 104 elective seats in a House of 144.
medium of the Congress Working Committee or cabinet laid down the main lines of national policy and supervised the work of the provincial ministries. At its command they took office and on its orders they resigned. The provincial ministries suffered no parallel party organizations, but they themselves were subordinate agents of an all-India authority parallel to the central government. Thus both provincial autonomy and provincial responsibility were incomplete in the Congress provinces, since the governments were subject to control by an outside authority in both respects.

The real political issues were debated and decided in the working committee and the annual general sessions of Congress. The principal influence continued to be Mahatma Gandhi though he held no office and had at times not even been a subscribing member of the party. To the peasant Gandhi was Congress and the Congress was Gandhi; the urban intelligentsia valued his world prestige if they did not always relish his doctrines; his colleagues respected his judgement and revered his character, however much they might be irritated by some of his opinions. Next in popular esteem came Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the idol of the young westernized classes and of the landless peasants of the United Provinces. A socialist and social reformer, an agnostic and anti-clerical, a nationalist and democrat, his generous ideals and fiery zeal exactly fitted the mood of the emerging westernized classes. His sacrifices for the cause, his patent disinterestedness, and his frankness of speech had already marked him as Gandhi’s destined successor. The more conservative wing of the Congress was represented by the able but unspectacular Rajendra Prasad, western Indian big business and militancy by Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the extreme left wing by the rising Bengali, Subash Chandra Bose.

For the present the Congress leaders were content to watch developments. But this watching was by no means passive; three decisions of vital importance were taken in the years 1936–9. The Congress leaders interpreted their leadership as a ‘High Command’; the provincial premiers were so many generals of division subject to directions from the Centre. When Dr. Khare in the Central Provinces grew restive he was forthwith replaced, even at the price of a local political schism. Extremists at the Centre were dealt with equally firmly. Mr. Subash Bose was allowed to succeed Pandit Nehru as president at the end of 1937. But when he stood for re-election a year later against the wishes of the Mahatma, he was disciplined as sternly as Dr. Khare. Thirdly, the Congress boldly claimed to be the de facto representatives of the Indian people. Other groups might represent different view-points, but only Congress represented India as a whole. From this it followed that in Congress majority provinces the idea of coalition could not be entertained. They were merely temporary devices where the help of fellow travellers was necessary for the formation of a ministry. In particular this doctrine applied to Muslims. Muslim nationalists represented Muslims as Muslims in the Congress, and Congress as a whole
represented Muslims as Indians. Accordingly no separate Muslim representation was necessary and no coalition with the Muslim League could be entertained. Thus the already incipient Muslim reaction was precipitated into positive action, and to this we may now turn our attention.

Muslim opinion in modern India has been compounded of a desire for self-government as passionate as that of the Hindu together with a feeling of separateness from Hinduism as definite as that of the orthodox Brahman from all others. There was in consequence a see-saw of attraction and repulsion for the undoubtedly nationalist but predominantly Hindu Congress. The Muslim desired to share in freedom, but his freedom must be as much from the Hindus as from the British. Thus the mooting of the Morley-Minto reforms produced a demand for communal electorates, 1914 war-time discontents, the Lucknow Pact, and sympathy for post-war Turkey co-operation in the non-co-operation movement of 1920. Experience of the Montford reforms, specially under Fazl-i Hussain's leadership in the Panjub, convinced Muslims even more than Hindus that the British were beginning to surrender the substance of power. In proportion as the prospect of British departure brightened, suspicions of Hindu intentions deepened. This helped to account for the falling apart of the two communities after 1922, and underlay the Muslim advocacy of a weak centre in the proposed federation. Sir Muhammad Iqbal proposed a separate federation of Muslim provinces in 1930, and the dreamer Choudhri Rahmat Ali coined the word Pakistan in 1933, along with a scheme regarded as chimerical by most politicians. The Muslims were uneasy but disunited, and when they sought unity in a revived Muslim League, it was under the Bombay ex-Congressman, Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Jinnah fought the 1937 elections on the basis of independent co-operation with the Congress in Hindu majority provinces by means of coalitions. "There is really no substantial difference between League and the Congress. . . . We shall always be glad to co-operate with Congress in their constructive programme," said the new leader in 1937. The Congress policy of absorption instead of co-operation, particularly in the United Provinces, was a bitter blow to this policy. At a stroke it destroyed hopes of friendly independent co-operation and in a moment revived the simmering Muslim suspicions of Hindu absorptive tendencies. Congress rule now meant for the middle class Muslim Hindu domination. The polished westernized Muslim politician found himself consigned to outer political darkness by his former colleagues; he turned to popular Muslim sentiment for support and found it unexpectedly easy to arouse. By so doing he converted a middle class Muslim nationalist movement into a popular Muslim resurgence, and so laid the political foundation of Pakistan. "The majority community have clearly shown their hand that Hindustan is for the Hindu," he declared.\(^1\) Reports were compiled of alleged Congress oppression

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\(^1\) R. A. Symonds, *The Making of Pakistan*, p. 53.

\(^2\) Ibid., 55.
and when the Congress ministries resigned in October 1939, Jinnah declared ‘a day of deliverance and thanksgiving, as a mark of relief that the Congress régime had at last ceased to function’. From this attitude it was but a step to the formal adoption of Pakistan as the goal of League endeavour in 1940. The Congress on their part under-estimated the significance of this development. Can a prophet come out of sophisticated Bombay, was their attitude. The League had not done too well in the elections; it did not control the Panjab or Bengal. These rumblings were minimized as the complaints of disgruntled politicians disappointed in their ambitions. But its miscalculation proved to be as great and as grievous as the British dismissal of Gandhi, twenty years before, as a harmless eccentric.

AUTHORITIES

The 1935 Act is summarized by R. Coupland in vol. I of his Report on the Constitutional Problem of India—The Indian Problem, 1833–1935 (1943) while vol. II—Indian Politics, 1936–42 (1943) well summarizes the politics of those years. The Act itself is summarized and extensively quoted in M. Gwyer’s and A. Appadorai’s Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 1921–47 (2 vols., Bombay, 1957), vol. I, p. xliii–xlv and 323–76. This work also provides valuable constitutional documents both before and after the Act.

For legal comment on the Act see P. Eddy and H. Lawton, India’s New Constitution (1935).

For politics after the Act, in addition to Coupland’s work already mentioned, reference may be made to the works of Tendulkar, Sitaramaya and Polak, etc., listed under Chapters 2 & 3 for Gandhi and the Congress generally. See also M. Brecher’s Nehru: A Political Biography (1959), N. D. Parikh’s Vallabhbhai Patel (Ahmedabad, 1953) and Lord Zetland’s Essays (1956).

An acute study of the British position in general will be found in G. Wint’s The British in Asia (2nd ed., 1955).
CHAPTER 7

India and the War, 1939–45

The outbreak of war in September 1939 found India even more unprepared in a material sense than Britain and with a much more divided mind. Almost the only material sign of preparation had been the visit of Lord Chatfield’s mission. The public and officials alike had been absorbed in the unfolding drama of the constitutional experiment. Europe was still far off, and it did not seem, even if war broke out, that India would be very directly affected. Not that the public was unaware or uninterested in European development. Indian nationalists as good democrats were strongly anti-Fascist; they joined in the chorus for strong measures without any great expectation of being called to take part in them. Meanwhile the rise of the Muslim League, the struggle between right and left wings of Congress, and the fate of the provincial ministries were of much more absorbing interest. Amongst the Congress leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru was the only one to be fully aware of the import of international events for India and to seek to interest the public in these issues. In foreign affairs the attitude of mind which was fast disappearing in home politics still lingered, a feeling that it was the business of the paramount power. India could only interest herself when freedom had been won. The old feeling was widespread that Britain’s embarrassment might be India’s opportunity. No one dreamt that embarrassment might become mortal peril, not only to Britain herself, but to India as well.

When war broke out, therefore, there was a general approval of the cause coupled with a widespread reluctance to do very much about it. It was Britain’s affair, not India’s. The old slogan of ‘no taxation without representation’ was translated to read ‘no popular war effort without responsible government’. The Congress ministries resigned on the manner of India’s participation in the war. Individuals and groups were willing to give help, but India as a whole sat back to watch the mighty drama unfold in the European arena from what was thought to be a secure and comfortable seat in the grandstand. This mood persisted until Dunkirk and the fall of France. A moment of alarm gave place to a feeling of admiration for British doggedness and spirit. When invasion failed it was realized that the war would be a long one and that India would have an important part to play. There was more willingness to assist, but still the divided mind persisted. How could India assist the cause of liberty abroad without first obtaining her freedom at home? The entry of Japan into the war intensified rather

1 See below.
than modified this mood. There was more awareness of danger and more readiness to help, but also a deepening sense of frustration at India’s inability to control her own destiny.

It will now be convenient to touch on the various aspects of war-time India in turn. To the Viceroy fell the task of not only managing a restive public opinion as best he could but of organizing the war of India as a member of the British empire and potentially of the British Commonwealth of Nations. A large programme of military expansion was put in hand. The Middle East was the obvious theatre for Indian troops, and thither forces were dispatched to assist Sir Archibald Wavell in his watching brief in Egypt. The fall of France, with its elimination of French strength in the Middle East and the entry of Italy into the war, transformed this theatre overnight into the most crucial military area outside Britain itself. Indian troops suddenly found themselves at the centre of events. Their courage and skill rose to the occasion. In the famous desert campaign of 1940–1 Indian troops bore a distinguished part. The Fourth and the Seventh Divisions added fresh laurels to Indian arms, and proved themselves masters of the rigours and intricacies of desert warfare. With modern equipment they were second to none in the world. Indian participation lasted through the commands of Wavell and Auchinleck to the final desert campaign of Montgomery. It also included the Iraq, Syrian, and Persian operations. In Iraq Indian intervention was decisive.

Before that time, however, the major Indian military effort had been diverted eastward. From the beginning of 1941 the Japanese menace to South-east Asia had been visibly growing. Along with British and Australians, Indian troops were used to garrison Malaya. When the Japanese stroke fell in December 1941 Indian troops shared in the long retreat to the south and in the disaster of Singapore. In its capitulation 90,000 Indian troops were involved. Indian formations played an honourable part in Alexander’s fighting retreat from Burma, and henceforth were concerned with the defence of India itself. Their posts were now the hilly jungles and fever-haunted valleys of the Indo-Burman border down to the rain-drenched tracts of Arakan. In this situation they had two fresh problems of the first magnitude to solve. The first was the exchange of tropical jungle for desert conditions of warfare, and the second the tactics of the Japanese trained to this type of warfare and possessing the mobility which came of frugal habits and light transport. From 1943 the active Indian army passed under Mountbatten’s South-East Asia Command (S.E.A.C.) and became a part of Sir William Slim’s Fourteenth Army. Their moment of trial and their greatest triumph came with the Japanese invasion of Assam in the spring of 1944. The Seventh Division’s stand at Kohima, cut off from all aid, save by air, broke the spearhead of the Japanese advance, and made inevitable the rout which followed. Thenceforward the story was one of increasing success, though always in the most arduous conditions, until the crowning triumph of the
recapture of Rangoon. The Indian army had shown its mettle in the most difficult of all terrains of the war and the most testing of all types of warfare. A Japanese document listed the Gurkhas as the troops most to be feared of all the nationalities opposed to them. When the Japanese war ended in August 1945 Indian troops were poised for the assault on Malaya under the command of Mountbatten. Alongside the army, the Royal Indian Air Force and Navy, both negligible at the outbreak of war, played a distinguished and increasingly significant part.

One of Linlithgow’s principal claims to fame was his organization of the Indian war effort. Here the mind of the administrator could range unhampered by personal vagaries and political perplexities. The first question was that of supply and the second that of military expansion. At first it was not thought that India would lie in close proximity to a large-scale campaign, but its vital relationship to the Middle East was early recognized. Before the war Lord Chatfield’s committee had recommended a capital outlay of 7 crores of rupees (£5,400,000) for expanding Indian ordnance factories, and this, with additions, was at first thought to be sufficient. After the fall of France, however, India was conceived as a centre of a Commonwealth group for the supply of the Middle Eastern theatre. The visit of the supply mission of Sir Alexander Roger in the autumn of 1940 coincided with the holding of the Eastern Group Conference which was attended by representatives, in addition to those of India, from Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Burma, Malaya, Hong Kong, Palestine, and East Africa. From the conference came the Eastern Group Supply Council, which rationalized the supply of materials from the various territories. India became the principal supplier of cotton textile, jute and jute products, leather products, and wooden furniture. In the first year of the council’s work India supplied 60 per cent. of its total demands and later 75 per cent. When Japan and America entered the war the picture changed. Some sources of supply dried up and fresh needs appeared nearer home. Moreover in America there was a reservoir of productive power which could make good deficiencies throughout the Allied world. India developed new needs and at the same time became eligible for Lend-Lease. Early in 1943 the council was wound up, its function of allocating orders being taken over by the British Central Provision Office with a British Ministry of Supply Mission working in collaboration.

But the work of industrial development went on with even greater energy. The expansion of industry was not limited to India’s traditional crafts like textiles, but included heavy industry and new industries altogether. Tata’s already great steel plant was further extended and this was supplemented by the Bengal Steel Corporation’s works at Burnpur and the Kumardhuti group. The cement industry was expanded on a large scale: the Indian deposits of bauxite were exploited to develop the new aluminium industry, and the mica industry, in which India held a monopoly outside Russia and Brazil, was largely increased.
Along with the organization of supply went the rapid growth of the armed forces. The peace-time strength of 175,000 was steadily increased until there was a total of more than 2 millions under arms. Mechanization and motorization went hand in hand with this process with the result that India not only gained an armed forces of unprecedented size, but a large number of technicians of varied skills. The navy, under a British vice-admiral, became an efficient and effective force which played its part both in the Burma campaign and against the Japanese submarine menace. The air force built up a reputation for smartness and efficiency which it carried over into the new era of independence. Though only a relatively small proportion of the military forces were actually engaged in military operations, the displacement of such large numbers from their customary life, and their equipment with new skills, was bound to open up new horizons and to stimulate the spirit of change.

The war in Indian experience had three well-defined stages. The first was the period of 'phoney' war, when life went on much as before. The war was a remote spectacle, a matter for talk and the newspapers. This phase ended for India with the fall of France in June 1940. The old international order seemed to have vanished overnight and the country was for a time bewildered and alarmed. Then followed the Battle of Britain, which was watched with growing admiration; the old order, it seemed, was to survive after all. The second phase was that of organization as a Middle Eastern base. Trade and industry boomed; headquarters swelled and men in khaki appeared; cities grew congested and there was an air of bustle and purpose. But still it was not India’s war so much as one to which India was contributing. The third phase opened with the Japanese aggression. From the spring of 1942 India began to suffer some of the perplexities and inconveniences of other belligerents and later met trials of her own. The war cloud spread over the whole country and became part of its daily experience. The herald of this transformation was perhaps the Japanese bombardment of Vizagapatam in April 1942.

The first effect was the appearance of the Americans in Delhi and in the East. To them were added large numbers of British troops concerned no longer with the Middle East but with the Japanese menace in Burma. The immediate consequence was the dislocation of the economic life of the country. Supply lines had to be re-orientated from lines from the interior to the ports to lateral lines from the ports to eastern India. To the strain which this placed upon the railways was added a reduction of shipping services. The Indian railways, already somewhat depleted by shipments to the Middle East, had to carry the whole weight of the war effort as well as the whole burden of the country's economic life. A period of unprecedented strain began which lasted until the end of the war. The mounting expenditure on the local

1 Military officers at H.Q. were not required to wear uniform at their offices in the afternoons until the arrival of General Auchinleck in Jan. 1941.
war effort, together with large sums spent by both British and Americans in making airfields and in other preparations, set in motion a price-rise from which India had hitherto been largely exempt. Shortages began to appear, and culminated in the Bengal famine of 1943.

It had been thought that famines were things of the past in India. There was the Famine Code, which had worked successfully for sixty years. It was based on the distribution of grain to threatened areas with arrangements for the employment of agriculturists on productive work until the next harvest could restore the countryside. But this assumed the import of foodstuffs from abroad if necessary. The war had now cut off supplies from abroad except from neighbouring Burma. Food was short everywhere. The loss of Burma denied her rice supplies to Bengal and the south. At the same time the price rise tempted peasants to dispose of their reserve stocks at what seemed to them heaven-sent prices. But then rice disappeared from the markets and a decline in indebtedness proved a poor substitute for a lack of sustenance. The overall shortage has been estimated at 5 per cent., but this was aggravated by faults of distribution and control. Extensive black markets developed and famished peasants began to appear in Calcutta. An added difficulty was the absence of rice in the rest of India so that only unpalatable grains and pulses could be offered to starving rice-eating areas. During the summer of 1943 it became apparent that the Bengal administration was unable to cope with the situation. An undue tenderness for the principle of provincial autonomy delayed action by the Centre and it was only on the arrival of Lord Wavell in October 1943 that the nettle was firmly grasped. The British army was entrusted with relief distribution and a system of rationing instituted for all large towns. Never had the British army been so popular. Thenceforth, though shortages continued, no one starved, and a feeling of confidence returned. Food became a central concern.

It is now time to turn to the constitutional problem during the war period. In the summer of 1939 the hesitancy of the princes still delayed the establishment of the federal centre. The Congress watched and waited and Gandhi, more fully persuaded of his pacifism as the war clouds lowered, sent a personal letter to Hitler. On the outbreak of war Lord Linlithgow thus found himself without a responsible ministry to consult, and without a legal option to proclaiming that 'war has broken out between His Majesty and Germany'. He followed this up by addressing both houses of the legislature and by consultations with the national leaders, beginning with Mahatma Gandhi himself. Such action was legal and perhaps inevitable, but it was natural for it to appear provocative to the rapidly growing national consciousness of India, and so in fact it seemed to both League and Congress. The premiers of the non-Congress or League ministries of Bengal, the Punjab, and Sind were backed by their legislatures in pledging support to the war effort and the princes did the same individually. But the
Congress demanded an immediate definition of war aims and an immediate declaration of independence, 'present application to be given to this status to the largest possible extent'. The League made its support dependent on 'justice for Muslims' in Congress provinces and a guarantee of no constitutional advance without League approval. The Viceroy met this situation on 17 October by affirming dominion status to be the goal of constitutional development, action to be taken after the war with due regard to minority opinions. Meanwhile he proposed the formation of an advisory council representing all sections of opinion to associate the Indian public with the prosecution of the war. This was rejected by the Congress High Command as inadequate, and the provincial Congress ministries forthwith resigned. The League was less forthright and indeed commended the stress on minority rights, but demanded the abandonment of the whole federal scheme.

The deadlock thus created lasted throughout the war. It had two aspects. In relation to the British the Congress demanded full responsibility before sharing in the war effort. The British on their side were precluded by constitutional difficulties from agreeing to this and could only offer self-government de facto in anticipation of the end of the war. To the British, with the precedent of Canada in mind, this seemed an honest, and, in the circumstances, a common-sense procedure. To the Congress it savoured of Machiavellian delay and dark designs to frustrate legitimate aspirations. The second aspect was the relation of Congress to other parties. The Congress continued its 1937 policy of regarding itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Indian people. This was unacceptable, not only to the government, but also to the League. It encouraged the League to proceed to the formal acceptance of the Pakistan programme in the early months of 1940, and the League's attitude in its turn sustained the British in declining to make a unilateral settlement with the Congress. The three parties to the constitutional struggle thus stultified each other. The deadlock bred a steadily increasing sense of frustration as between British and Congress on the one hand, and a steadily deepening suspicion as between the League and Congress on the other.

The fall of France produced a temporary easing of tension. 'The tone of Congress hostility', in Professor Coupland's words, 'softened.' For a moment it seemed as though the fall of Britain might be the prelude to a Nazi occupation. 'We do not seek our independence', wrote the Mahatma on 1 June, 'out of British ruin.' The Congress High Command threw overboard Gandhi's pacifism. (He had praised Pétain's armistice and had called 'on every Briton to adopt . . . a nobler and a braver way' of surrender to Hitler.) There was talk of a national government and of parallel bodies to organize defence. The reply of the new British war cabinet was the 'August offer'. The offer contained one new point of substance along with the usual provisos of British obligations and minority rights. The post-war constitution was to be drawn up by an Indian constituent assembly whose decisions were
virtually accepted beforehand. Thus Parliament virtually surrendered its right of legislating for India, a right which it had hitherto jealously guarded.

But by August the first panic fears of British collapse had passed. Though the issue in fact was still in the balance it was known that the British would fight to the last, and the evident British resolution inspired a new confidence in their ability. This had the effect, not of warming Congress hearts but of reviving suspicions of real British intentions. Britain, thought many, was still playing with India. There could be no settlement except on the basis of independence now and with Congress alone as representing India. Consciousness of strength joined with revived suspicion to reject the offer. The appeals of the new Secretary of State (Mr. Amery) as well as the Viceroy fell on deaf ears; the deadlock was more complete than ever. The League for its part, newly converted to the Pakistan ideal, insisted that any national government should be on a Hindu-Muslim fifty-fifty basis and pointed the moral of partition. The communal deadlock was as complete as the Indo-British one.

The Congress was thus thrown back on Mr. Gandhi's pacifism and non-co-operation. Mr. Gandhi insisted on preaching pacifism in opposition to the war effort and organizing civil disobedience as a sanction for this right when disputed or denied by the government. The most reluctant and least successful of civil disobedience movements followed. Organized in easy stages from the autumn of 1940, it reached its peak in the following May, when some 14,000 Congressmen were in prison. This bore no comparison with the figure of 1930 and thereafter the numbers steadily fell. The movement had in fact no real popular backing, and was chiefly interesting as an index of what the Mahatma could achieve through personal influence alone. The Viceroy on his side carried out the long-promised expansion of his council to a total of fifteen, of whom eleven were Indians.

The entry of Japan and America into the war and the imminent threat of invasion which followed produced a new situation. The need to break the deadlock was now very urgent, and to the British desire to achieve a settlement was added an evident American interest in Indian freedom. All Congressmen, including Pandit Nehru, had been released on the eve of Pearl Harbour and the stage was set for a further effort. On 11 March 1942 the prime minister announced the dispatch of Sir Stafford Cripps, then Leader of the House of Commons and a member of the war cabinet, on a mission to India with a new and radical offer. The Cripps offer dominated Indian politics for the rest of the war. It first reiterated the intention of His Majesty's government to set up an Indian union which should take its place as a dominion of the Commonwealth as soon as possible after the war, and it then pro-

1 Mr. Gandhi's words were 'between India as represented by Congress, and England', News Chronicle, 14 Aug. 1940, R. Coupland, Constitutional Report on India, vol. ii, p. 202.
posed specific steps towards that end. A constituent assembly would be elected by the provincial legislatures acting as an electoral college. This body would then negotiate a treaty with the British government. The future right of secession from the Commonwealth was explicitly stated. The Indian states would be free to join, and in any case their treaty arrangements would be revised to meet the new situation. The only proviso was the right of any province to contract out of the constitution and ‘to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so desires’. The offer ended with a call for co-operation by the popular parties in a national war-time administration.

The great advance which the Cripps offer marked was its frankness and precision. Gone were the hesitancies and the generalities of the 1939 and 1940 declarations. But there were new features as well. A Constituent Assembly had already been conceded, but it was now made clear that the framing of the new Constitution would be the work of Indians alone. The right of secession was acknowledged. The device of a bilateral treaty for implementing the new Constitution and discharging British obligations (reminiscent of the Irish settlement) was introduced. Finally the provision for provincial contracting out provided a means of reassuring Muslim fears within the orbit of democratic principles.

At one moment it seemed as though a settlement was in sight, but then the Congress leaders insisted that the new government must have immediately the full powers of a dominion cabinet. On this rock the discussions foundered; high hopes had been raised, and their disappointment left the sense of frustration deeper than before. The League watched pensive in the wings and observed the collapse not without signs of sardonic satisfaction.

It is perhaps too early to assess the exact cause of the breakdown. It is certain that Mahatma Gandhi took an unfavourable view and eventually overbore the more generous instincts of Nehru and Rajagopalachari. One consideration was the imminent Japanese threat; was it any use to draw a cheque on a failing bank? But even if invasion did not occur immediately, would not the situation again be critical when military movements again became possible after the monsoon? The British had gone so far under the stress of the Japanese threat that they might go further yet if they continued to survive and the threat persisted. Communal considerations led Hindu minds in the same direction. The offer represented almost but not quite a settlement with Congress on Congress terms. The provision for contracting out represented, for all its democratic colour, a concession to the League and as such was distasteful. Congress still underrated the League’s hold over Muslims and was confident that it could smother its agitation if given full power at the Centre. A little waiting might give that full power. The stake of a united India under Hindu control was one worth playing for. So the golden moment passed and with it the last real
chance of establishing a united independent India. The rejection of the offer was the prelude to partition.

This decision was not made without some internal stress, the chief sign of which was the ejection of Rajagopalachari from the Congress party. For the rest Congress was rallied behind the once ascendant Gandhi. The enigmatic Mahatma refashioned his pacifist principles and non-violent technique to meet the new situation. The presence of the British in India, he declared, was a provocation to the Japanese. He coined the ‘Quit India’ slogan, and prepared a resolution demanding British abdication on pain of a revived civil disobedience campaign. ‘There is no question of one more chance’, he said. ‘After all, this is open rebellion.’ All the signs suggested that events would reach a crisis at the moment the Japanese might be able to move again at the beginning of October. When, therefore, the resolution was passed by the All-India Congress Committee on 7 August, the Viceroy, with the unanimous support of the Executive Council, acted swiftly. The whole working committee was interned at Poona. A serious but short outbreak of violence followed, which cost some 900 lives and caused damage estimated at a million pounds. Though responsibility was disclaimed by the leaders, it is difficult to believe that all of them were unaware of such large scale planning by extremists.

During this period India owed much to the rock-like firmness which the Viceroy combined with his patience. The failure of the rebellion did much to discredit the Congress and the improved military situation did still more. The Congress had not only acted wrongly, they had made a mistake. They had backed the wrong horse. The conviction spread that the British were immovable for the duration of the war, and was reinforced by the Viceroy’s firmness in dealing with another Gandhian fast early in 1943. Mounting military success and the vigorous measures of Lord Wavell to deal with the food crisis still further strengthened the government’s position. Cautious feelers were put out for breaking the deadlock with the British and abortive conversations held between League and Congress leaders; but the end of the war in Europe found the position apparently unchanged. It was, however, in appearance only. For in the interval the League had greatly strengthened its position. The strength of Muslim separatism was now plain for all to see. Even if the Congress should now accept the Cripps offer in the hope of avoiding partition the League would reject it in the hope of achieving it.

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Sitaramayya's *History of Congress*, and biographies of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Azad and Jinnah continue to be important. See also C. A. Cooke, *Life of R. S. Cripps* (1957). Lord Linlithgow has been defended by his son, Lord Glendevon, in *Viceroy at Bay* (1971).
CHAPTER 8

Independence and Partition

When the cease-fire sounded in Europe the position of the Indian government seemed stronger than at any time since 1942. It enjoyed the prestige of success and evident strength. The caravan was passing on steadily to victory. But the apparent calm of Indian politics was superficial and deceptive. It was the last manifestation in the British period of the Indian genius for accepting a situation too intractable to be altered, and of biding one’s time for a more favourable moment. Beneath the surface the same tensions persisted, and indeed were growing more acute. The Congress was even more suspicious of the British in victory than they had been of them in defeat. Imperfectly aware, in spite of the precedent of 1919, of the exhaustion which cripples even the victorious in total war, Indian leaders could not believe that the British would ‘stand and deliver’ from the plenitude of power. Were not their expressions of benevolence merely a further example of British hypocrisy, and was not their constant harping on minority rights a subtle device to sabotage the idea of an independent India by encouraging Muslim truculence? In spite of the long succession of League victories in both central and provincial elections, the Congress leaders did not yet believe that there was substance behind the demand for Pakistan. Firmness, they thought, could still secure a united independent India on their own terms. Jinnah and the League leaders, on the other hand, were equally suspicious of Congress intentions. They were also conscious of greatly increased strength. They were not yet irrevocably committed to outright partition, in spite of their public declarations, any more than the Congress itself had been after its declaration of independence in 1928, but they believed that the pressing of their claims was the only way to secure the future of their community. Between Congress suspicion of the British, Muslim suspicion of the Congress, and Congress underestimation of League strength, the path of British statesmanship towards the goal of Indian self-government was bound to be hard and stony.

Lord Wavell had succeeded Lord Linlithgow as Viceroy in the autumn of 1943. Thus far his administration had been conspicuously successful. He had been conciliatory but quite firm towards Congress; he had dealt vigorously with the Bengal famine and had instituted a steadily improving control over the whole food administration; he had presided over a steadily expanding war effort in an atmosphere of growing success; he had kept inflation within bounds; his presence and prestige exuded strength and confidence. He had now to face a
wholly different task. He had first to convince two highly critical bodies of the reality of British sincerity and then to persuade two mutually highly suspicious bodies that co-operation, with its attendant give and take, was both necessary and feasible. Failure meant partition with all its incalculable consequences. It is easy to see, at even this short distance of time, that the dice of fortune was heavily loaded against him. Nevertheless he bent himself manfully to the task.

Wavell's first move was to attempt the formation of a national administration as contemplated in the Cripps proposals (which had never been withdrawn). This would complete the war with Japan (then expected to last another year) and then arrange for the promised Constituent Assembly. Conversations were held in June 1945, but they broke down on the allotment of seats in the Executive Council and the Congress refusal to accept the League's claim to be the sole representatives of Muslim opinion. The sudden ending of the Japanese war in August made the situation more urgent. Wavell now put the controversy over the League's representative claim to the test of a general election, both provincial and central. This occupied the winter of 1945–6 while tension gradually mounted. It now became clear that the League dominated Muslim opinion almost as completely as the Congress dominated Hindu. In the key province of the Panjab, the Unionist party, long infiltrated by League sentiment, almost disappeared, and its rump under Sir Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana could only continue in office with the help of the Congress. The carefully devised weightage system here placed a minority government in power in circumstances of rising passion. A short-lived naval mutiny in February 1946 revealed the narrow margin by which the British continued to maintain order of a kind.

The new British government now intervened directly. A cabinet mission led by Lord Pethwick-Lawrence, now a leading member of the new government, and consisting besides of Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A. V. (later Viscount) Alexander, visited India in April. After further efforts at mediation between the parties the mission made its own proposals in May. The aim was still to preserve a united India while giving reasonable satisfaction to Muslim claims to autonomy. The method proposed was an ingenious modification of the earlier Cripps offer. There was to be a federal union controlling defence, foreign affairs, and communications, and consisting of the British Indian provinces. The states were to be included after negotiation. There were two new features. The powers of the federal government were reduced (in accordance with Muslim desires) and individual provinces were to be at liberty to form subordinate unions of their own. Each of these was to decide for itself the powers it would exercise outside the range of the federal subjects. On this basis a constituent assembly would be convened representing all parties, and once more it was proposed to form an interim national government. This was Pakistan in parvo and seemed to open an avenue for the reconciliation of a united India with Muslim autonomy.
For a moment there was a gleam of hope, for both sides accepted the plan as a basis for action. But breakdown once more occurred over the communal allotment of seats. The Congress insisted on appointing a Muslim to one of their five seats and thus reducing League representation to four; the League insisted on parity and refused to work with nationalist Muslims whom they regarded as traitors to their cause. When the Congress refused to proceed the League offered to take office alone and resented the Viceroy’s refusal to proceed with one party only. When, a few weeks later, the Congress repented and the Viceroy admitted their leaders to office with Nehru as Vice-President of the Council, the League denounced the action as a breach of faith and proclaimed a ‘direct action day’ on 16 August. The tension could no longer be restrained within peaceful bounds, and to the bloody August riots in Calcutta (where Hindus were the sufferers) was added the communal outbreak in Bihar (where Muslims were the victims). There were also outbreaks in East Bengal and the United Provinces. The hope of a united independent India was extinguished in the blood and monsoon passion of 1946. Partition was now the only possible solution, though it took another nine months to convince all parties of the fact.

These months were passed in strain and mounting misery. In October 1946 the League joined the Executive Council. But it was soon seen that they had come to curse and not to bless. Pandit Nehru found himself in real danger when he visited the north-west in the same month; it became obvious that the Frontier would not stand for Hindu rule, Red Shirts, and the Frontier Gandhi notwithstanding. The Constituent Assembly met in December only to be boycotted by the League. Early in the new year there followed the fall of the Khizr ministry in the Panjab to the accompaniment of fighting which destroyed Amritsar and Multan. Section 93 rule and suppressed civil war succeeded the feeble directives of a minority ministry. Something had to be done and done quickly.

Once more the British cabinet directly intervened. Pandit Nehru, Mr. Jinnah (now the Qaid-i-Azam or great leader), and Sardar Baldev Singh (a Sikh leader) were called to London for discussions, but these were as fruitless as before. In a last effort to dissipate suspicion it was announced on 20 February 1947 that June 1948 had been determined as the date of the withdrawal of British power. At the same time Lord Wavell was recalled in favour of Lord Mountbatten, who was charged with the preparation of a procedural plan. But neither the persuasions of London, nor the shock of an imminent political vacuum, nor the stimulus of a new personality could now break the Congress-League deadlock. Mr. Jinnah saw victory in sight. ‘The Muslim League will not yield an inch in its demand for Pakistan’, he said. He had so cast Congress tactics back upon itself that it was that body itself which now began to see in partition the only alternative to prolonged civil war and fearful destruction of human life. In May they themselves proposed the partition of the Panjab as the only alternative to civil war.
Lord Mountbatten soon convinced himself that Pakistan was now the only alternative to anarchy. A visit home secured the consent of the cabinet for this plan. On 3 June he announced the British govern-

ment's acceptance of the principles of partition, a procedural plan for carrying it through, and an acceleration of the date of British withdrawal to 14 August. The plan was accepted on the same day by Congress, League, and Sikhs. Each party professed dissatisfaction but each believed that they would gain nothing further by fighting. The Sikhs were the least satisfied, and a powerful section determined to fight in
any case, but they were the weakest party of the three and suffered from divisions and poor leadership. The least common denominator of Indian power politics had at last been discovered.

The plan worked smoothly and was carried through with remarkable address by the Viceroy. In essence it was a further adaptation of the Cripps offer of 1942, implemented by a master of rush tactics. The partition of the Panjab and Bengal was recognized, provided that the Legislative Assemblies, voting if necessary by communities, asked for it. Boundary commissions were to determine the actual frontiers. In Sind the decision for partition rested with the Legislative Assembly. In the Frontier Province, where the Red Shirt ministry retained a precarious hold, a referendum was to be held to decide the future of the province, and the same held good for the district of Sylhet in Assam. Thus Pakistan, with its eastern and western wings, came into existence, and with India formed two new dominions in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Each had its own Constituent Assembly and arrangements were made for the proportional sharing of assets and liabilities. Lord Mountbatten became the first Governor-General of the Indian dominion and Mr. Jinnah of Pakistan. Only the states remained to be fitted into the picture. The British treaties were ended and with it British paramountcy; each state became in theory independent, but with a strong hint from the departing British that they should associate themselves with one or other of the dominions.

Thus the British period in India came to an end after nearly three and a half centuries of trading, two centuries of political power, and a hundred and thirty years of general supremacy. The dream of Macaulay, Elphinstone, and their contemporaries came true in a way that they would not have expected. They might have disapproved in part, but on the whole they would have felt that their prescience had been justified. For the India which the British left in 1947 differed greatly from the archaic country which their diplomacy and arms had mastered a century and a half before. If there was not a class ‘of Indians in blood and colour but English in taste, in morals and in intellect’, as Macaulay and Munro had hoped for, a radical transformation had in fact taken place. Not only the external conditions of life but the soul of India itself had been greatly changed. The pessimism of the Panjab school of civilians had been disproved. While the superstructure of Indian society remained impressive to the casual observer, ideals and ideas from the West, new values along with new institutions had taken root in the country. The process had continued with gathering force beneath nostalgic cultural archaism fostered by growing national sentiment. The very weapons and arguments used by Congress against the British were largely of western provenance. India broke her British fetters with western hammers. And it was significant of the community of ideas between the two sides that the fetters were never in fact broken by force, but began to be removed by one side as soon as they began to be rattled by the other.
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For the Pakistan movement see works listed under Chapter 5, *The Genesis of Pak*.
CHAPTER 9

Economic and Cultural Development

The last quarter of a century of the British period was a time of rapid development in all departments of Indian life. Everywhere people were looking to the new India that was to be. But the new India which forward-looking patriots envisaged differed widely from the India to which their predecessors fifty years before had looked back. Less and less did people seek to revise the glories of the past, more and more did they strive to rival the triumphs of the contemporary West. Old India was not to be abandoned it is true; but increasingly it was coming to be regarded as a gracious background to the hard competitive world in which the new generation was determined to play an equal and worthy part. It was to provide a sunset glow, as it were, in whose light the hard outlines of the western factory would be softened. It would supply an emotional warmth for the people committed increasingly to new ways of life and thought. The new India was not to be built up, as late nineteenth-century patriots had thought, by copious draughts from the past, but rather by frequent injections from the energetic, contemporary West.

These two tendencies had been present in India from the days of Ram Mohan Roy, and often coexisted within the same individuals. In the latter years of the British period the two streams continued to run side by side, and not always to be obviously in conflict, but the western current was palpably gaining. The extent of its progress was to some extent concealed by nationalist sentiment, which naturally wished to glorify the national heritage, and felt too open a homage to western ideas to be damaging to its sense of self-respect. Nevertheless, the tendency was there, waiting for its strength to be revealed when the withdrawal of the foreign ruling power would no longer make open modernism seem unpatriotic. The influence of the two tendencies can be traced across the various facets of the national life.

From the close of the first World War there was rapid economic development. The suspension of the cotton excise in 1924 and its abolition in 1925 was the symbolic closing of the age of economic dependence. The new principle of fiscal autonomy, as interpreted by the Tariff Board, proved to be no cynical playing with words, but a living reality. The Tariff Board set itself to safeguard existing industries and to foster new ones. Thus the new steel industry received protection which enabled it to weather the depression of the early thirties, and the cotton industry was saved from the competition of cheap Japanese textiles. The sugar industry received help which
enabled India, before the second World War, to become independent of foreign sources of supply, and the cement industry began its career. The war intensified this already considerable economic activity. The Indian jute, steel, cotton, and leather industries expanded rapidly. Cement manufacture became a major industry. The Indian deposits of bauxite were exploited to develop a new aluminium industry and engineering developed from a jobbing basis to an industrial level. Numbers of technicians were trained as part of the war-time military and industrial expansion. In all directions India was seeking to make goods which she had formerly received from abroad. India became the sixth in order of world industrial states, and possessed in Tata's the largest single steel plant in the world.

All this was pure westernism, and it was natural that in this sphere such influence should be strong. But the old India was not yet extinct even industrially. It had its champion in Mahatma Gandhi himself, with his advocacy of khaddar or handwoven and homespun cloth. He directed the All-India Khaddar Association and resolutely opposed machines as the engines of Satan. His policy was based on considerations of the moral welfare of the peasants rather than on economic grounds, and on this basis there was much to be said for it. But even his authority could not induce the mass of Congressmen to take seriously the Congress rule of membership of spinning 9 yards of yarn a day. His fight was patently a losing one and even he had to make concessions to the evil thing. He submitted to the surgical operations of western medicine, he travelled on western railways, he consorted with great Indian industrialists like Birla, and did not hesitate to take somewhat of their profits for the benefit of the party funds. The homespun programme was a patriotic and moral but pre-industrial gesture; with independence it receded to the background of national life like village handicrafts in Britain. Industrialism had clearly come to stay.

In social life the same dualism can be observed. But here the Mahatma was a revolutionary instead of a conservative force. He headed the movement for the uplift of the depressed or exterior castes with even more zeal than that for khaddar cloth. He not only insisted on their inclusion within the Hindu fold and risked his fast to death in 1932 for its sake, but affirmed their equal status as human beings with all other Hindus. His campaigns for the abolition of untouchability, for free temple entry and admission to wells, were founded upon this belief. He coined the word Harijan (son of God) to describe them in emphasis of this conviction and renamed the paper in which he expounded his views in their honour. Gandhi was not alone in this work. Christian missions and devoted Hindus like Gokhale’s Servants of India had preceded him, but his advocacy with his genius for popular appeal raised the whole question to a national level. In Dr. Ambedkar the Harijans found a leader of outstanding courage and ability from among their own number. The way was prepared for the formal abolition of untouchability in the new Constitution. There were other influences
working in the same direction. The Sarda Act of 1929 raising the marriage age was a signpost of reformist sentiment, though it was only spasmodically enforced. The rights of women were championed with a new vigour. Female education was pressed forward and the Hindu code on the subject of women’s rights itself altered. Educated women were still but a very small minority but they had already produced such striking figures as Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the poetess of Congress politicians, and Begam Liaquat Ali Khan. Within the Hindu home there was mitigation of the austere lot of the Hindu widow, and behind the purdah Muslim women began to stir. The movement received a strong impulse from the civil disobedience movement of 1930–1 when women played a prominent part in political activity. Caste associations were cautiously relaxing the stricter caste rules and simplifying ceremonies, and a general sentiment was growing in favour of freer social intercourse between all sections of society.

Hardly any of these tendencies were based on a study of the Shastras. Rather, they were derived from ideas of individualism and personal worth, of moral rights and duties coming from the West. One could not for generations claim democratic political rights with its corollary of personal equality without eventually becoming aware of its social implications. The ideological skin of traditional Hinduism (or Brahmanism) which had covered Hindu society so long, was wearing thin amongst the westernized and forward-looking section of the people. Over village life it still stretched firm and largely intact. But while rural India forms the weight of Indian society, it is weight in the form of ballast. In the long run, and provided the run is long enough, it will follow the leaders in the towns. All this did not go unchallenged. The Mahasabha sought to organize the orthodox elements politically and the Sanatan Dharma stood staunchly for traditional views. But the orthodox found no successor to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya of equal distinction. To the majority of Hindus Hinduism meant Gandhi, and Gandhi was anathema to the really orthodox. The pressure of the West was felt even in avowedly Hindu bodies. Thus the reformist Arya Samaj, whose slogan was ‘back to the Vedas’ and whose effort was to revive the primitive Hindu institutions and along with them the Vedic way of life, found itself compelled to maintain modern educational institutions conforming to government regulations alongside its ashrams and gurukuls.

In education there was rapid development. This was most noticeable at the top, but there were increasing efforts to spread popular primary instruction. The first province to make notable progress at the elementary level was the Panjab under the impetus of Sir Fazl-i-Husain. The movement culminated in the government Sargent plan which was paralleled by the Congress Wardha scheme. It is interesting to note that the differences between them were of method rather than objective. The purpose of both was the democratic concept of education for all, not the Brahman principle of education for some. In the sphere of
higher education the Sadler Commission bore fruit in the establishment of a number of unitary teaching universities, of which Lucknow in the north, Patna in the east, and Annamalai in the south were typical examples. The latter exemplified the fact that modern higher education was now sufficiently firmly rooted in the public mind to become the object of munificent private benefaction. Delhi, in the hands of Sir Maurice Gwyer, provided a further type of a teaching university composed of federated colleges. Along with new universities went the rapid growth of technical institutions and the development of scientific study at the highest level. The work of Sir Jagadish Bose in Calcutta, and of Dr. C. V. Raman in the Bangalore Institute, were highlights of a body of scientific endeavour which placed India in the main stream of world scientific study. In many spheres names began to appear beside that of Tagore in the world arena of knowledge and thought, such as Sir Muhammad Iqbal the Panjabi poet and thinker, Sir Jadunath Sarkar the historian, and Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan the philosopher.

The intellectual climate of the twenties was one of liberal humanitarian rationalism. Tilak's attempt to combine Brahmanical orthodoxy with revolutionary nationalism died with him; it was the rationalist humanitarianism of his Brahman rival Gokhale which held the field. The most characteristic representatives of this current of thought were perhaps Mr. C. R. Rajagopalachari and the silver-tongued Srinivasa Sastri in the south, and Pandit Motilal Nehru in the north. Mr. Jinnah, in his days of westernized elegance before 1935, represented the same trend amongst Muslims. Pandit Motilal's son Jawaharlal followed the western mode of using liberalism as a stepping-stone to socialism. For a time in the thirties he dallied with Marxism. Few went so far as this before the late thirties. But then a small group, appalled by the contrasts between poverty and wealth to be seen everywhere, repelled by the Congress patronage of bankers and industrialists, and frustrated of any hope of improvement through normal channels, went beyond Nehru and avowedly espoused the Marxist cause. Many of them were 'England returned' and derived their inspiration from the contemporary Communist trend among British intellectuals.

These currents were western inspired, but they did not altogether go unchallenged. With singular grace and subtlety Shri Arabindo Ghose from his retreat in Pondicherry sought to reinterpret Vedantic thought in modern terms. Sir Muhammad Iqbal equally sought to find in Islam a dynamic for Muslims in the modern world. These were perhaps the two greatest thinkers of the time. Mahatma Gandhi himself tirelessly preached ahimsa and insisted that his proposed moral revolution was essentially Hindu. But even Gandhi's ahimsa owed much to Tolstoy, himself a link in the long chain of Christian pacifism, while Iqbal's dynamism was not unrelated to western revolutionary influences. Try as these Indian thinkers would, the West kept breaking in. Time may elevate Ghose to a pedestal as the founder of neo-Hinduism, but may also reveal him, like Porphyry among the
neo-Platonist, as the last great champion of a dying school. Be this as it may, it is certain that the western stream was stronger than the eastern during this period, and appeared to be gathering force.

The Indian revival of the visual and aural arts had lagged behind developments in other fields. But now there were increasing signs of vitality. The inspiration was largely traditional, but even here the influence of the West was felt. Art was secular and naturalist in outlook even though its subjects were often religious in form, the artists a professional élite rather than hereditary craftsmen. Sculpture was again practised in a secular muse. Music was cultivated and found a western interpreter in Fox-Strangeways. But musical development, especially in Bengal, looked westward and attempted combination of eastern and western modes. The most striking development was in painting. The efforts of Havell, Rothenstein, and Coomaraswamy led to a new appreciation of the treasures of Indian art and sculpture, and bore fruit in the modern school of Indian painting. Much pleasing work of merit was produced, and by Abanindranath Tagore, the doyen of the school, work of great distinction. Here, too, however, the modifying influences were western. While the Bengal school looked back to Ajanta for inspiration and the Lahore school turned toward the Mughuls, Bombay sought to practise a western realism. On the whole the early promise was scarcely fulfilled; Indian artists await a fresh creative vision which perhaps independence will give.

Literary activity beginning in Bengal had long been great and had received world recognition in the award of the Nobel Prize to Tagore in 1912. Other Indian languages took up the tale and between the wars there was an increasing number of essayists and novelists practising in English as well. The writing of such men as Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Ahmed Ali was supple and vital. They were much exercised by social problems and their work tended to realism; their writings formed a new vehicle for the discussion of ideas formerly provided mainly by the periodical press. Their work promises greater things in the future, but meanwhile it can be said that they have taken over from British writers like E. M. Forster and Edward Thompson the task of interpreting modern India to itself and the world. The cultural keynotes of this period were autonomy and western influence. Gone were the days of imitation or uncritical admiration. In every branch of activity India was standing on her own feet and making her own decisions. She was increasingly ready to face the West on its own terms, to learn, to absorb, and to teach in her turn. In the realms of the spirit as well as in that of politics India was preparing to shape her own future. And whatever form that future might take, it would certainly contain a large element of the West. It is at least arguable that in dying politically the West in India bade fair to triumph spiritually.
ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

AUTHORITIES

For economic development, see the authorities listed at the end of Book III, chapter 4, Economic Policy and Development, 1858–1939, p. 271-2.

For the cultural background see W. T. de Bary et al., Sources of Indian Tradition (New York, 1958). For some insight into modern developments the works of Rabindranath Tagore, R. K. Narayan (specially The Guide, New York, 1958), N. C. Chaudhuri (specially The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, 1951), Humayun Kabir and Mulk Raj Anand may be consulted. The films of Satyajit Ray are invaluable for their cultural sensitivity as well as their skill.