The Initial Years

Fifteenth August 1947, the first day of free India, was celebrated with much exuberance and elation. The sacrifices of generations of patriots and the blood of countless martyrs had borne fruit. But this joy was tainted by despair, for the country had been divided. Large parts of the two new nations were engulfed by communal riots. There was a mass exodus of people from both states across the new borders. There was scarcity of food and other consumer goods, and a fear of administrative breakdown.

In a memorable address to the Constituent Assembly on the night of 14 August, Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking as the first prime minister of a free India and giving expression to the feelings of the people, said:

> Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge . . . At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity . . . We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again.[1]

But independence had been accompanied by a multitude of problems, and, of course, centuries of backwardness, prejudice, inequality, and ignorance still weighed on the land. The debris of two centuries of colonialism had to be cleared and the promises of the freedom struggle to be fulfilled. The long haul had just begun. As Nehru declared in his 14 August speech, 'The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements . . . That future is not one of ease and resting but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken.'[2]

There were the immediate problems of the territorial and administrative integration of the princely states, the communal riots that accompanied Partition, the rehabilitation of nearly six million refugees who had migrated from Pakistan, the protection of Muslims threatened by communal gangs, the need to avoid war with Pakistan, and the Communist insurgency. Restoration of law and order and political stability and putting in place an administrative system, threatened with breakdown because of Partition and the illogical division of the army and higher bureaucracy virtually on religious lines, were other immediate tasks. As Nehru declared in 1947, 'First things must come first and the first thing is the security and stability of India.'[3] Or, in the words of the political scientist W.H. Morris-Jones, the task was 'to hold things together, to ensure survival, to get accustomed to the feel of being on the water, to see to it that the vessels keep afloat.'[4]

In addition there were the medium-term problems of framing a constitution and building a

representative democratic and civil libertarian political order, organizing elections to put in place the system of representative and responsible governments at the Centre and in the states, and abolishing the semi-feudal agrarian order through thoroughgoing land reforms.

The newly formed independent government also had the long-term tasks of promoting national integration, pushing forward the process of nation-in-the-making, facilitating rapid economic development, removing endemic poverty, and initiating the planning process. It also sought to bridge as quickly as possible the gap between mass expectations aroused by the freedom struggle and their fulfilment, to get rid of centuries-long social injustice, inequality and oppression, and to evolve a foreign policy which would defend Indian independence and promote peace in a world increasingly engulfed by the Cold War and getting divided into hostile power blocs.

All these problems had to be dealt with within the framework of the basic values to which the national movement had been committed and within the parameters of a broad national consensus.

The people and the political leadership set out to handle these short-term and long-term problems fuelled by an optimism, a certain faith in the country's future and with a *joie de vivre*. This mood was to persist for most of the Nehru years. Though many, especially on the left, were dissatisfied with and basically critical of Nehru and his policies, they too shared this feeling of hope. Those who have lived through the Nehru era often now feel that they were lucky to have done so. Nehru himself once again expressed this feeling after nearly a decade as prime minister: 'There is no lack of drama in this changing world of ours and, even in India, we live in an exciting age. I have always considered it a great privilege for people of this generation to live during this period of India's long history . . . I have believed that there is nothing more exciting in the wide world today than to work in India.'[5]

Some of this euphoria disappeared with the India–China war of 1962. The war brought in a degree of realism but even so neither Nehru nor the country experienced any sense of defeatism. Nehru had always believed that 'India's greatest need is for a sense of certainty concerning her own success'.[6] And it was this sense of excitement and of the coming success which he succeeded in imparting to the millions.

We shall discuss the short-term problems in the following sections. The long-term tasks, the maturing of the country under Nehru's stewardship, and the development of the political parties are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Independent India embarked on its tasks with the benefit of an outstanding leadership, having tremendous dedication and idealism besides the presence of a strong nationwide party, the Congress. Beside the great Nehru stood a group of leaders who had played a notable role in the freedom movement. There was his deputy prime minister, Sardar Patel, a leader who possessed a strong will and was decisive in action and strong in administration. Then there were the learned Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the erudite Rajendra Prasad, and C. Rajagopalachari, endowed with a razor-sharp intellect. At the state level, were several leaders like Govind Ballabh Pant in U.P., B.C. Roy in West Bengal, and B.C. Kher and Morarji Desai in Bombay, who enjoyed

unchallenged authority in their states. All these leaders had skills and experience to run a modern and democratic administrative and political system which they had acquired through organizing a mass movement, building up a political party, and participating in colonial legislatures for decades. They also possessed a great deal of talent in consensus– building. The national movement had brought together different regions, sections of society and ideological currents around a common political agenda. Outside the Congress were the Socialists, Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan, the Communists, P.C. Joshi and Ajoy Ghosh, the liberal communalist, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, and the Dalit leader, Dr B.R. Ambedkar. On the periphery were Dr S. Radhakrishnan, the distinguished philosopher, Dr Zakir Hussain, the educationist, V.K. Krishna Menon, who had struggled for India's freedom in Britain, and a host of dedicated Gandhian leaders.

The leaders of independent India were persons of total personal integrity and had an austere lifestyle. No finger was ever pointed at Sardar Patel, for example, even as he performed the unenviable but necessary task of gathering funds for the Congress from the rich.

The Congress leaders also shared a common vision of independent India. They were committed to the goals of rapid social and economic change and democratization of the society and polity, and the values imparted by the national movement. Nehru's commitment to these values is well known. But, in fact, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari were equally committed to the values of democracy, civil liberties, secularism, independent economic development, anti-imperialism and social reforms and had a pro-poor orientation. These leaders differed with Nehru primarily on the question of socialism and class analysis of society. We may point out, parenthetically, in this context that Patel has been much misunderstood and misrepresented both by admirers and critics. The right-wingers have used him to attack the Nehruvian vision and policies, while his leftist critics have portrayed him as the archetypal rightist. Both, however, have been wrong. In any case, it is important that Nehru and the other leaders shared the belief that for the country's development the building up of a national consensus was necessary. The leadership's position was strengthened by the fact that they enjoyed tremendous popularity and prestige among almost every section of the people. On top of that, this team was headed by Jawaharlal Nehru who exercised, after December 1950, unchallenged authority in the party and the government.

Another positive feature of the Indian situation was the existence of Congress, a strong, democratically functioning, India-wide national party, with an established leadership and deep roots and strong support among the people. Except for the Communist party, its authority or legitimacy was questioned by nobody.

Even as Congress was being transformed from a movement into a party and was struggling to retain its politically all-embracing and ideologically diverse character, its leadership was aware of the fact that in the troublesome post-Partiton period the country needed a government which would represent the widest possible consensus and carry with it different shades of opinion and sections of society for implementing a common programme. So, even though the Socialists and the Communists moved into the Opposition, and the Congress was in an overwhelming majority in the Constituent Assembly and enjoyed unchallenged power, the Congress leadership widened

the base of the Constituent Assembly and the government by the inclusion of distinguished and representative non-Congressmen. The government virtually became a national government. For example, the first Nehru cabinet of fourteen included five non-Congressmen: Dr B.R. Ambedkar and Syama Prasad Mookerjee, both of whom had opposed the Congress before 1947, John Mathai, C.H. Bhabha and Shanmukham Chetty. Dr B.R. Ambedkar was also made the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution. Dr S. Radhakrishnan, the first Vice-President and the second President of India, had never been a Congressman.

Accession of the Princely States

Unifying post-Partition India and the princely states under one administration was perhaps the most important task facing the political leadership.

In colonial India, nearly 40 per cent of the territory was occupied by fifty-six small and large states ruled by princes who enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy under the system of British paramountcy. British power protected them from their own people as also from external aggression so long as they did British bidding.

In 1947 the future of the princely states once the British left became a matter of concern. Many of the larger princely states began to dream of independence and to scheme for it. They claimed that the paramountcy could not be transferred to the new states of India and Pakistan. Their ambitions were fuelled by the British prime minister Clement Attlee's announcement on 20 February 1947 that 'His Majesty's Government do not intend to hand over their powers and obligations under paramountcy to any government of British India.'[7] Consequently, rulers of several states claimed that they would become independent from 15 August 1947 when British rule ended.

In this they got encouragement from M.A. Jinnah who publicly declared on 18 June 1947 that 'the States would be independent sovereign States on the termination of paramountcy' and were 'free to remain independent if they so desired'.[8] The British stand was, however, altered to some extent when, in his speech on the Independence of India Bill, Attlee said, 'It is the hope of His Majesty's Government that all the States will in due course find their appropriate place with one or the other Dominion within the British Commonwealth.'[9]

The Indian nationalists could hardly accept a situation where the unity of free India would be endangered by hundreds of large or small independent or autonomous states interspersed within it which were sovereign. Besides, the people of the states had participated in the process of nation-in-the-making from the end of nineteenth century and developed strong feelings of Indian nationalism. Naturally, the nationalist leaders in British India and in the states rejected the claim of any state to independence and repeatedly declared that independence for a princely state was not an option—the only option open being whether the state would accede to India or Pakistan on the basis of contiguity of its territory and the wishes of its people. In fact, the national movement had for long held that political power belonged to the people of a state and not to its ruler and that the people of the states were an integral part of the Indian nation. Simultaneously, the people of

the states were astir under the leadership of the States' Peoples' Conference as never before, demanding introduction of a democratic political order and integration with the rest of the country.

With great skill and masterful diplomacy and using both persuasion and pressure, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel succeeded in integrating the hundreds of princely states with the Indian Union in two stages. Some states had shown wisdom and realism and perhaps a degree of patriotism by joining the Constituent Assembly in April 1947. But the majority of princes had stayed away and a few, such as those of Travancore, Bhopal and Hyderabad, publicly announced their desire to claim an independent status.

On 27 June 1947, Sardar Patel assumed additional charge of the newly created States' Department with V.P. Menon as its Secretary. Patel was fully aware of the danger posed to Indian unity by the possible intransigence of the rulers of the states. He told Menon at the time that 'the situation held dangerous potentialities and that if we did not handle it promptly and effectively, our hard-earned freedom might disappear through the States' door'.[10] He, therefore, set out to tackle the recalcitrant states expeditiously.

Patel's first step was to appeal to the princes whose territories fell inside India to accede to the Indian Union in three subjects which affected the common interests of the country, namely, foreign relations, defence and communications. He also gave an implied threat that he would not be able to restrain the impatient people of the states and the government's terms after 15 August would be stiffer.

Fearful of the rising tide of the peoples' movements in their states, and of the more extreme agenda of the radical wing of the Congress, as also Patel's reputation for firmness and even ruthlessness, the princes responded to Patel's appeal and all but three of them—Junagadh, Jammu and Kashmir and Hyderabad— acceded to India by 15 August 1947. By the end of 1948, however, the three recalcitrant states too were forced to fall in line.

Junagadh was a small state on the coast of Saurashtra surrounded by Indian territority and therefore without any geographical contiguity with Pakistan. Yet, its Nawab announced accession of his state to Pakistan on 15 August 1947 even though the people of the state, overwhelmingly Hindu, desired to join India.

The Indian nationalist leaders had for decades stood for the sovereignty of the people against the claims of the princes. It was, therefore, not surprising that in Junagadh's case Nehru and Patel agreed that the final voice, like in any other such case, for example Kashmir or Hyderabad, should be that of the people as ascertained through a plebiscite. Going against this approach, Pakistan accepted Junagadh's accession. On the other hand, the people of the state would not accept the ruler's decision. They organized a popular movement, forced the Nawab to flee and established a provisional government. The Dewan of Junagadh, Shah Nawaz Bhutto, the father of the more famous Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, now decided to invite the Government of India to intervene. Indian troops thereafter marched into the state. A plebiscite was held in the state in February 1948 which went overwhelmingly in favour of joining India.

The state of Kashmir bordered on both India and Pakistan. Its ruler Hari Singh was a Hindu, while nearly 75 per cent of the population was Muslim. Hari Singh too did not accede either to India or Pakistan. Fearing democracy in India and communalism in Pakistan, he hoped to stay out of both and to continue to wield power as an independent ruler. The popular political forces led by the National Conference and its leader Sheikh Abdullah, however, wanted to join India. The Indian political leaders took no steps to obtain Kashmir's accession and, in line with their general approach, wanted the people of Kashmir to decide whether to link their fate with India or Pakistan. (Nehru and Patel had made a similar offer in the case of Junagadh and Hyderabad.) In this they were supported by Gandhiji, who declared in August 1947 that Kashmir was free to join either India or Pakistan in accordance with the will of the people.

But Pakistan not only refused to accept the principle of plebiscite for deciding the issue of accession in the case of Junagadh and Hyderabad, in the case of Kashmir it tried to short-circuit the popular decision through a shortsighted action, forcing India to partially change its attitude in regard to Kashmir. On 22 October, with the onset of winter, several Pathan tribesmen, led unofficially by Pakistani army officers, invaded Kashmir and rapidly pushed towards Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. The ill-trained army of the Maharaja proved no match for the invading forces. In panic, on 24 October, the Maharaja appealed to India for military assistance. Nehru, even at this stage, did not favour accession without ascertaining the will of the people. But Mountbatten, the Governor-General, pointed out that under international law India could send its troops to Kashmir only after the state's formal accession to India. Sheikh Abdullah and Sardar Patel too insisted on accession. And so on 26 October, the Maharaja acceded to India and also agreed to install Abdullah as head of the state's administration. Even though both the National Conference and the Maharaja wanted firm and permanent accession, India, in conformity with its democractic commitment and Mountbatten's advice, announced that it would hold a referendum on the accession decision once peace and law and order had been restored in the Valley.

After accession the cabinet took the decision to immediately fly troops to Srinagar. This decision was bolstered by its approval by Gandhiji who told Nehru that there should be no submission to evil in Kashmir and that the raiders had to be driven out. On 27 October nearly 100 planes airlifted men and weapons to Srinagar to join the battle against the raiders. Srinagar was first held and then the raiders were gradually driven out of the Valley, though they retained control over parts of the state and the armed conflict continued for months.

Fearful of the dangers of a full-scale war between India and Pakistan, the Government of India agreed, on 30 December 1947, on Mountbatten's suggestion, to refer the Kashmir problem to the United Nations Security Council, asking for vacation of aggression by Pakistan.

Nehru was to regret this decision later as, instead of taking note of the aggression by Pakistan, the Security Council, guided by Britain and the United States, tended to side with Pakistan. Ignoring India's complaint, it replaced the 'Kashmir question' before it by the 'India–Pakistan dispute'. It passed many resolutions, but the upshot was that in accordance with one of its resolutions both India and Pakistan accepted a ceasefire on 31 December 1948 which still prevails and the state was effectively divided along the ceasefire line. Nehru, who had expected to get

justice from the United Nations, was to express his disillusionment in a letter to Vijaylakshmi Pandit in February 1948: 'I could not imagine that the Security Council could possibly behave in the trivial and partisan manner in which it functioned. These people are supposed to keep the world in order. It is not surprising that the world is going to pieces. The United States and Britain have played a dirty role, Britain probably being the chief actor behind the scenes.'[11]

In 1951, the UN passed a resolution providing for a referendum under UN supervision after Pakistan had withdrawn its troops from the part of Kashmir under its control. The resolution has remained infructuous since Pakistan has refused to withdraw its forces from what is known as Azad Kashmir.

Since then Kashmir has been the main obstacle in the path of friendly relations between India and Pakistan. India has regarded Kashmir's accession as final and irrevocable and Kashmir as its integral part. Pakistan continues to deny this claim. Kashmir has also over time become a symbol as well as a test of India's secularism; it was, as Nehru put it, basic to the triumph of secularism over communalism in India.

Hyderabad was the largest state in India and was completely surrounded by Indian territory. The Nizam of Hyderabad was the third Indian ruler who did not accede to India before 15 August. Instead, he claimed an independent status and, encouraged by Pakistan, began to expand his armed forces. But Sardar Patel was in no hurry to force a decision on him, especially as Mountbatten was interested in acting as an intermediary in arriving at a negotiated settlement with him. Time, Patel felt, was on India's side, especially as the Nizam made a secret commitment not to join Pakistan and the British government refused to give Hyderabad the status of a Dominion. But Patel made it clear that India would not tolerate 'an isolated spot which would destroy the very Union which we have built up with our blood and toil'.[12]

In November 1947, the Government of India signed a stand– still agreement with the Nizam, hoping that while the negotiations proceeded, the latter would introduce representative government in the state, making the task of merger easier. But the Nizam had other plans. He engaged the services of the leading British lawyer Sir Walter Monckton, a friend of Mountbatten, to negotiate with the Government of India on his behalf. The Nizam hoped to prolong negotiations and in the meanwhile build up his military strength and force India to accept his sovereignty; or alternatively he might succeed in acceding to Pakistan, especially in view of the tension between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

Meanwhile, three other political developments took place within the state. There was rapid growth, with official help, of the militant Muslim communal organization, Ittihad ul Muslimin and its paramilitary wing, the Razakars. Then, on 7 August 1947 the Hyderabad State Congress launched a powerful satyagraha movement to force democratization on the Nizam. Nearly 20,000 satyagrahis were jailed. As a result of attacks by the Razakars and repression by the state authorities, thousands of people fled the state and took shelter in temporary camps in Indian territory. The state Congress-led movement now took to arms. By then a powerful Communist-led peasant struggle had developed in the Telangana region of the state from the latter half of 1946. The movement, which had waned due to the severity of state repression by the end of

1946, recovered its vigour when peasant *dalams* (squads) organized defence of the people against attacks by the Razakars, attacked big landlords and distributed their lands among the peasants and the landless.

By June 1948, Sardar Patel was getting impatient as the negotiations with the Nizam dragged on. From his sickbed in Dehradun, he wrote to Nehru: 'I feel very strongly that a stage has come when we should tell them quite frankly that nothing short of unqualified acceptance of accession and of introduction of undiluted responsible government would be acceptable to us.'[13] Still, despite the provocations by the Nizam and the Razakars, the Government of India held its hand for several months. But the Nizam continued to drag his feet and import more and more arms; also the depredations of the Razakars were assuming dangerous proportions. Finally, on 13 September 1948, the Indian army moved into Hyderabad. The Nizam surrendered after three days and acceded to the Indian Union in November. The Government of India decided to be generous and not punish the Nizam. He was retained as formal ruler of the state or its Rajpramukh, was given a privy purse of Rs 5 million, and permitted to keep most of his immense wealth.

With the accession of Hyderabad, the merger of princely states with the Indian Union was completed, and the Government of India's writ ran all over the land. The Hyderabad episode marked another triumph of Indian secularism. Not only had a large number of Muslims in Hyderabad joined the anti-Nizam struggle, Muslims in the rest of the country had also supported the government's policy and action to the dismay of the leaders of Pakistan and the Nizam. As Patel joyfully wrote to Suhrawardy on 28 September, 'On the question of Hyderabad, the Indian Union Muslims have come out in the open on our side and that has certainly created a good impression in the country.'[14]

The second and the more difficult stage of the full integration of the princely states into the new Indian nation began in December 1947. Once again Sardar Patel moved with speed, completing the process within one year. Smaller states were either merged with the neighbouring states or merged together to 'form centrally administered areas'. A large number were consolidated into five new unions, forming Madhya Bharat, Rajasthan, Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), Saurashtra and Travancore-Cochin; Mysore, Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir retained their original form as separate states of the Union.

In return for their surrender of all power and authority, the rulers of major states were given privy purses in perpetuity, free of all taxes. The privy purses amounted to Rs 4.66 crore in 1949 and were later guaranteed by the constitution. The rulers were allowed succession to the gaddi and retained certain privileges such as keeping their titles, flying their personal flags and gun salutes on ceremonial occasions.

There was some criticism of these concessions to the princes at the time as well as later. But keeping in view the difficult times just after independence and Partition, those were perhaps a small price to pay for the extinction of the princes' power and the early and easy territorial and political integration of the states with the rest of the country. Undoubtedly, the integration of the states compensated for the loss of the territories constituting Pakistan in terms of area as well as

population. It certainly partially healed 'the wounds of partition'.

Two other trouble spots remained on the Indian body politic. These were the French- and Portuguese-owned settlements dotting India's east and west coasts, with Pondicherry and Goa forming their hub. The people of these settlements were eager to join their newly liberated mother-country. The French authorities were more reasonable and after prolonged negotiations handed over Pondicherry and other French possessions to India in 1954. But the Portuguese were determined to stay on, especially as Portugal's NATO allies, Britain and the US, were willing to support this defiant attitude. The Government of India, being committed to a policy of settling disputes between nations by peaceful means, was not willing to take military steps to liberate Goa and other Portuguese colonies. The people of Goa took matters in their hands and started a movement seeking freedom from the Portuguese, but it was brutally suppressed as were the efforts of non-violent satyagrahis from India to march into Goa. In the end, after waiting patiently for international opinion to put pressure on Portugal, Nehru ordered Indian troops to march into Goa on the night of 17 December 1961. The Governor-General of Goa immediately surrendered without a fight and the territorial and political integration of India was completed, even though it had taken over fourteen years to do so.

The Communal Holocaust

Partition and the violence which accompanied it led to nearly six million refugees pouring into India having lost their all.

India was in the midst of a communal holocaust. There was senseless communal slaughter and a fratricidal war of unprecedented proportions. Unspeakable atrocities were perpetrated on the minorities in both India and Pakistan. In the span of a few months, nearly 500,000 people were killed and property worth thousands of millions of rupees was looted and destroyed. Communal violence threatened the very fabric of society. Even in Delhi, under the very nose of the central government, the looting and killing of Muslims lasted several days.

At the very outset the people and the government faced the gravest of crises. The great danger was that the atmosphere and the mentality generated by Partition and the riots might persist and strengthen communal tendencies in Indian politics. But Indian nationalism was able to withstand the test. Despite the fierce pressure of communal sentiment, which affected even some of the important Congress leaders, both at the Centre and in the states, it is to the credit of the national leadership and the people that they managed to maintain India's secular polity. This was no easy task and Nehru, particularly had to use the full force of his personality, including threats of resignation, to make this possible.

The situation was brought under control within a few months through decisive political and administrative measures. For example, during August–September, the back of communal violence in Delhi was broken by bringing the army on the streets and ordering the police to shoot at communal mobs indulging in looting and killing. In fact, in spite of many errors and weaknesses, the Government of India's record, and in particular Nehru's personal record, in dealing with the post-Partition riots was exemplary. The government also succeeded in protecting

the Muslim minority in the country, so that in the end 45 million Muslims chose to remain in India.

Communalism was thereby contained and weakened but not eliminated, for conditions were still favourable for its growth. For communalism to be eclipsed a consistent struggle against it would be needed for a prolonged period. More than anyone else, Nehru was aware of this. And so he never tired of stressing that communalism was a fundamental issue of India politics and that it posed the main threat to India's integrity. 'If allowed free play,' he wrote in 1951, 'communalism would break up India.'[15] Portraying communalism as 'the Indian version of fascism', he said in October 1947: 'The wave of fascism which is gripping India now is the direct outcome of hatred for the non-Muslims which the Muslim League preached among its followers for years. The League accepted the ideology of fascism from the Nazis of Germany . . . The ideas and methods of fascist organization are now gaining popularity among the Hindus also and the demand for the establishment of a Hindu State is its clear manifestation.'[16]

Nehru carried on a massive campaign against communalism to instil a sense of security in the minorities, through public speeches, radio broadcasts, speeches in parliament, private letters and epistles to chief ministers. He repeatedly declared: 'No State can be civilised except a secular State.'[17] On Gandhiji's birthday in 1951, he told a Delhi audience: 'If any person raises his hand to strike down another on the ground of religion, I shall fight him till the last breath of my life, both as the head of the government and from outside.'[18] Democratic though he was, he even advocated a ban on political organizations based on religion and got the constitution amended to enable the government to impose 'reasonable restrictions' on the right to free speech and expression in order to curb communal speeches and writings. In his struggle against communalism, Nehru got the full cooperation of his colleagues like Sardar Patel and C. Rajagopalachari. Patel, for example, declared at the Jaipur session of the Congress in December 1948 that the Congress and the government were determined 'to make India a truly secular state'. In February 1949 he described the talk of 'Hindu Raj' as 'that mad idea'.[19] And he told his audience in 1950: 'Ours is a secular state . . . Here every Muslim should feel that he is an Indian citizen and has equal rights as an Indian citizen. If we cannot make him feel like this, we shall not be worthy of our heritage and of our country.'[20]

A major setback to the communal forces occurred with Gandhiji's martyrdom. The tragedy of the communal riots preceding and accompanying independence deeply affected Gandhiji. When the entire nation was rejoicing in August 1947, the man who had led the struggle for freedom since 1919, the man who had given the message of non-violence and love and courage to the Indian people, the man who had represented the best in Indian culture and politics, was touring the hate-torn lands of Bengal and Bihar, trying to douse the communal fire and bring comfort to people who were paying through senseless slaughter the price for freedom. In reply to a message of birthday congratulations in 1947, Gandhiji said that he no longer wished to live long and that he would 'invoke the aid of the all-embracing Power to take me away from this "vale of tears"

rather than make me a helpless witness of the butchery by man become savage, whether he dares to call himself a Muslim or a Hindu or what not'.[21]

The celebrations of independence had hardly died down when on 30 January 1948, a Hindu communal fanatic, Nathuram Godse, assassinated Gandhiji or the Father of the Nation. The whole nation was shocked and stricken with grief and communalism retreated from the minds of men and women. Expressing the nation's sorrow, Nehru spoke over All India Radio:

> Friends and comrades, the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere . . . The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light . . . that light represented something more than the immediate present; it represented the living, the eternal truths, reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom.[22]

Realizing that Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) adherence to the ideology of communalism and violence and the hatred that it had been spreading against Gandhi and secularism were the real forces behind the assassination—the RSS men had even celebrated it in many places—the government immediately banned the RSS and arrested most of its leaders and functionaries. Nehru, of course, had for some time been characterizing the RSS as a fascist organisation. In December 1947 he stated: 'We have a great deal of evidence to show that the RSS is an organisation which is in the nature of a private army and which is definitely proceeding on the strictest Nazi lines, even following the technique of organisation.'[23]

The government, however, had regard for civil liberties, even in the case of organizations like the RSS. Nehru, for example, had written to Patel on 29 June 1949: 'in existing circumstances the less we have of these bans and detentions, the better.'[24] The ban on the RSS was lifted in July 1949 after it had accepted the conditions laid down by Patel as the Home Minister. These conditions were: The RSS would adopt a written and Published constitution, restrict itself to cultural activities and not meddle with politics, renounce violence and secrecy, profess loyalty to India's flag and constitution and organize itself along democratic lines.

Rehabilitation of Refugees

The government had to stretch itself to the maximum to give relief to and resettle and rehabilitate the nearly six million refugees from Pakistan who had lost their all there and whose world had been turned upside down. The task took some time but it was accomplished. By 1951, the problem of the rehabilitation of the refugees from West Pakistan had been fully tackled.

The task of rehabilitating and resettling refugees from East Bengal was made more difficult by the fact that the exodus of Hindus from East Bengal continued for years. While nearly all the Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan had migrated in one go in 1947, a large number of Hindus in East Bengal had stayed on there in the initial years of 1947 and 1948. But as communal riots broke out periodically in East Bengal, there was a steady stream of refugees from there year after year till 1971. Providing them with work and shelter and psychological assurance, therefore

became a continuous and hence a difficult task. Unlike in Bengal, most of the refugees from west Punjab could occupy the large lands and property left by the Muslim migrants to Pakistan from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and could therefore be resettled on land. This was not the case in West Bengal. Also because of linguistic affinity, it was easier for Punjabi and Sindhi refugees to settle in today's Himachal Pradesh and Haryana and western U.P., Rajasthan and Delhi. The resettlement of the refugees from East Bengal could take place only in Bengal and to a lesser extent in Assam and Tripura. As a result 'a very large number of people who had been engaged in agricultural occupations before their displacement were forced to seek survival in semi-urban and urban contexts as the underclass', and contributed to 'the process of immiserisation' of West Bengal.[25]

Relations with Pakistan

More intractable was the problem of dealing with Pakistan. Despite the Kashmir issue, Nehru and the Government of India adopted towards Pakistan a policy of non-rancour and fair dealing and of promoting conciliation and reducing mutual tensions. In January 1948, the Government of India, following a fast by Gandhiji, paid Pakistan Rs 550 million as part of the assets of Partition, even when it feared that the money might be used to finance military action in Kashmir. The governments of the two countries differed on issues raised by evacuee property, left behind by those who migrated from the two countries, but every effort was made to resolve them through negotiations.

Along with the Kashmir issue, an important source of constant tension between the two countries was the strong sense of insecurity among Hindus in East Bengal, fuelled primarily by the communal character of Pakistan's political system. This led to the steady migration of the persecuted Hindus from East Bengal to West Bengal and retaliatory attacks on Muslims in West Bengal, leading to their migration. Many urged the Government of India to intervene in East Bengal militarily to protect the minority there. But, though very concerned about the fate of Hindus in East Bengal and the rise of communal sentiment in India, Nehru and the Government of India refused to get provoked into retaliatory action. Regarding it as a human problem, the government tried to solve it through persuasion and pressure, even while taking strong action against attacks on Muslims in West Bengal. Nehru urged Pakistan to put an end to communal attacks on Hindus and to provide them with security so that they stayed on in East Bengal. He repeatedly stressed the duty of each country to protect its minorities. He even thought of resigning from office and touring East Bengal as a private person to repeat Gandhiji's approach in Noakhali.

On 8 April 1950, the prime ministers of India and Pakistan signed an agreement known as the Nehru–Liaqat Pact to resolve the issue of protection of the minorities. The pact met with the strong disapproval of the Hindu communalists and the two ministers from Bengal, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and K.C. Neogi, resigned from the cabinet in protest. It was plain sailing for the pact elsewhere in the country, given Sardar Patel's support for it. The migration of Hindus from East Bengal, however, continued despite the pact.

Notwithstanding continuous differences and acrimony, the two governments were also able to sign several agreements on trade and travel between the two countries. One of the most ticklish problems faced by the two countries was that of the distribution of canal water in Punjab. Showing a degree of generosity, the Government of India agreed to supply an undiminished quantity of water to Pakistan pending a long-term engineering solution to the problem based on mutual discussion under the World Bank's auspices.

In general, the Government of India followed the policy of trying to improve relations with Pakistan and, above all, to prevent the emergence of a climate of hostility and hatred. Nehru, in particular, repeatedly assured the people of Pakistan that India did not think of Pakistan as an enemy. One of the reasons for this policy was the effort to preserve and strengthen the secular atmosphere within India, which was being endangered by the Hindu communalists. And, undoubtedly, it did serve that purpose in the long run, even though it failed to mollify Pakistan or convince it of India's good intentions.

Nehru was voicing his own, his government's and other secular Indians' opinion when in 1950 he expressed the sentiment underlying his approach towards Pakistan:

> Ultimately we cannot go against the currents of history. I am so sure of the desire of our people that I have arrived at this conclusion. Though we may have been partitioned and we may have been divorced from each other, our own historical, cultural and other contacts, geographic, economic and every other, are so fundamentally great, despite everything that happened, and despite all that passion and prejudice, and in spite of even gross inhumanity and killing, that ultimately the basic principles will survive. These are the things that keep us together unless, of course, India and Pakistan are terribly backward countries culturally.[26]

Nehru and the Communists

In the early post-independence period, the government was faced with another challenge; this time from the left. As we shall see in Chapter 15, the Communist Party of India (CPI) proclaimed the beginning of a general revolution in India in February 1948, declaring the Nehru government of being an agent of imperialist and semi-feudal forces. It initiated militant mass movements in various areas, the most prominent being the attempt to organize a railway strike all over the country on 9 March 1949. It also continued the armed struggle in the Telangana area of the Hyderabad state begun earlier against the Nizam. This effort at revolution continued till the middle of 1951.

Nehru was appalled, but though he was highly critical of the policy and activities of the CPI, he resisted banning it till he felt that there was enough proof of its violent activities. Even then he permitted the banning of the CPI only in West Bengal and Madras where it was most active. Being in agreement with the basic socioeconomic objectives of the Communists, he believed that the best way to combat their politics and violent activities was to remove the discontent of the people through economic and other reformist measures. Even so, as soon as the CPI gave up its programme of waging armed struggle, including in Telangana, and declared its intention to join

the parliamentary democratic process, Nehru saw to it that the CPI was legalized everywhere and its leaders and cadres released. It was also allowed to participate in the general elections of 1951–52.

Throughout, Nehru differentiated between the Communists and the communalists. In 1964, he said to R.K. Karanjia:[27]

> Now between the parties of the Right and the Left, as you differentiate them, I would always prefer a party with some ideology built round serious social and economic thinking. You mentioned the communists. The communists, with all their faults, function in terms of serious economic solutions. What we repudiate is all the dogma and violence of their approach. If they can divest themselves of this obsession and accept the discipline of our parliamentary democracy in good faith, there is not much difference between their goal of socialism and ours. The other parties you mention, like the Jan Sangh and Swatantra, seem to be organized around plainly fascist and feudal concepts without any social or economic basis. As such, they are dangerous to the country and our values of democracy and socialism.