chapter eight

Freedom with Partition

8.1. QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

The demise of the Civil Disobedience movement around 1934 resulted in serious dissension within the Congress, in the same way as it had happened after the withdrawal of the earlier Non-cooperation campaign. While Gandhi temporarily withdrew from active politics, the socialists and other leftist elements-the most important of them being jayaprakash Narayan, Achhut Patwardhan, Asoke Mehta, Yusuf Mehrali, Narendra Dev and Minoo Masani-formed in May 1934 the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). His sympathies for socialism notwithstanding, Nehru never formally joined this group, whose "ideology", in the words of Surnit Sarkar, "ranged from vague and mixed-up radical nationalism to fairly firm advocacy of Marxian 'scientific socialism'. "[1] The CSP, which rapidly gained in strength in provinces like UP, was meant to operate from within the Congress and try to change its orientation towards a socialist programme as well as contain the dominance of the conservative 'right' wingers. However, soon the divide within the Congress centred on two issues, i.e., council entry and office acceptance. The rift came to a head, but was somehow avoided at the Lucknow Congress in 1936. Here the majority of the delegates, led by Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel, with the blessings of Gandhi, came round to the view that participation in the elections and subsequent acceptance of office in the provinces under the Act of 1935 would help boost the flagging morale of the Congress, at a time when direct action was not an option. The AICC meeting (August 1936) in Bombay decided in favour of contesting the election, but postponed the decision on office acceptance until the election was over. The results of the election in 1937, for which both the right and left-wingers campaigned jointly, were outstanding for the Congress (see chapter 6.4) and this was folJowed by the AICC sanctioning office acceptance in March by overriding the objections of Nehru and other CSP leaders. Gandhi by taking one of his remarkable compromise positions endorsed the decision, while reposing his faith in non-violence

and constructive programme from outside the legislatures. Nehru's opposition hinged on the argument that by running the provincial governments, the Congress would be responsible for "keeping the imperialist structure functioning" and thereby would be letting down the masses whose "high spirits" the Congress itself had once helped in boosting up.[2] Within a few years he was to be proved prophetic!

The Congress won the election in 1937 by targeting the newly enfranchised voters who included sections of the industrial working class and sections of the peasantry, including some of the dalits. But the achievements of the Congress ministries during the next two years frustrated all these groups. We have noted earlier (chapter 7.2) how dalits and their leaders were not impressed by the few caste disabilities removal and temple-entry bills that constituted the token legislative programmes of the Congress ministries, offering nothing more than mere window dressing. We have also noticed (chapter 7.4) how Congress victory had aroused the hopes and aspirations of the industrial working class, leading to increased labour militancy and industrial unrest in Bombay, Gujarat, UP and Bengal, at a time when the Congress was being decisively drawn into a closer friendship with the Indian capitalists. This resulted in a perceptible anti-labour shift in Congress attitudes, epitomised in the passage of the Bombay Trades Disputes Act in 1938. Equally significant were the developments on the peasant front, where the rising militancy before the elections were harnessed by the Congress to win the race; but later it found it difficult to rise up to the expectations of its *kisan* (peasant) voters who were hoping for some radical changes in the existing agrarian relations.

The Kisan Sabha movement started in Bihar under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati who had formed in 1929 the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in order to mobilise peasant grievances against the zamindari attacks on their occupancy rights. Initially, the BPKS, *by* Sahajanand's own admission, was meant to promote class harmony, so that the escalating landlord-tenant friction did not jeopardise the nationalist broad front. But when it was revived again in 1933, it increasingly came under the influence of the socialists, so that by 1935 it adopted abolition of zamindari as one of its programmes. By this time the BPKS membership had risen to thirty-three thousand.[3] It is also important to remember that this kisan movement sought to construct a broad front of the peasantry. Although the rich occupancy tenants provided it with the leadership and its main support base, it attracted a fair amount of participation from the middle and poorer peasants as well." Around the same time

the Kisan Sabha movement also gained in momentum in central Andhra districts under the leadership of the CSP activist N.G. Ranga. He organised a number of peasant marches in 1933-34, and under his stewardship at the Ellore Zamindari Ryots Conference in 1933 the demand was raised for the abolition of zamindari. In 1935 Ranga and E.M.S. Namboodripad tried to spread the peasant movement to other linguistic regions of Madras Presidency, organised a South Indian Federation of Peasants and Agricultural Labour and initiated the discussion for an all-India peasant body.[5] Also in the neighbouring province of Orissa, which was created in 1936 under the new constitutional arrangements, the Utkal Kisan Sangha had been formally established in 1935 under the leadership of the Congress socialists, who were organising, in the coastal districts of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore, militant peasant movements around some radical demands. In its very first conference, abolition of zarnindari was given a programmatic expression in one of its resolutions.[6]

All these radical developments on the peasant front culminated in the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) at the Lucknow session of the Congress in April 1936, with Sahajanand Saraswati elected as its first president. The Kisan Manifesto, which was adopted in August, contained radical demands, such as the abolition of zamindari, graduated income tax on agricultural income, granting of occupancy rights to all tenants and scaling down of interest rates and debts. A number of CSP leaders and communisrs=-following the 1935 Comintern decision to follow a 'united front' strategy-joined the AIKS and helped in consolidating the movement where it already existed, such as UP, Bihar and Orissa, and also in extending the movement to other provinces, such as Bengal, where a provincial Kisan Sabha was started in March 1937. It was also because of its CSP members that the AIKS remained a part of the Congress and maintained close relationship with the provincial Congress committees. The Congress too was given a more radical orientation by its socialist members; in the Faizpur session in December 1936 the Congress finally adopted an Agrarian Programme. There was also a marked shift towards the democratic and anti-feudal movements in the princely states. The All India States Peoples' Conference, which had been formed in 1927 to coordinate nationalist movement in the native states, so far received apathetic treatment from the Congress. Indeed, the 1934 Bombay Congress had specifically resolved to follow a non-interventionist policy in the states. But this began to change from 1936 when Nehru attended the fifth session of the States Peoples' Conference and stressed the

need for mass movement. In October 1937 the AICC resolved to provide moral and material support to the peoples' movements in the states. But Gandhi still remained cautious; he did not like this shift and wanted the whole policy to be reviewed at the next Congress session at Haripura.

Obviously, this ascendancy of the 'left' within the Congress was not liked by the 'right' wingers like Vallabhbhai Patel, Bhulabhai Desai, C. Rajagopalacbari or Rajendra Prasad, who still preferred constitutional politics to radical agitation, and also by the committed Gandhians who believed in constructive programme. However, with the election approaching, they could hardly ignore the organisational bases created by the provincial kisan sabhas, and under leftist pressure in some provinces they agreed to include abolition of zamindari in their election manifesto. In the election of 1937 the socialists and the right-wing leaders acted in unison, and reaped its benefits in the spectacular Congress victories, which were quite unexpected in some provinces. So when after July 1937 the Congress ministries began to take over office in the eight provinces, it was hailed by the rural masses as an emancipatory experience marked by the institution of an alternative authority.

But while the ministry formation raised great expectations and brought in greater militancy among the peasantry, it also brought the right-wingers bade to power and they now tried to retrieve the Congress from the clutches of the socialists. In the province of Bihar, where the IGsan Sabha began to organise a powerful peasant movement around the issue of *bakasht* land where permanent tenancies had been converted into short-term tenancies in recent years, the conservative Congress leadership renegotiated their alignment with the landlords and entered into formal "agreements" with them. When the proposed tenancy legislations of the Congress were significantly watered down because of landlord pressure, the peasants were not impressed and they staged in 1938-39 a militant movement under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha for the restoration of the bakasht lands. The movement that spread over large parts of Bihar, was strongest in the Reora and Manjihiawan regions of the Gaya district, in Chapra in Sahabad, in Barahiya Tai in Monghyr and among the Santai bataidars in the Kosi Diara region. Participation cut across caste and class barriers. bringing in both dalit and poorer landless agricultural workers, along with the richer Bhumihar and Rajput peasantry. In its basic ideological thrust, the movement was "reformist", as claimed by Stephen Henningham,7 as it did not threaten the zamindari system, but only sought to restore some pre-existing

Conference (AISPC), founded in 1927. Although the states could never remain totally insulated from the political waves of British India, the princes remained steadfast loyalists to their imperial protectors, trying to keep the nationalist agitation at bay. In the late 1930s, therefore, the Congress left-wingers, like Bose and Nehru, became more insistent on the desirability of greater intervention in the princely states, in order to bring them at par with the political developments in British India.[12] The right-wingers too now possibly, as surmised by Ian Copland (1999), began to dream of power at the proposed federal centre, and for that they required the princes to nominate their representatives from among people close to the praja mandals. Such a confluence of ideas and ambitions resulted in a significant policy shift at the Haripura Congress in 1938, where a resolution was adopted to support the peoples' movements in the states; although no organisational assistance was to be provided, individual leaders couJd participate, under the overall leadership of a special subcommittee of the Congress Working Committee. In February 1939, Nehru accepted the presidency of the AISPC and the Tripuri Congress endorsed the scheme of joint action. As a result of this evolving situation, in late 1938 and early 1939 many of the princely states witnessed an unprecedented escalation of popular agitation, spearheaded by the local praja mandals, clandestine Congress branches and outside political leaders from British India. Significant agitation took place in Mysore, Jaipur, Rajkot, Travancore, Kashmir and Hyderabad-Gandhi himself taking a leading role in Rajkot.'! While some states like Mysore and Rajkot became more conciliatory and made token concessions, the larger states resisted the pressure resolutely, with help coming, although belatedly, from the British authorities. As a result of such confrontational line up, peaceful demonstrations soon deteriorated into numerous acts of violence, and later into communal conflicts in southern Deccan, forcing Gandhi to withdraw the movement in April 1939. The situation was again back to normal by autumn." As mentioned earlier (chapter 6.5), the major political fall out of this sudden flare up was the stiffening of princely opposition to the proposed federation idea of the Act of 1935.

On the other end too, the issue of federation became the cause of a major rift between the Congress old guards and their left-wing critics and it came to a head in the period between the Haripura Congress in March 1938 and the Tripuri Congress in March the following year. It centred on the re-election of the Congress president Subhas Chandra Bose, whose militant anti-federation stand had

irked the conservatives. Bose contested the election defying Gandhi's wishes, and emerged victorious defeating Gandhi's own candidate, Pattabhi Sitaramayya. As B.R. Tomlinson describes it, the election "was fought out in ideological terms—'right' versus 'left', 'pro-Federation' versus 'anti-Federation', 'pro-Ministry' versus 'anti-Ministry'".[15] Gandhi took it as his personal defeat and twelve of the fifteen members of the Working Committee resigned immediately. The showdown came at the Tripuri Congress where a resolution was passed censoring Bose for raising allegations against the Gandhians that they would sell out on the federation issue. Gandhi asked him to constitute his own Working Committee and refused all cooperation. Bose tried to patch up a compromise but failed, and ultimately at the AICC meeting in Calcutta in April 1939 he resigned and was quickly replaced by Rajendra Prasad. Bose then formed his own Forward Block, as a left party within the Congress; but it did not gain much strength outside his own province of Bengal. When he staged a protest against the AICC decision to ban Congressmen from participating in civil disobedience without the prior permission of provincial Congress committees, the Working Committee at Gandhi's insistence punished him for indiscipline; in August 1939 he was removed from all Congress positions—notably the presidency of the Bengal PCC-and was banned from holding any executive office for three years. Later in January 1940, Gandhi wrote to C.F. Andrews describing Subhas as "my son"—but a "spoilt child of the family" who needed to be taught a lesson for his own good.[16] Bose's virtual expulsion, however, did not mean that Congress was about to fall apart, although it definitely signified a reassertion of authority by the right-wingers. The socialists were weakened within the Congress, but could not be completely weeded out. Although some members at this stage clearly preferred autonomy, the AIKS still remained a part of the Congress. But the expectations and militancy that its members had once generated among the masses, had been clearly dampened by the conservative policies of the Congress ministries. The Congress itself began to lose its popularity as indicated in the drastic fall in its membership, from 4.5 million in 1938-39 to 1.4 million in 1940-41.[17] It was this sense of popular frustration combined with a growing militant mood that prepared the ground for the next round of mass movement in India in 1942.

The outbreak of World War Two in September 1939 brought in new variables in Indian politics. The war brought changes in British policies and changes in Congress strategies too. Viceroy Lord Linlithgow associated India with England's declaration of war

disease and pain. There was a widespread fear that if Japan invaded, the British would do the same in India. And that seemed no longer a distant possibility, as the British initiated a harsh 'denial policy' in coastal Bengal by destroying all means of communications, including boats and cycles, paying very little compensation. From May 1942 American and Australian soldiers began to arrive in India and soon became the central figures in stories of rape and racial harassment of civilian population. Rumours were rife, both fed by the Axis propaganda machine, and by Subhas Bose's *Azad Hind* Radio, broadcast from Berlin from March 1942 (more in chapter 8.2}. By the middle of the year there was a widespread popular belief in India that British power was going to collapse soon and therefore it was the opportune moment for a fight to the finish and to liberate India from nearly two hundred years of colonial rule.

Gandhi was not slow to feel this popular mood of militancy and realised that the moment of his final engagement with the Raj had arrived. "Leave India to God", Gandhi wrote in May 1942. "If that is too much, then leave her to anarchy. This ordered disciplined anarchy should go, and if there is complete lawlessness, I would risk it".[19] He briskly set aside all opposition from within the Congress against direct action, coming mainly from Nehru and Rajagopalachari, and prepared the party for the final struggle, "the biggest fight in my life".[20] In July, the Congress Working Committee approved of a draft resolution on mass-as opposed to individual-civil disobedience. The "Quit India" resolution, adopted by the AICC in Bombay on 8 August 1942, proposed to begin this mass civil disobedience under Gandhi's direction, if power was not immediately handed over to the Indians. On this occasion, Gandhi delivered his famous "Do or Die" speech, arguing that this was the final battle-a "fight to the finish"-and so the Indians must win independence or give up their lives for it. This fired the imagination of an already rankled Indian population, expecting a breakdown of the established authority. As Gyanendra Pandey puts it, Gandhi provided them with a "psychological break", by asserting that everyone should henceforth consider themselves as "free man or woman", and should choose their own course of action if the leaders were arrested.[21] His fear proved to be true, as all front-ranking leaders of the Congress, including Gandhi, were arrested in the early morning of 9 August and this was followed by unprecedented mass fury that goes by the name of "August Revolution" in nationalist legends. The unusual intensity of the movement surprised everyone. Viceroy Linlithgow

described it as "by far the most serious rebellion since 1857".[22] It was violent and totally uncontrolled from the very beginning, as the entire upper echelon of the Congress leadership was behind bars even before it began. And therefore, it is also characterised as a "spontaneous revolution", as "no preconceived plan could have produced such instantaneous and uniform results"."

The history of the Quit India movement as revealed in recent studies shows that it was not just an impulsive response of an unprepared populace, although the unprecedented scale of violence was by no means premeditated by the Congress leadership, as was claimed by the government. First of all, the last two decades of mass movement-which in the recent past had been conducted on a much more radical tone under the leadership of the various associated and affiliated bodies of the Congress, like the AITUC, CSP, AIKS and the Forward Block-had already prepared the ground for such a conflagration. The Congress leaders before 9 August had drafted a twelve-point programme which not only included the usual Gandhian methods of saryagraha, but a plan to promote industrial strikes, holding up of railways and telegraphs, non-payment of taxes and setting up of parallel government. Several versions of this programme were in circulation among Congress volunteers, including the one prepared by the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee, which contained clear instructions for such subversive action. However, compared to what actually happened, even this was a cautious programme! But then, as the movement progressed, the AJCC continued to issue "Instructions to peasants" which outlined the course of action anticipating what was to eventuate in the later months of the movement.[24] On the question of non-violence, Gandhi this time was remarkably ambivalent. "I do not ask from you my own non-violence. You can decide what you can do in this struggle", said Gandhi on 5 August. Three days later on the 8th, speaking on the AICC resolution, he urged: "I trust the whole of India to-day to launch upon a non-violent struggle." But even if people deviated from this path of non-violence, he assured: "I shall not swerve. I shall not flinch".[25] In other words, the issue of non-violence seemed to have been of lesser importance in 1942 than the call for "Do or Die" or the invitation to make a final sacrifice for the liberation of the nation.[26] The people accepted the challenge and interpreted it in their own ways and these interpretations were to some extent influenced by the lower level, often unknown, Congress leaders and students, who took over the leadership after the national and provincial leaders were all arrested between 9 and 11 August. There is no denying that the Congress and Gandhi at this important historical juncture enjoyed

unquestionable symbolic legitimacy in popular mind—whatever happened, happened in their name. But Congress as an organisation and Gandhi as a person had little control over these happenings. In the words of Gyanendra Pandey, Gandhi was "the undisputed leader of a movement over which he had little command. "[27]

Sumit Sarkar has identified three phases of the Quit India movemenr.? It initially started as an urban revolt, marked by strikes, boycott and picketing, which were quickly suppressed. In the middle of August, the focus shifted to the countryside, which witnessed a major peasant rebellion, marked by destruction of communication systems, such as railway tracks and stations, telegraph wires and poles, attacks on government buildings or any other visible symbol of colonial authority and finally, the formation of "national governments" in isolated pockets. This brought in severe government repression forcing the agitation to move underground. The third phase was characterised by terrorist activities, which primarily involved sabotaging of war efforts by dislocating communication systems and propaganda activities by using various means, including a clandestine radio station run by hitherto unknown Usha Mehta from "somewhere in India". Not only the educated youth participated in such activities, but also bands of ordinary peasants organised such subversive actions by night, which came to be known as the "Karnataka method". What is important, these so-called "terrorists" enjoyed enormous popular support and patronage, so that the definition of "underground" in British official parlance virtually got expanded to cover the entire nation, as no Indian could anymore be trusted by the authorities. As time passed, underground activities came to be channeled into three streams, with a radical group under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan organising guerrilla warfare at India-Nepal border, a centrist group led by Congress Socialists like Aruna Asaf Ali mobilising volunteers throughout India for sabotage activities, and a Gandhian group led by Sucheta Kripalani and others emphasising non-violent action and constructive programme.[29] In the Quit India movement there was use of violence at an unprecedented scale and the government used it as a justification for repression. The wartime emergency powers were taken advantage of to use the army for the first time—as many as fifty-seven battalions of British troops were deployed to crush what was essentially a civilian agitation. Churchill could defend this swift and ruthless repression and silence a critical world opinion by citing the needs of war. By the end of 1942, the "August Revolution" had been thoroughly crushed, with nearly ninety-two thousand people arrested by the end of 1943.

In eastern UP, in districts of Ghazipur and Azamgarh the arrival of student volunteers from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU)—even rumour of their arrival-galvanised the local peasantry into action, destroying railway tracks and stations and burning papers in the Court of Ward office. However, in many places in these districts, like the Sherpur-Mohammadabad region-as Gyanendra Pandey puts it—the "message of destruction" and the Gandhian principle of non-violence "co-existed uneasily", as some committed Gandhian leaders sought to maintain its non-violent purity.[31] The mass insurrection was much more intense in the district of Ballia, where British rule ceased to exist for a few days; but here too contradictions weakened the movement. The story was not much dissimilar, as student leaders arriving from BHU and Allahabad University-the latter in a hijacked *Azad* (liberty) train—inspired the peasantry into action. Several thousands of them attacked and looted the railway station and a military supply train at Bilthara Road on 14 August, took over the thana and tahsil buildings at Bansdih town four days later, with the local station officer and tahsildar offering no resistance, and the local Congress leader trying to establish a parallel administration. And then on 19 August, a huge crowd besieged the Ballia town, forcing its Indian District Magistrate to burn all currency notes in the treasury and free all political prisoners. The released Gandhian leader Chittu Pande hereafter took control of the movement and was proclaimed the *Swaraj Ziladbish* or Independent District Magistrate, who did not however know what to do next. So when on the following day the army arrived, the leaders all fled and the whole town of Ballia lay deserted. The Quit India movement here thus came to a rather "anti-climactic end" due to a lack of leadership.P

In contrast to Bihar and eastern UP, the Quit India movement was less instantaneous and intense, but more prolonged in other regions of India. In Bengal, the movement took place in Calcutta and in the districts of Hugli, Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum and Dinajpur-in the latter district marked by the participation of Santals and dalit groups like Rajbansis and Paliyas. But it was undoubtedly strongest in Tamluk and Contai (Kanthi) subdivisions of Midnapur where, as Hitesranjan Sanyal has commented, "national movement had by 1930 become a part of the popular culture among peasants.";[33] and they had been further organised in recent past by the Krishak Sabhas and Forward Block. Since April 1942, in the coastal areas of Midnapur the government destroyed nearly eighteen thousand boats in pursuance of its 'denial policy', and this not only deprived the peasants of their vital means of communication, but also impacted very badly on the

politics like Rajagopalachari opposed the movement, but because of various other factors, such as the strength of constirutionalism, absence of the socialists, opposition of the Kerala communists, indifference of the non-Brahmans and a strong southern challenge to a political campaign dominated by the north." But what was more significant, there were important social groups who consciously stayed away from the movement. The most important of them were the Muslims who stood aloof from the campaign almost in all regions and therefore, the Muslim League, which did not approve of the movement, could claim that it represented the majority of the Indian Muslims. But although their abstention was nearly universal, the Muslims did not oppose Quit India actively, except perhaps in some parts of Gujarat, and there was no major incident of communal conflict throughout the whole period. On the other hand, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the dalirs, who had joined the viceroy's executive council as a labour member just before the onset of the campaign, also did not support it. But once again, although many of his supporters did not join, we have evidence of dalit participation in the Quit India movement in various regions and cross-caste unity was never a rare occurrence in this campaign (as shown earlier). It is also important to remember that the Hindu Mahasabha too condemned the Quit India movement as "sterile, unmanly and injurious to the Hindu cause" and stalwart Hindu leaders like V.D. Savarkar. B.S. Munje and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee wholeheartedly supported British war efforts that were allegedly being wrecked by the Congress campaign. But despite this official line, a strong group of Mahasabha members led by N.C. Chatterjee seemed eager to participate in it and under their pressure the Mahasabha Working Committee had to adopt a face saving but vague resolution stating that defence of India could not be supported unless freedom of India was recognised with immediate cffect.[39] The other Hindu organisation, RSS, which until now had its main base in Maharashtra, remained aloof as well. *As* the Bombay government noted in a memo: "the Sangh has scrupulously kept itself within the law, and in particular, has refrained from taking part in the disturbances that broke out in August 1942."[40]

The Communist Party of India, following the involvement of Soviet Russia in the war in December 1941, became another important political group which did not support Quit India movement because of their "Peoples' War,, strategy. The British government, then anxious to find any group that could embarrass the Congress and support war efforts, promptly withdrew the ban on the CPI that

had been in place since 1934 and the latter now started preaching in favour of war efforts to contain fascism. However, despite this official line, there is ample evidence to show that many individual communists were swayed by the patriotic emotions of the day and actively participated in the Quit India movement."! And on the other hand, the trade unions and kisan sabhas, which the communists controlled, began to lose their popularity and support, as the leaders found it difficult to convince their followers the logic of supporting a distant war by subverting a campaign for their own freedom. It is possible to argue that when the dalit peasants or other poorer classes participated in the Quit India movement, their motivation was different from those of the educated youth and the middle peasant castes. But it is too simplistic to describe the movement as a "dual revolt"," because despite variance in vision, the different classes and communities were also united in common action against the British. Watching Patna city on 11 August, a confounded communist leader Rahul Sankrityayana observed in utter astonishment that the "leadership had passed on to the *ricksha-pullers,* ekka-drivers and other such people whose political knowledge extended only this far–that the British were their enemies" .43 It was this commonly shared dominant tone of anti-imperialism that united everyone in 1942 and in the villages it even overshadowed the anti-feudal tendencies that appeared from time to time in different parts of the country. The Quit India movement by promising immediate freedom from an oppressive imperial order had thus captured the imagination of a significant section of the Indian population, notwithstanding their differing perceptions of freedom.

The Quit India movement also provided important lessons for the Congress. First of all, the defeat discredited the left-wingers who had been demanding action. Gandhi, on the other hand, was in a dilemma. Congress volunteers were justifying violence by referring to his own dictum that it was justifiable in self-defence. He did not condone violence, but did not formally condemn it either; instead, he held the government responsible for the outbreak of violence. Indeed, neither he nor any other Congress leaders had any control over the people and the volunteers, nor any of them had anticipated the kind of response the Quit India movement had generated. To the Indian masses in 1942, Gandhi and Congress were symbols of liberation, not sources of ideological constraint. Gandhi's twenty-one day fast commencing on 10February1943 restored symbolically his centrality in the movement once again, but not as a controlling figure; nor did he insist on the surrender of the underground leaders.

enthusiastic response. Back in Bengal, he forged a link with the Muslim League, and decided to launch a civil disobedience movement to destroy the Holwell monument that stood in Calcutta as a reminder of a Black hole tragedy which most people believed did never happen and was invented only to tar the memory of Siraj-ud-daula, the last independent ruler of Bengal. It was a campaign that had an obvious appeal to the Muslims and thus could further strengthen the Hindu-Muslim pact in Bengal. But before it could start, he was arrested by the British on 3 July 1940 under the Defence of India Act. The Holwell monument was later removed, but Bose remained incarcerated until he threatened to start a hunger strike in December.[47] He was then released unconditionally, but kept under constant surveillance. In the meanwhile, war progressed in Europe, and Bose believed that Germany was going to win. Although he did not like their totalitarianism or racism, he began to nurture the idea that the cause of Indian independence could be furthered with the help of the Axis powers and started exploring various possibilities. Finally, in the midnight of 16-17 January 1941 he fled from his Elgin Road residence in Calcutta incognito as an upcountry Muslim. He travelled to Kabul and then through Russia on an Italian passport; by the end of March he reached Berlin.[48]

Subhas Bose met Goebbels and Hitler in Berlin, but did not receive much help from them. He was allowed to start his *Azad Hind* Radio and was handed over the Indian POWs captured in North Africa to start an Indian Legion, but nothing beyond that. Particularly, he could not get an Axis declaration in favour of Indian independence, and after German reverses at Stalingrad, that became even more difficult.[49] But in the meanwhile, a new stage of action was being prepared for him in Southeast Asia, where the Japanese were taking real interest in the cause of Indian independence. India originally did not figure in the Japanese policy of Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, under which the Japanese proposed to help Asians gain independence from Western imperialism. But by 1940 Japan had developed an India policy and the following year sent Major Fuziwara to Southeast Asia to contact expatriate Indians who were organising themselves into the Indian Independence Leagues under the leadership of men like Pritam Singh. Then in December 1941, Captain Mohan Singh, a young officer of the Punjab Regiment of the British Indian Army who had surrendered to the Japanese in the jungles of Malaya, agreed to cooperate with Fuziwara to raise an Indian army with POWs to march alongside the Japanese to liberate India. In June 1942, a united Indian Independence League,

representing all Indians in Southeast. Asia, was born as a civilian political body having controlling authority over the army. To chair this body, Rash Behari Bose, a veteran Bengali revolutionary then living in Japan, was flown in. By September, the INA was formally in existence. But its relationship with the Japanese was still far from satisfactory, as "Japanese duplicity" now became more than apparent.[50] General Tojo, the Japanese prime minister, made a declaration in the Diet supporting Indian independence. But beyond that, the Japanese were only prepared to treat INA as a subsidiary force, rather than an allied army. As Mohan Singh insisted on autonomy and allied status, he was removed from command and put under arrest. Rash Behari Bose tried to hold the banner for some time, but he was then too aged for the task. By the beginning of 1943 the first INA experiment virtually collapsed.

As Mohan Singh had often mentioned to the Japanese, the INA movement needed a new leader and outside India *only* one person could provide that leadership, and that was Subhas Chandra Bose. The Japanese now seriously considered the proposition and negotiated with the Germans to bring him to Asia. At last, after a long and arduous submarine voyage, in May 1943 Bose arrived in Southeast Asia and immediately took control of the situation, with Japanese assurance of help and equal treatment. In October, he established a Provisional Government of Free India, which was immediately recognised by Japan and later by eight other governments, including Germany and Fascist Italy. And he became the supreme commander of its army, the *Azad Hind Fauj* (Free India Army) or the Indian National Army, which recruited around forty thousand men by 1945[51] and had a women's regiment named after the legendary Rani of Jhansi of 1857 fame {see chapter 7.5). The Provisional Government declared war on Great Britain and its chief ambition was to march-as an allied army with the Japanese-through Burma to Imphal {in Manipur) and then to Assam, where the Indian people were expected to join them in an open rebellion to liberate their mother-country. But the ilJ-fated Imphal campaign, which was finally launched on 8 March 1944 by Japan's Southern Army accompanied by two INA regiments, ended in a disaster. The reasons were many, as Joyce Lebra enumerates them: the lack of air power, breakdown in the chain of command, disruption of the supply line, the strength of Allied offensive, and finally for the INA, lack of cooperation from the Japanese. The retreat was even more devastating, finally ending the dream of liberating India through military campaign. But Bose still remained optimistic, thought of regrouping, and after Japanese

surrender, contemplated seeking help from Soviet Russia. The Japanese agreed to provide him transport up to Manchuria from where he could travel to Russia. But on his way, on 18 August 1945 at Taihoku airport in Taiwan, he died in an air crash, which many Indians still believe never happened."

But if INA's military campaign was over after a last valiant engagement at Mount Popa in Burma, its political impact on India was yet to unfold itself. After their surrender, the twenty thousand INA soldiers were interrogated and transported back to India. Those who appeared to have been persuaded or misled by Japanese or INA propaganda—classified as "Whites" and "Greys"—were either released or rehabilitated in the army. But a few of them at least—the most committed and categorised as "Blacks"—were to be court martialled. Not to try them would be to give indication of weakness; and to tolerate 'treason, would be to put the loyalty of the Indian army at risk. So altogether ten trials took place, and in the first and most celebrated one at Red Fort in Delhi, three officers-P.K. Sahgal, G.S. Dhillon and Shah Nawaz Khan-were charged of treason, murder and abetment of murder. The trial would take place in public, as this was expected to reveal the horrors that these INA men had perpetrated and that, the government hoped, would swerve public opinion against them. But as the events subsequently unfolded, the government, it seemed, had completely miscalculated the political fallout of the INA trials. As the press censorship was lifted after the war, the details of the INA campaign were revealed every day before the Indian public and these officers appeared as patriots of the highest order—not by any means traitors-and the demand for discontinuing the trials grew stronger by the day. The Congress leaders, many of them just released after long incarceration since the Quit India days, could hardly ignore this issue that so profoundly touched popular emotions. The election was round the corner and the INA trials could be an excellent issue. Subhas Bose might have been a renegade leader who had challenged the authority of the Congress leadership and their principles. But in death he was a martyred patriot whose memory could be an ideal tool for political mobilisation. So the AICC meeting in September 1945 decided to defend the accused in the INA trial—the "misguided pattiots"—and announced the formation of a Defence Committee, consisting of some legal luminaries of the day, like Tej Bahadur Sapru, Bhulabhai Desai, Asaf Ali, and also Jawaharlal Nehru, donning the barrister's gown after about a quarter of a century. In the subsequent days, as the election campaign set in, Nehru and other Congress leaders addressed numerous

public meetings with large gatherings. And there two issues figured prominently: one was the government excesses and the martyrs of 1942 and the other was INA rrial."

The government, however, remained firm. The first trial opened on 5 November and continued for two months, and in course of that time India erupted into "a mass upheaval", as Nehru later described it. "Never before in Indian history", he admitted, "had such unified sentiments been manifested by various divergent sections of the population. "[54] There were many factors that led to this mass upsurge. The trial took place at Red Fort, which appeared to be the most authentic symbol of British imperial domination, as here took place in 1858 the trial of Bahadur Shah II, the last Mughal emperor and the acclaimed leader of the 1857 revolt. Furthermore, as trial progressed, its reports appeared in the press, leading to more awareness and to some extent more emotionalisation of the sacrifices made by the INA soldiers. All political parties, like the Congress Socialists, Akali Dal, Unionist Party, Justice Party, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha and even the Muslim League wanted the trials to be discontinued. Individual communists enthusiastically participated in the demonstrations, although their party vacillated in its response. And by a strange coincidence, the three accused belonged to three different religions: one Hindu, one Sikh and one Muslim! The demonstrations, therefore, showed signs of remarkable communal harmony. An INA week was celebrated between 5 and 11 November, while the INA Day was observed on 12 November in cities across the country. People from all walks of life participated in the campaign, attended protest meetings, donated money to the lNA relief fund, closed shops and other commercial institutions and in some places refrained from celebrating diwali. And the movement touched even the remotest places like Coorg, Baluchistan and Assam.P Violence erupted first on 7 November when the police opened fire on the crowd at a protest demonstration in Madura. Then between 21 and 24 November, rioting broke out in various parts of the country, starting from Bose's own Calcutta. Here, first of all, American and British military establishments were attacked; but then the rioting took a general anti-British tone, with students clashing with the police and being joined later by the striking taxi drivers and tramway labourers. They exhibited unprecedented communal harmony, with the demonstrators flying simultaneously the Congress, League and Communist flags. Order could be restored after three days, with 33 people dead and 200 injured. The Calcutta riot was soon followed by similar demonstrations in Bombay,

Karachi, Patna, Allahabad, Banaras, Rawalpindi and other places, or in other words, all over the country.[56]

The government's determination now wavered. In the trial, the defence tried to argue that people fighting for freedom of their country could not be tried for treason. But despite that, they were found guilty as charged; but the commander-in-chief remitted their sentence and set them free on 3 January 1946. The three officers came out of the Red Fort to a hero's welcome at public meetings in Delhi and Lahore, that celebrated a moral victory against the British. But it was not all over yet. On 4 February, in another trial, Captain Abdur Rashid-who preferred to be defended by a Muslim League Defence Committee, rather than by the Congress[57]-was sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment. It sparked off another explosion in Calcutta between 11 and 13 February, this time called initially by the student wing of the Muslim League, but later joined by the members of the communist-led Student Federation and industrial workers. Once again demonstrations followed, with Congress, League and red flags flying simultaneously, and large meetings were organised, where League, Communist and Congress leaders addressed the crowd. A general anti-British sentiment pervaded the city, which was paralysed by transport strikes, industrial action and pitched street battles with British troops. Order was again restored after three days of brutal repression that had eighty-four people killed and three hundred injured. To a historian who participated in the demonstrations as a student leader, the situation looked like an "Almost Revolution". The fire soon spread to east Bengal and the spirit of revolt affected other parts of the country as well, as sympathetic protest demonstrations and strikes took place in practically all major cities of India.[58]

Since the middle of 1945 the British were expecting a mass upheaval in India any way. But what really perturbed them was the impact of the INA trials on the loyalty of the army, which in post-Quit India days was their only reliable apparatus of rule. General Auchinleck, the commander-in-chief, remitted the sentence of the three INA officers because, as he later explained to senior British officers, "any attempt to force the sentence would have led to chaos in the country at large and probably to mutiny and dissention in the army culminating in its dissolution."[59] The growing political consciousness among the army personnel during and after the war had already been a cause of concern for the authorities. What further contributed to it was the INA trial and the growing sympathy for the INA soldiers who were almost universally regarded as patriots, rather than "traitors". The members of the RIAF, as well as some

other army personnel in various centres openly donated money to the INA relief fund and on some occasions attended protest rallies in full uniform. In January 1946, the RIAF men went on strike in support of their various grievances. But what really posed a real grave challenge to the Raj was the open mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy (RJN) in February 1946.

It all started in Bombay on 18 February when the naval ratings in HMIS Talwar went on hunger strike against bad food and racial discrimination. Soon the rebellion spread to other naval bases all over India and to some ships on the sea where sympathetic strikes took place. At its peak, seventy-eight ships, twenty shore establishments and twenty thousand ratings were involved. What was really remarkable was the extent of fraternisation between the naval ratings and common people that was visible during these few days in various cities of India-a phenomenon that had immense revolutionary potential. Bombay went on strike on 22 February in sympathy, and here public transport system was paralysed, roadblocks were raised, trains were burnt, shops and banks were closed and industrial workers went on strike. Here too the navy rebels used three flags simultaneously as they went round rampaging the city. A Maratha battalion was called in to bring peace to Bombay. By 25 February the city was quiet again, but by then 228 civilians were dead and 1,046 were injured. Similar hartals took place in Karachi on 23 February and in Madras on the 25th; in both cities several ratings and civilians died in police firing. Sympathetic, but less violent, one day strikes were also reported from Trichinopoly and Madurai; workers' strikes took place in Ahmedabad and Kanpur. The RlAF men and some army personnel also went on strike at different centres.[60] There was, in other words, enough reason for the government to be perturbed.

The RIN mutiny was, however, short lived, but it had dramatic psychological repercussions. Although it did not immediately lead to an open revolt in the Indian army, such a possibility could never be ruled out. An official inquiry commission later revealed that "majority of ratings [were] politically conscious" and were profoundly influenced by the INA propaganda and ideals.[61] The sympathetic strikes in the air force and army indicated very clearly that the Indian Army was no longer the same "sharp sword of repression" which the British could use as before, if a popular outburst of the 1942 proportions took place again. To what extent this revelation forced upon the British a change of policy in favour of transfer of power is debatable. For, the Congress, which could alone give leadership to such an upsurge, was not interested in the radical and

violent potential of the happenings of 1945-46. To its leader hip, the INA officers were patriots, but "misguided"; they could be taken back into the Congress, as Sardar Patel announced at a meeting in Calcutta, only if they "put their swords back into the scabbard".[62] When the RIN mutiny took place, socialists like Aruna Asaf Ali sympathised with the rebels; but Gandhi condemned the violence and Patel persuaded the ratings to surrender. To Patel the preferences were clear: "discipline in the Army cannot be tampered with.... We will want Army even in free India".[63] In other words, for Congress the days of struggle were over; it was now looking forward to its new career as the ruling party. For, after the war it was clear to everyone that the British would like to hand over power to Indians sooner rather than later. Leaders like Nehru were anticipating in late 1945 that "Britain would leave India within two to five years".[64] So it was rime to negotiate for a peaceful transfer of power.

But if Congress was not prepared to risk another battle in 1945-46, the communists were. Not only did they participate actively in the urban riots in Calcutta and Bombay, where they had by now prepared a solid base among the industrial workers, they now organised some militant peasant movements in various parts of India, involving the poor peasants and sharecroppers. Ever since the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow gave its verdict in 1935 in favour of a united front strategy in India, the Indian communistsstarted functioning through the Congress. In Bengal, the "ex-detenus", once incarcerated for terrorist activirie , tarted communist propaganda and sought to capture the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS).Through this organisation they started mobilising the peasantry in northern, eastern and central Bengal around radical agrarian issues such as payment of tolls at village marts collected by the Union Boards, illegal abwabs (truces) imposed by the zamindars, abolition of the zamindari system, and finally the sharecroppers' demand for a two-thirds share of the produce.P By 1940 the BPKS was almost totally under the control of the communists, and its membership had shot to thiny-four thousand from mere eleven thousand three years ago. Communist activities and kisan mobilisation picked up further momentum once the ban on the CPI was lifted in 1942. Although the Quit India movement temporarily stole the wind off its sails, the popularity of the BPKS does not seem to have been affected at all; by May 1943 it had 124,872 members.[66]

One reason for the popularity of the communists by mid-1943 and subsequently,was perhaps the aftermath of the devastating Bengal famine of that year. Amartya Sen is "inclined to pick a figure

around 3 million as the death toll of the Bengal famine".[67] Paul Greenough would put it somewhere "between 3.5 and 3.8 million",[68] while the more recent estimate of Tim Dyson and Arup Maharatna puts it at 2.1 million as the figure for excess deaths caused by the Bengal famine." Even if we go by the most conservative estimate, the famine was a catastrophe of such magnitude that history of the subcontinent had never known before. Bengali public opinion was unanimous that it was a "man-made" famine. There were a few natural factors of course, like a devastating cyclone in Midnapur; but that alone did not cause the famine. *As* Greenough points out, the per capita entitlement of rice was gradually going down in Bengal over a long period. In 1943 it reached a crisis point due to multiple factors, such as the breakdown of an already vulnerable rice marketing system, which had for long remained completely unsupervised and uncontrolled, leading to hoarding and speculation. What added to this were a government procurement policy that prioritised official and military requirements over local needs of subsistence and the wartime stresses, like the 'denial policy', the refugee influx from Burma into Chittagong and the disappearance of imported rice from Burma. The relief operations failed miserably; while the government tried to save Calcutta at the expense of the countryside, the Marwari Relief Committee and the Hindu Mahasabha relief committees targeted only the middle classes. The peasantry, the worst sufferers of the famine, had nowhere to go. It is true that this unusual scarcity of food caused by the exorbitant price of rice-that shot beyond the reach of the ordinary people--did not cause any food riot in Bengal; instead, the violence, as Greenough argues, turned "inward" and "downward" destroying all conventional relationships of patronage and dependency."

The communists responded adequately to the food situation. They held meetings at various parts of Bengal criticising the government's food policy and undertook-through BPKS and Mahila Samiris-extensive relief work in the villages of the presidency and Rajshahi divisions, i.e., in north and central Bengal, where they became instantly popular among the poor peasants and sharecroppers. In 1943 the BPKS membership reached 83,160-the highest among all the provincial Kisan Sabhas in the country.[71] Although they preferred a conciliatory policy at this stage-under the People's War strategy-the involvement of poor peasants often got BPKS engaged in clashes with zamindars, grain dealers and other vested interests. This gradually prepared the ground for the Tebhaga movement in support of a longstanding demand of the sharecroppers for

two-thirds share of the produce, instead of the customary half. At the end of the war, in view of the rising popular unrest, the Communist Party too started shifting grounds and moved towards a more belligerent line. In a resolution adopted on 5 August 1946 it declared that the "Indian freedom movement has entered its final phase". So what was needed was a "joint front of all patriotic parties" to stage a "national democratic revolution" that would ensure "all power to the people"." Against this backdrop, in September 1946 the BPKS decided to launch the Tebhaga movement and soon it spread to a wide region where peasants harvested the paddy and took it to their own *kbamar* (storehouse) and then invited the landlords to come and take their one-third share. Although north Bengal districts were the worst affected by this sharecroppers' agitation, contrary to popular notion, as Adrienne Cooper has shown, Tebhaga movement touched a wider region, covering almost every district in eastern, central and western Bengal. Here the peasants carved out their tebhaga *elaka* or liberated zones, where they instituted alternative administrations and arbitration courts. The Muslim League ministry, then in power in Bengal, responded by proposing a Bargadar Bill in January 1947, apparently conceding the sharecroppers' demand; but it was soon dropped because of opposition from within the Muslim League and from the Congress. From February the movement began to spread rapidly, provoking an angry response from the government. The peasants bravely fought police repression and resisted landlords' lathiyals, but soon it became such an uneven battle that the BPKS decided to retreat, although in some pockets peasants resolved to continue without their leaders.[73]

One may observe in this peasant movement some of the earlier features like the strength of community ties that predominated previous peasant struggles (noted in chapters 3.2 and 4.2). The sharecroppers belonged mainly to tribal and dalit groups, such as the Rajbansis and Namasudras, and the BPKS had built its organisation on the foundation of such community structures." Sugata Bose has, however, noticed in this movement of the late colonial period greater class consciousness, concerns about individual rights and preponderance of economic issues that often tended to fracture older community loyalties, as Rajbansi and Muslim sharecroppers often did not feel inhibited in attacking Rajbansi and Muslim jotedars.[75] But it was not a revolutionary movement either, claiming land for the tillers, which remained only a distant goal to cement a delicate alliance between various classes of peasantry. It was a partial movement that gave precedence to the sharecropper's demand. It

was therefore participated by the sharecroppers and poor peasants in large numbers, supported and sometimes led by the middle peasants. Its impact on Bengal agrarian relations was far reaching. But above all, it showed that in a political environment already vitiated by communal riots, the peasants were still capable of aligning across the religious divide.[76] However, it was also true that the same peasants on other occasions participated in communal riots. Class and community were thus so intimately intertwined in peasant consciousness and identity that it is analytically difficult to separate one from the other. Such elements of continuity suggest that these peasant responses were more conjunctural-instigated by their immediate grievances, ideological mediation and historical environment-rather than indicative of any sharp turn in colonial peasant history. And this is a pattern that we will observe in other communist-led mass movements as well.

In western India, the Maharashtra Kisan Sabha took up the cause of the Varli tribal agricultural labourers in Umbargaon and Dahanu talukas in Thana district. Their main grievance was against forced labour *(veth)* performed for the landowners and moneylenders at a time when prices of daily necessities had been pushed up by war. In 1944 the Varlis of Umbargaon on their own staged an unsuccessful strike to demand a minimum daily wage of twelve annas (1 rupee = 16 annas) for agricultural work such as grass cutting and tree felling. The strike failed, but hereafter the Kisan Sabha started organising the Varlis and at a conference in May 1945 decided to launch a more prolonged movement for the abolition of forced labour and claiming a minimum wage of twelve annas. The movement spread quickly in the Umbargaon taluka where forced labour was stopped and debt-serfs were released, and then it spread to the nearby Dahanu taluka with similar results. In October, as the grass-cutting season approached, the movement entered its second phase when the Kisan Sabha called for a strike to claim a minimum wage of Rs 2-8 for cutting five hundred lbs of grass. The landlords responded with intimidation, court cases and appeals to district administration for help. In one incident on October 11, when the police opened fire on a peaceful gathering, five Varlis died defending the red flag, which had by now become the symbol of their unity and an icon of their liberation. The strike was nearly complete and forced many landlords-though not all-to yield to their demands. But that did not end the Varli's struggle. In October 1946 the movement was again renewed, this time with an additional demand for a minimum daily rate of Rs 1-4 for forest work, which the timber companies were not prepared

to offer. The near total peaceful strike continued for over a month and finally on 10 November in an agreement with the Kisan Sabha, the Timber Merchants Association agreed to pay the minimum wage." The movement thus ended in a great victory for the tribal Varlis who were mobilised by the Kisan Sabha around specific economic grievances. This did not mean however that their community identity played a less important role, as the red flag had now acquired a magical significance to become a new iconic representation of their tribal solidarity.

In the south, the communists entrenched themselves and established their undisputed sway over peasant unions in the villages of north Malabar during the early forties, when the region suffered from acute food shortages and near famine conditions. During the People's War phase they preferred a conciliatory policy, sought to renegotiate the agrarian relations and tried to construct what Dilip Menon has called a "conjuncrural community of landowners and culrivarors"." But this fragile truce broke down in 1946 in a context of postwar stress and scarcity, as the landlords became more aggressive in collecting rent in kind, evicting defaulting peasants and asserting their rights over wastelands and forests. The Kerala Communist Party also allowed a more belligerent line for the peasants at this stage. It was never that violent as in Bengal, but throughout the 1946-47 period peasant volunteers here fought with the landlords and the Malabar Special Police to prevent collection of rents at times of scarcity, to stop the sale of rice in open markets for excess profits and to bring wastelands under cultivation. [79]

However, it was further south in the princely state of Travancore that the most violent popular upsurge led by the communists took place in October1946 at Punnapra-Vayalar near the industrial city of Alleppye. Here the growth of coir industry after World War One saw the emergence of a large working class and their unionisation under communist leadership by mid-1940s. In 1946, the government of the princely state, in view of the impending withdrawal of the British, started working towards asserting the independence of Travancore by imposing an undemocratic constitution, aJlegedly based on "American model". While the local Congress seemed to be conciliatory to the Diwan, the Communist Party decided to make it an issue. *As* this situation coincided with food scarcity and a lockout in the coir industry, the workers were exasperated, and were joined by agricultural workers, boatmen, fishermen and various other lower occupational groups. On 24 October they attacked a police outpost at Punnapra, killing three policemen and thereafter violence spread

rapidly to other areas. The government retaliated the next day, when the military attacked and killed 150 communist volunteers at a camp in Vayalar and another 120 at Menessary. The movement then died down quickly, as the communist leaders went underground and repression was unleashed. Robin Jeffrey has argued that the "revolt had nothing at all to do with communal or caste issues" and was a "product of an organised, disciplined working class". But the fact remains that about 80 per cent of the participants belonged to the low ranking–but socially organised-Ezhava caste, and this certainly provided an element of solidarity among the ranks of the rebels."

It was in Hyderabad-another southern princely state-that the most prolonged and radical peasant movement under communist leadership took place from mid-1946. Here, agrarian relations under the autocratic rule of the Nizam resembled, in the words of D.N. Dhanagare, "a page from medieval, feudal history", where the jagirdars, *pattadars* (landowners), deshmukhs and deshpandes (revenue collectors) held complete sway over the rural society.[81] Further to that, commercialisation of agriculture and introduction of cash crops brought in the *sahukars* (moneylenders), growing land alienation and increasing number of agricultural labourers. Particularly in the 1940s, the falling prices continuing from the depression years affected the small landowning pattadars and rich peasants, while poorer peasants resented the oppressive practice of forced labour or *uetti* and food scarcity of the postwar period. This created the groundwork for an armed peasant insurrection, which took place in Telengana, i.e., the eight Telugu speaking districts of Hyderabad, with the nearby Andhra delta of the British ruled Madras Presidency providing a secure base. Here the communists had started mobilising the peasantry since mid-1930s through certain front organisations, such as the Andhra Conference in Telengana and the Andhra Mahasabha in the delta region. The movement started in Nalgonda district in July 1946 with an attack on a notorious landlord and within a month it spread to a wide region in Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam districts. The demands of the movement were many, as they were meant to forge a class alliance between the Kamma and Reddy small pattadar and rich peasant leadership of the communist movement, and the poorer untouchable Mala, Madiga and tribal peasants and landless labourers who were gradually being drawn into the movement. These included demands for wage increases and abolition of verri, illegal exactions, eviction and the recently imposed grain levy. The movement at this initial stage was, however, less organised and more "spasmodic" in nature.[82]

In June 1947 the Nizam announced that after the withdrawal of the British, Hyderabad would maintain its independence and would not join the Indian union. As this meant the continuation of the antiquated medieval rule, the local Congress decided to launch a saryagraha, and the communists, despite their reservations, joined in and hoisted national flags in various parts of the state. But the alliance soon broke down, as the movement was not going anywhere, while the Majlis lttehad-ul-Musalmin, an outfit of the minority Muslim aristocracy, now recruited its own armed bands, called the *Razakars,* and with the endorsement of the Nizam unleashed a reign of terror in the Telengana countryside. To resist repression, the peasants under communist leadership now began to form volunteer guerrilla squads called *dalams,* began to seize wastelands and surplus land from big landlords and redistribute them, and formed village republics or 'soviets' in areas considered to be liberated zones. When on 13 September 1948 the Indian army entered Hyderabad, it meant the end of the Nizarn's dream of independence and his army, police and the Razakar bands surrendered immediately. But this did not mark the end of the Telengana insurrection, which now entered its second phase, as the Communist Party, despite some opposition from within, decided to continue the struggle, which was claimed to be heralding a People's Democratic Revolution in India. The Indian army also launched its "Police Action" against the communist guerrillas and the uneven battle continued until October 1951, when the movement was formally withdrawn.[83]

The Telengana movement was perhaps the most widespread, most intense and most organised peasant movement in the history of colonial India. According to one estimate, the movement involved peasants in "about 3,000 villages, covering roughly a population of 3 million in an area of about 16,000 square miles." It mobilised ten thousand village squad members and about two thousand guerrilla squads, and managed *to* redistribute about 1 million acres of land. About four thousand communist cadres or peasant volunteers were killed, while about ten thousand were jailed and many more thousands harassed and tortured.[84] This sheer scale also makes it clear that there were more complexities in the movement than these statistics apparently suggest. Dhanagare has shown that it was based on very broad class and communal alliances, which often proved vulnerable. The class alliance began to flounder after the seizure of land began and the land-ceiling question was settled in favour of rich peasants.[85] Also in occupying land, there was more enthusiasm about commons land, wasteland and forests, than about the surplus land of

the landlords. Although dalit groups formed a sizeable section of the participants, their role, as Gail Omvedt asserts, was mainly "a subordinate one", as the communist leadership almost routinely ignored the issues of caste oppression and untouchabiliry. [6]

In all these peasant movements organised by the communists and Kisan Sabhas, there is evidence of autonomous peasant initiative, either in taking action before the middle-class leaders actually arrived or in defying the latter's cautionary directives.[87] What these conflagrations, therefore, indicate i the existence of widespread popular discontent among all classes of peasantry in postwar India, which the Communist Party decided to channelise, albeit in certain specific regions. And if the peasantry was restive, the industrial working classes had become restless too, because of the inflation and post-war retrenchment. The wave of strikes in Indian industries reached its peak in 1946 when more than 12 million man-days were lost and this figure was more than three rimes higher than in the previous year. And apart from industries, workers struck at the Post and Telegraph Department and in the South Indian Railways and North-We tern Railways.t! This general environment of disquiet did not, however, lead to any nationwide mass movement. But that does not mean that all those moments of rebellion were meaningles or those hundreds of lives were sacrificed in vain. After the war it was clear that the British were going to leave India. But that decision, one may argue, was to a large extent prompted by this environment of inquietude. There was a growing realisation that now it would be more difficult to deal with a mass upsurge or to hang on to the empire by force, as disaffection had also trickled into the army ranks. Hence there was a greater urge to negotiate for an ordered transfer of power, so that India might at least remain within the Commonwealth and the British economic and strategic interests were protected. We may now turn to that story.

8.3 TOWARDS FREEDOM WITH PARTffiON

The historiography of decolonisation in India, as Howard Brasted and Carl Bridge point out, is polarised on the question whether freedom was seized by the Indians or power was transferred voluntarily by the British "as an act of positive statesmanship".[89] That British decision to quit was partly based on the ungovernability of India in the 1940s is beyond doubt. It is difficult to argue that there was a consistent policy of devolution of power, which came to its logical culmination in Augu t 1947 through the granting of self-government in India. \Vehave already seen (chapter 6) that the con riturional

hostile was the American public opinion, and it could not be easily cast aside, as since the Lend Lease Act Britain had become too dependent on the United States for conducting the war. So Franklin Roosevelt finally had him to sign the Atlantic Charter in August 1941, which acknowledged the right to self-determination for all people of the world. But it was open to interpretation and in Churchill's conservative interpretation, it was meant only to be applicable to the European people subjugated by Nazi Germany, and not to their colonial subjects. A few months later, he announced arrogantly that he had "not become His Majesty's Chief Minister in order to preside over the Liquidation of the British Empire".[95]

The rapid progress of the Japanese army in Southeast Asia, however, shattered British prestige and dented its self-confidence. Indian collaboration was now more urgently needed, and the allies like Roosevelt and Chiang Kai Shek wanted the Indian problem to be sorted out on a priority basis. The Labour members in the cabinet therefore insisted that something had to be done about India in the line of their 1938 agreement. It was decided that Cripps would go to India to negotiate with the Indian political parties on a declaration that very much resembled the previous August offer. Cripps Mission which came to India in March-April 1942 promised Indian self-determination after the war; India then might opt out of the Commonwealth, but had to enter into a treaty to safeguard British economic and strategic interests; there would be an elected Constituent Assembly to which the princes could also nominate their representatives; the provinces could secede from the union if they so wished and this gave tacit recognition to Muslim League's Pakistan demand; and more immediately, Indians would become members of the viceroy's executive council in order to prop up war efforts. Congress rejected the proposal, as it did not want to shoulder responsibilities without real power and also wanted some control over defence. Cripps could not persuade them, as he did not get either the cooperation of the viceroy or the support of his prime minister.[96] It is also argued that Churchill did not sincerely wish the Mission to succeed; he merely wanted to show the world-and more particularly, his allies-that something was being done to resolve the Indian political imbroglio.[97] The failure of the Mission, as we have noted earlier, prepared the ground for a total confrontation between the Raj and the Congress. But although a failure, the Mission signified an important shift in British policy. It announced Indian independence after the war, within or outside the empire, to be the ultimate goal of British policy; and that unity would no longer be a precondition for

independence.[98] It was on these two essential conceptual pillars that post-war British policy of decolonisation was to evolve, although in 1942 there was not yet any political consensus on them.

During the last years of World War Two and immediately after it the global political situation as well as the objective conditions in India changed so drastically that they gravitated almost inevitably towards India's independence. "Whatever pre-war tendencies may have existed", argues John Darwin, "the pattern of post-war decolonization was profoundly influenced by the course and impact of the war."[99] In India, the Quit India movement and its brutal repression ruptured the relationship between the Raj and the Congress and destroyed whatever goodwill the former might have had among the majority of Indian population. The Bengal famine and the wartime food scarcity in other regions further damaged the moral foundations of the Raj. The subsequent agitation surrounding the INA trials showed that no resolution of the Indian question was possible without the participation of the Congress, which could neither be sidelined nor coerced into silence. Meanwhile, in global politics too the balance of power had tilted decisively in favour of the United States. Britain emerged victorious from the war with its empire in tact. But although there was no dearth of desire to maintain the old imperial system of power, it simply did not have-being dependent on a United States loan—the financial capacity to shoulder the responsibilities of a world power. The interest of Franklin Roosevelt in India's national movement, on the other hand, remained as a constant pressure on an otherwise intransigent Churchill. And after the war, worldwide anti-imperialist sentiments, generated by the very struggle against Nazi Germany and enshrined in the United Nations Charter and its strict trusteeship rules, made empire morally indefensible.

Britain's imperial relations with India had also undergone profound changes in the meanwhile. India performed three imperial functions: it provided a market for British exports, was a remitter of sterling and a source of military strength to protect the British empire. But since the 1930s London had little control over Indian monetary and fiscal policies: protective tariffs had already been imposed and wartime procurement policies led to an evaporation of India's sterling debt, replaced by Britain's rupee debt to India. India's relevance to imperial defence was also coming under close scrutiny. India was traditionally considered to be a strategic asset for maintaining control over Britain's world empire, particularly in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. But it was now doubtful as to how long that would be viable, as already there was stiff opposition

against the use of British Indian Army for post-war restoration of the Dutch and French empires in Indonesia and Indochina. Military expenditure had been another key issue. In 1938 it was found that the Indian army needed modernisation, and the government of India was unable to bear the expenditure. So under an agreement in November 1939 it was decided that the bulk of this expenditure would be borne by the British government, which would also bear the cost of the Indian army fighting on foreign soil outside India. *As* the war broke out, Indian army had to be deployed in the Southeast Asian front and it became increasingly difficult ro transfer cash during wartime; as a result, Britain's debt to India started piling up, so that by 1946 Britain owed India more than £1,300 million, almost one-fifth of Britain's GNP.[100] But this did not mean that Britain decided to leave because, as Tomlinson has surmised, India was no longer considered to be one of her "imperial assets" and was regarded as "a potential or actual source of weakness". [101] Even during the war there was optimism at the Whitehall that the sterling balances would be an advantage, rather than problem, for it would serve as pent up demand for British export industries and could be used to supply capital goods to India, which would boost employment during the crucial post-war reconstruction period in Britain.I'" One may further point out, that this financial situation arose because of the increasing nationalist pressure for more resources and budgetary allocation for the development of their own country, rather than for servicing the empire. If the current situation could reveal anything at all to the imperial managers, it was that India had now certainly become less manageable as a colony-that henceforth it could only be kept under control at a heavy cost, both financial and military. Britain's interest in India could now best be safeguarded by treating it as an independent nation, through informal rather than formal control. The massive Labour victory in July 1945 created a congenial atmosphere for such a political change.

Much indeed has been said about the significance of Labour victory in the history of Indian independence. B.N. Pandey, for example, has argued that the Labour Party, particularly the new Prime Minister Clement Attlee, the new Secretary of State Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Stafford Cripps, now the President of the Board of Trade, were long committed to the cause of Indian independence. Now with decisi ve majority in the House of Commons the time arrived for them to redeem their pledge. [103] Contemporary observers like V. P. Menon went further to suggest that a Labour victory was

union was not enough.[109] As the Congress chose the collision course and launched the Quit India movement, the British found useful allies in Jinnah and the Muslim League, as Churchill openly described "Hindu-Muslim feud as the bulwark of British rule in India".[110] Between 1942 and 1943 League ministries were installed in Assam, Sind, Bengal and the North-West Frontier Province through active maneuvring by the British bureaucracy. The demand for Pakistan was, however, still not well defined at this stage. At the constitutional front, what Jinnah wanted was autonomy for the Muslim majority provinces in a loose federal structure, with Hindu-Muslim parity at the central government, the minority Hindus in the Muslim majority provinces serving as security for the Muslim minorities elsewhere.

The Congress tried to meet Muslim demands through top level political negotiations. In April 1944 C. Rajagopalachari proposed a solution: a post-war commission would be formed to demarcate the contiguous districts where the Muslims were in absolute majority, and there a plebiscite of the adult population would decide whether they would prefer Pakistan; in case of a partition there would be a mutual agreement to run certain essential services, like defence or communication; the border districts could choose to join either of the two sovereign states; the implementation of the scheme would wait till after full transfer of power. In July 1944 Gandhi proposed talks with Jinnah on the basis of the 'Rajaji formula', which indeed amounted to an acceptance of Pakistan demand. But Jinnah did not agree to this proposal and Gandhi-Jinnah talks in September 1944 broke down. In Gandhi's view, the talks failed because of fundamental differences in perspectives: while he looked at separation as within the family and therefore preferred to retain some elements of parmership, Jinnah wanted complete dissolution with sovereignty.[111] It is difficult to tell, however, whether Gandhi's perception was true or Jinnah at this stage was not contemplating partition, but was fighting for his principal demand for the recognition of parity between Hindus and Muslims as two equal nations, whatever their numbers might have been.

This issue surfaced again in June 1945 when Churchill permitted Wavell—the previous commander-in-chief who had in 1943 replaced Linlithgow as the new viceroy-to start negotiations with the Indian leaders. Wavell had a clear understanding that "India after the war will become a running sore which will sap the strength of the British empire". India would be ungovernable by force, because a policy of ruthless repression would not be acceptable to the British

public. So "some imaginative and constructive move" needed to be taken immediately, in order "to retain India as a willing member of the British Commonwealth".[112] During his visit to London in March 1945 he finally convinced Churchill of the desirability of a Congress-League coalition government in India as a preemptive measure to forestall the political crisis he predicted after the war. He, therefore, convened a conference at Simla to talk about the formation of an entirely Indian executive council, with the viceroy and commander-in-chief as the only British members. Caste Hindus and Muslims would have equal representation, while the Scheduled Castes would also be separately represented; and doors would be open for discussion of a new constitution. But the Simla conference of 25 June–14 July 1945 crashed on the rock of Jinnah's demand for parity. He claimed for Muslim League an exclusive right to nominate all the Muslim members of the cabinet. Congress refused to accept it, for that would amount to an admission that Congress was a party only of the caste Hindus. Ironically, at that time, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was the Congress president! Wavell called off the meeting, as a coalition government without the League would not work.

Ayesha Jalal has argued that at no point between 1940 and the arrival of the Cabinet Mission in 1946 did either Jinnah or Muslim League ever coherently define the Pakistan dernand.!'! But it was this very vagueness of the demand that made it an excellent instrument for a Muslim mass mobilisation campaign in the 1940s, the primary objective of which was to construct a Muslim national identity transcending class and regional barriers. In addition to its traditional constituency, i.e., the landed aristocracy, Muslim politics during this period began to attract support from a cross-section of Muslim population, particularly from professionals and business groups for whom a separate state of Pakistan would mean elimination of Hindu competition. And to this was added the political support of the leading ulama, pirs and maulavis who lent this campaign a religious legitimacy,':" Muslim politics at a national level was now being institutionalised and Jinnah gradually emerged as its authoritative leader, establishing his control over the provincial branches of the League. Those provincial groups or leaders, who did not toe his line, like A.K. Fazlul Huq and his Krishak Praja Party (KPP) in Bengal or Sir Sikander Hyat Khan and his Unionist Party in Punjab, were systematically pulled down and politically marginalised. Both Huq and Khan were censored in July 1941 when they agreed to join-without Jinnah's approval-the Viceroy's National Defence Council,

which in terms of its membership structure did not recognise the Muslim claim of pariry.'!' During the closing years of the war, both the KPP and the Unionist Party were gradually shoved out of the political centrestage in the Muslim majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab where Pakistan demand became an ideological rallying symbol that helped overcome the various fissures within a heterogeneous Muslim community.

To get to the details of the Bengal story first, Fazlul Huq and his KPP had thrown here a major challenge to the Muslim League in the 1937 election; but soon after the election, they came to terms with the League by forming a coalition government with them. Huq soon began to lose popularity, as he gravitated more towards zamindar and rich peasant interests and reneged on a number of election promises given to the tenant and poor peasant constituencies of the KPP. He joined the League in 1937 and was given the honour of introducing the Lahore Resolution in 1940. But he never fully endorsed Jinnah's politics and in 1941, when reprimanded by him, Huq resigned both from the National Defence Council and from the Muslim League, with a stinging letter of complaint against the authoritarian leadership style of Jinnah. Although he later retracted his steps, his relationship with the Bengal League members remained strained, particularly when later that year he formed a coalition government with the Hindu Mahasabha, with Shyama Prasad Mukherjee as the co-leader. This Progressive Coalition ministry was ultimately toppled in March 1943 with the active connivance of the Bengal Governor and a Muslim League ministry was then installed under the leadership of Khwaza Nazirnuddin. This boosted League's image, local branches of the Muslim League were opened throughout Bengal and a mass mobilisation campaign was launched.[116] This campaign was however more symbolic and emotional than programmatic. 'Pakistan' was presented as "a peasant utopia" which would bring in liberation for the Muslim peasantry from the hands of the Hindu zarnindars and moneylenders. As a result, by the mid-1940s, Pakistan as an ideological symbol of Muslim solidarity gained almost universal acceptance among the Muslim peasants."? Abul Hashim, the Bengal League leader travelled extensively throughout east Bengal countryside campaigning for Pakistan and his draft manifesto, that outlined the moral, economic and political objectives of the movement, also appealed to the Muslim middle classes, particularly the students. The Nazimuddin ministry had to resign in March 1945; but by then the Muslim League in Bengal had emerged as the only mass based political party of the Muslims.[118] This meant a

virtual political death of the KPP, many of its younger progressive members having already joined the League, which by now had become, to quote Taj Hashmi, "everything to everybody".[!" This popularity was translated into a massive election victory in 1946, with the League winning 93 per cent of Muslim votes in the province and 119 of the 250 seats in the assembly. This was the inevitable result of an election campaign that had been turned into "a religious crusade", as the Congress President Maulana Azad later complained.P"

In Punjab the structure of politics was sharply divided along rural-urban lines; while the Unionist Party held sway over rural politics, the Muslim League acquired a base among the urban Muslims. But the Unionist Party was in control, as Punjab landowners accounted for 60 per cent of its much restricted electorate, organised along agricultural 'tribal' constituencies.[121] The Unionists after the 193 7 election formed a coalition ministry in Punjab with Sir Sikander Hyat Khan as the premier. But Sikander soon came to terms with Jinnah through what is called the Jinnah-Sikander Pact of 1937. Although the alliance was full of tensions, this gave the Unionists some sort of legitimacy among the Punjabi Muslim population, while Jinnah found a springboard to further his mission to project Muslim League as the centre of South Asian Muslim politics. Sikander also contributed to the organisation of the 1940 Lahore conference and to the drafting of the resolution. But he never fully accepted 'Pakistan' as a separatist demand. "If Pakistan means unalloyed Muslim raj in the Punjab", he announced in the Punjab Assembly in March 1941, "then I will have nothing to do with it".[122] But Sikander died suddenly in December 1942 and his mantle fell on relatively inexperienced Malik Khizr Hyat Khan Tiwana. Jinnah continuously pressurised him for more and more political leverage, first to form a Muslim League As embly Party and then to rename the coalition government as "Muslim League Coalition Ministry". When Khizr refused to oblige and stood his ground, he was expelled from the Muslim League in April 1944.[123] Hereafter, Jinnah launched a well orchestrated mass campaign to popularise the idea of Pakistan in rural Punjab, with the help of some of the disgruntled elements in the Unionist Party, the young enthusiasts of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation and the *sajjad nishins* (custodians of *sufi* shrines) who were now pressed into the political service of Islam. He even befriended the Communist Party, which supported the Pakistan demand. When the *pirs* with their huge rural influence, issued *fatwas,* support for Pakistan became an individual religious responsib-

iliry of every Muslim. As the election of 1946 approached, the entire power structure of the Punjabi Muslim community–from the rural magnates and the landowning *jaildar-lambardar* class which previou ly supported the Unionist Party to the ordinary Muslim peasants in western Punjab-all drifted towards the Muslim League. The wartime scarcity and food procurement policy also contributed to this groundswell. [124]

If the League undercut the Unionist support base in the west, the Congress did the same in east Punjab; the Akalis mobilised too. So in the election of 1946, the Unionist Party got just 18 of the 175 seats in the Punjab Assembly; Congress got 51, the Akalis 22 and the Muslim League 75, almost sweeping the rural Muslim constituencies. But this did not immediately mean the demise of the Unionist Party, as Khizr now cobbled together another coalition ministry with the Congress and the Akalis–much to the chagrin of the Muslim League. [ii.s] However, although still kept away from power, the election results for Muslim League certainly signalled a popular acceptance of Pakistan as a religious definition of state and community by the Punjabi Muslims. The Muslim League also did reasonably well in the election in the other Muslim majority province of Sind and in the whole of India it got 74.7 per cent of votes in the Muslim constituencies.[126] Although the electorate was heavily restricted (about 10 per cent of the population), this was interpreted as a popular mandate for Pakistan. An unfettered Hindu raj or Pakistan, Jinnah had announced in an election meeting: "That is the only choice and only issue before us".[127] The League, claims Anita Inder Singh, had thus "presented the elections as a plebiscite for Pakistan '[128] and the victory certainly made it the only constitutionally legitimated representative of the Indian Muslims–the centre of the South Asian Muslim political universe, as Jinnah had dreamed of it. The election of 1946 also brought a popular mandate for Congress, which won majorities in every province except Bengal, Sind and Punjab, winning 80.9 per cent of votes in the general constituencies. For Congress too the issue was singular: "only one thing counts", announced its election manifesto, "the freedom and independence of our motherland, from which all other freedoms will flow to our people".[129]

These election results also marginalised all other non-Muslim political parties, like the Communist Party winning only eight seats, the Hindu Mahasabha with only three seats and Dr Arnbedkar's All India Scheduled Castes Federation bagging just two of the 151 seats reserved for such castes. This was undoubtedly the outcome of the wave of patriotism generated by the Quit India movement, from

which Congress had emerged with unprecedented legitimacy as the representative of the Indian political nation. And then it successfully tied up its election campaign with the INA agitation, a strategy in which S. Gopal has smelled "a touch of escapism't.P? But it was a movement that attracted almost universal approbation of all sections of the Indian population and by supporting it Congress remained at the forefront of a situation that created immense possibilities for the future of India. Although it is difficult to establish any direct link between the INA agitation, the subsequent naval mutiny and the political turmoil they generated with any immediate and perceptible change in imperial policy,'!' it is quite probable, as P.S. Gupta has surmised, that the situation, particularly the more mass based INA agitation, "led to the sending of a Cabinet Mission".[132]

However, on 19 February 1946–the day after the RIN mutiny broke out in Bombay–when Clement Attlee announced the proposed visit of a Cabinet Mission, as R.J. Moore has shown, the uppermost concern in official mind was that of imperial defence, and for that purpose a united India was considered to be in Britain's best inrerests.l-' The three-member mission that visited India between March and June 1946, was headed by Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, and included Sir Stafford Cripps, now the President of the Board of Trade, and First Lord Admiralty Mr A.V. Alexander. Its brief was to discuss two issues-the principles and procedures for the framing of a new constitution for granting independence, and the formation of an interim government based on widest possible agreement among Indian political parties. But agreement proved to be elusive, as the two major political parties in India had now become more intolerant about their contradictory political agendas. Between 7 and 9 April 1946, the Muslim League Legislators' Convention in Delhi defined Pakistan as "a sovereign independent state" consisting of the Muslim majority provinces of Bengal and Assam in the northeast and the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the northwest.[134] On the other hand, on 15 April Maulana Azad, the Congress president, declared that complete independence for a united India was the demand of the Congress.[135] The Cabinet Mission rejected the proposal of a sovereign Pakistan with six provinces as a non-viable concept and offered instead, on 16 May–after wide consultation across the political spectrum—a three tier structure of a loose federal government for the Union of India, including both the provinces and the princely states. There would be a Union government at the top, in charge only of defence, foreign affairs and communications and

harmonious whole" and by the mid-1940s they were preparing for an ultimate showdown by giving their volunteer groups "pseudo-military training".[144] This was the period, which witnessed, to quote Das, the "convergence of elite and popular communalism", creating a general environment of distrust and tension between the Hindus and the Muslims, that finally exploded in August 1946. As a "chain reaction" to the Calcutta carnage, riots broke out in the districts of Chittagong, Dacca, Mymensingh, Barisal and Pabna. But the worst came in October in the two southeastern districts of Noakhali and Tippera. If in Calcutta the two communities shared the casualties almost equally, here the Hindus were mostly on the receiving end, as Muslim peasants, in very systematically orchestrated attacks, destroyed Hindu property, raped their women and killed several thousands of them.[145]

It was not just Bengal that witnessed such communal polarisation at a mass level. Christophe Jaffrelot (1996) has shown that almost the entire north Indian Hindi belt was experiencing the same communal build up in the 1940s. If the Muslim minorities organised themselves around the rallying symbol of Pakistan and were raising disciplined paramilitary volunteer organisations as the Muslim National Guard,[146] the Hindus did not fall behind in organising and simultaneously stigmatising their "threatening Others". This can be gauged from the growing popularity of the overtly Hindu nationalist organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which focussed primarily on the social and psychological construction of the Hindu nation. The number of its volunteers *(swayamsevaks)* rose from forty thousand in 1938 to seventy-six thousand in 1943 to six hundred thousand by the beginning of 1948. More interesting is the regional distribution of this disciplined and well-drilled volunteer corp. The RSS was most strong in Bihar, the Bombay region, the Central Provinces, Greater Punjab (including Delhi and Himachal Pradesh) and UP. Here the RSS appealed to the students and youth, who were attracted to paramilitary training, were distrustful of Gandhian methods, and nurtured deep anti-Muslim feelings. And the organisation was generously patronised by the Hindu Mahasabha leaders, the Arya Samajis and the maharajas of certain princely states where Muslim minorities had of late become articulate and rnilitanr."" It was no wonder, therefore, that the communal fire that was kindled in Calcutta soon engulfed the whole of the subcontinent. Riots began in Bombay from 1 September, in Bihar from 25 October and in Garhmukteswar in UP from November–and in all these places Hindus were primarily in the offensive.[148] The news of the

killing of Muslims travelled with survivors to such far off lands as the North-West Frontier Province where a Congress government was in power, facing a civil disobedience campaign by local Muslims. The Parhan code of honour made them identify with their victimised community and the cycle of vengeance continued. Pathan tribesmen, instigated by local pirs, began to attack local Hindus and Sikhs from December 1946 in Dera Ismail Khan and Tonk. Their primary target was property rather than life; yet, by April 1947 over a hundred Hindus and Sikhs were killed. The worst communal inferno ravaged Punjab since March 1947. Trouble started brewing when the Unionist ministry, on the advice of Governor Jenkins, banned the Muslim National Guard-and also the RSS-in January. This led to the launching of a civil disobedience movement by the League, which organised protest demonstrations and processions, participated by hundreds of thousands of ordinary Muslim men and also women. The ministry ultimately resigned on 2 March in the face of mounting discontent, plunging the region into chaos and disorder. The chief target of Muslim attack was Hindu property; the latter retaliated as well and Muslims lost about four thousand shops and houses in just one week in March 1947. And then in the following three months, according to official accounts, about thirty-five hundred people died in Punjab and properties worth Rs. 150 million were damaged.':" But this was nothing in view of what was yet to come to Punjab in the wake of partition, and in that mindless mayhem "all communities", to quote Ian Talbot, "had blood on their hands".[150]

Viceroy Wavell had in the meanwhile managed to constitute an Indian interim government without the Muslim League. A Congress dominated government was sworn in on 2 September 1946 with JawaharlaJ Nehru as the prime minister. But it came to a complete impasse when in late October the League was also persuaded to join. Nehru sat helplessly while his country was torn asunder by civil war. On 9 December the Constituent Assembly started meeting, but the League decided to boycott it, as Congress refused to accommodate its demand for sectional meetings drafting group constitutions. Only one man still tried to change the course of history! Gandhi almost single-handedly tried to bring back public conscience. He moved alone fearlessly into the riot-torn places-from Noakhali to Calcutta to Bihar to Delhi. His presence had a miraculous effect, but this personal effort failed to provide a permanent solution. At the age of seventy-seven, Gandhi was now a lonely figure in Indian politics; as S. Gopal succinctly describes it, "His role in the Congress was

April he produced what is known as 'Plan Balkan'. It proposed the partition of Punjab and Bengal and handing over power to the provinces and sub-provinces, which would be free to join one or more of group Constituent Assemblies on the basis of self-determination, while the Interim Government would remain until June 1948. Demission of power to the provinces and the absence of a strong centre would certainly lead to Balkanisation of India. [156] It is therefore not surprising that Nehru rejected these proposals on the ground that "[ijnstead of producing any sense of certainty, security and stability, they would encourage disruptive tendencies everywhere and chaos and weakness". [157] Jinnah cast them aside too, as he was not yet prepared to accept the partition of Punjab and Bengal which would give him only a "truncated or mutilated, moth-eaten Pakistan". [151]

The alternative plan that Mountbatten proposed was to transfer power to two successor Dominion governments of India and Pakistan. Nehru, who was opposed to the idea of dominion status was won over, although according to his biographer, he accepted it only as an "interim arrangernent't.!" And as for partition, he is reported to have confessed later about the "truth", that "we were tired men and we were getting on in year too .... We saw the fires burning in the Punjab and heard everyday of the killings. The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it."[160] On 3 June Mountbatten announced his new plan and proposed to advance the date of transfer of power from June 1948 to 15 August 1947. The plan provided for the partition of Bengal and Punjab; the Hindu majority provinces which had already accepted the existing Constituent Assembly would be given no choice; while the Muslim majority provinces, i.e., BengaJ, Punjab, Sind, North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan would decide whether to join the existing or a new and separate Constituent Assembly for Pakistan; this was to be decided by the provincial assemblies; there would be a referendum in the North-West Frontier Provinces, and in case of Baluchistan, the Querta municipality and the tribal representatives would be consulted. Nehru, Jinnah and Sardar Baldev Singh on behalf of the Sikhs endorsed the plan the following day[161] and thus began the fast march to transfer of power.

But partition still remained a contentious issue. Neither Jinnah nor Muslim League ever defined the rights of non-Muslims in future Pakistan, and this omission, as Jalal points out, proved to be a "fatal defect" of their scheme, [162] causing anxieties in religious minorities in Punjab and BengaJ. In Punjab, since the 1930s the AkaJi Dal had

been speaking of a separate land for the Sikhs. Such demands were reiterated after the Lahore resolution of the Muslim League in 1940. For the first time the proposal of a "Khalisran", consisting of territories from Jammu to jamrud, as a buffer state between Pakistan and India was floated. The Shiromoni Akali Dal opposed such separatist claims, but its anxiety to preserve the territorial integrity of the Sikh community increased once the Pakistan proposal was given serious consideration by the Cripps Mission and in the Rajagopalachari formula of the Congress. As a pre-emptive strike to prevent the possibliliry of their perpetual subjugation to Muslim majority rule, they now began to talk of a distinct Sikh land in eastern and central parts of Punjab, taking Chenab River as the dividing line. *This* territorial vision of Sikh identity took various expressions, such as "Azad Punjab" in 1942 or a "Sikh state" in 1944; but none of these claims were separatist per se. For example, the Memorandum of the Sikh All Parties Committee to the Cripps Mission asserted their determination to resist "the separation of the Punjab from the All India Union". After the abortive Gandhi-Jinnah talks, and in response to the Rajaji formula which they all detested, the Akali leader Master Tara Singh announced in no uncertain words that "the Sikhs could not be forced to go out of India-into Pakistan". Once the talk of Pakistan became more serious, particularly in the election of 1946, the Akalis decided to move into strategic alliance with the Unionists and later formed a coalition government with them. Before the Cabinet Mission in 1946, Tara Singh on their behalf once again asserted that they were opposed to Pakistan, but if that eventuality occurred, Punjab would like to remain a separate state, with options to federate with either India or Pakistan.l'" The relationship between the Muslims and the Sikhs deteriorated further following the resignation of the Khizr ministry and outbreak of violence since March 1947. The Akali Dal, patronised by the Maharaja of Patiala, now started mobilising jathas for the defence of Sikh life, property and the holy shrines, and more significantly, called for partition of Punja~a demand, which was ultimately accepted by the Congress in its 8 March resolution. But when partition was agreed upon in the 3 June proposal on the basis of population, the Sikhs found that they were about to lose significant properties and important shrines in the Muslim majority divisions of west Punjab. So a group, prompted by a few British advisers, now began to advocate a third line, that of opting for Pakistan and having an autonomous Sikh region there, and thus retaining the unity of the Sikh community, at least as a

August, when in a brief ceremony at Karachi, the newly designated capital, Mountbatten handed over power by reading a King's message, and Jinnah took over as the first governor general of the Dominion of Pakistan. That night the Indian Constituent Assembly met in a special session, where at the stroke of midnight Nehru delivered his now famous "Tryst with Destiny" speech. When the rest of the world was fast asleep, as he put it in his exemplary flamboyant style India awoke to life and freedom. The next day he was sworn in as free India's first prime minister and the country plunged into celebrations.

But there were many who were not in a mood to celebrate. To register his opposition to partition, Gandhi decided not to participate in any celebration and spent the day in fasting and prayer. The nationalist Muslims felt betrayed too, as the publication in 1988 of the thirty pages of Maulana Azad's book *India Wins Freedom* (1957)—the pages which remained sealed for thirty years—revealed that he was not in a celebratory mood either. *Also* unhappy were the Hindu nationalists like Veer Savarkar, who had once campaigned for *Akhand Hindustan* (undivided India), and so the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS launched a campaign against the celebrations. But the feeling of uncertainty was most dominant in the minds of the minorities, particularly in Punjab and Bengal, where they suddenly found themselves entrapped in an alien land or indeed in an enemy territory.[170] What followed in a little while was the worst-case scenario of communal violence and human displacement that the history of the subcontinent has ever known: about 1 million people were killed and seventy-five thousand or more women were raped. Trains full of dead bodies travelled across the border in both directions; more than 10 million people were displaced and began to taste bitter freedom amidst the squalor of the refugee camps.[?] The most well known victim of this frenzy was Gandhi himself, assassinated on 30 January 1948 by a militant Hindu nationalist.

For many Indians freedom thus came with a sense of loss caused by the partition, while to many Muslims in Pakistan, particularly to their state ideologues, partition itself meant freedom. It is no wonder therefore, that 'Partition' happens to be the most contested discursive territory of South Asian historiography; just the sheer volume of the literature that has been produced in this field is staggering."[?] We do not have space here to delve into the details of this historiography, other than highlighting a few major trends. This historiography begins its career with a focus on the elite, the leaders of the two principal parties, the Congress and the Muslim League being the

chief actors in this drama of truly epic proportions. For some Pakistani historians, first of all, the partition was a liberatory experience, a logical culmination of a long historical process that had started in the nineteenth century by Sayyid Ahmed Khan and others, when the South Asian Muslims began to discover their national identity that was articulated later in the complex subcontinental politics of the 1940s.[173] For Aitzaz Ahsan, partition was "A Primordial Divide"- "a Divide that is 50 years young and 5,000 years old".[174] As Akbar Ahmed argues, the concept of Pakistan was "irresistible and widespread among the Muslims". In 1947 they "forced a separation" and thus claimed for themselves "a separate history of their own".[175] And the chief architects of this history were Jinnah and the leaders of the Muslim League. As opposed to this position, there are other important works, which have questioned the inevitability and legitimacy of partition. The works of Uma Kaura (1977), Stanley Wolpert (1984), Anita Inder Singh (1987), R.J. Moore (1988), Ian Talbot (1988), Mushirul Hasan (1993, 1997) and more recently Sucheta Mahajan (2000), have argued consistently over the period-despite some differences in emphases, nuances and semantics-that Congress, i.e., its leaders, had stood all along until the very end for a secular united India. But it was Jinnah and his Muslim League-which from 1940 began to advocate the 'two nation theory'-who were ultimately responsible for the sad but avoidable vivisection of the subcontinent. Jinnah's alienation from the Congress began after 1937, and if he was a little flexible as regards the definition and specifics of the Pakistan demand until Britain announced its decision to quit, "it was always on the cards".[176] This interpretation, in other words, rests on two fundamental assumprions=- which Asim Roy has described as the "two partition myths"-i.e., "The League for Partition' and 'the Congress for uniry"'!" A recent 'revisionist' history has forcefully challenged these two shibboleths of the familiar partinon narranves.

When Pakistan was ultimately created, it contained 60 million Muslims, leaving behind another 35 million in non-Muslim India. So Ayesha Jalal (1985) launched her 'revisionist' critique by raising an all-important question: "how did a Pakistan come about which fitted the interests of most Muslims so poorly?" (p. 4) In her view, the Lahore Resolution, which neither mentioned 'Partition' nor 'Pakistan', was Jinnah's "tactical move"-his "bargaining counter" to have the claim of separate Muslim nationhood accepted by the Congress and the British (pp. 57-58). The ideal constitutional arrangement he preferred for India at this stage was a weak federal structure,

with strong autonomy for the provinces, with Hindu-Muslim parity at the centre. His optimism was that Congress, keen on a strong unitary centre, would ultimately concede his demand to avoid his more aggressive scheme of separation, which "in fact [he] did not really want" (p. 57). But that Congress or the British would never accept partition under any circumstances was a mistaken assumption. Congress in the end did accept partition and thus Jinnah was beaten in his own game of wits. Asim Roy, in a supportive article for Jalal, therefore, came up with a rather strong emotive statement that "it was not the League but the Congress who chose, at the end of the day, to run a knife across Mother India's body".[178] However, this interpretative model, as pointed out by many, attaches even more importance to "High Politics" than the one it seeks to displace; it relies too much on Jinnah's agency and allows too much space to the inner depths of his speculative mind. Even though we agree that Jinnah might have first floated the idea of Pakistan as a "bargaining counter"-and even Sumit Sarkar admits that[179]-it is doubtful if he had the same bargaining autonomy once the mass mobilisation campaign began in 1944 around this emotive symbol of Muslim nationhood. Jalal has rectified this imbalance in her analysis in her second book, which focuses on a wider Muslim quest for *Self and Sovereignty* (2000). Here she traces the evolution of a "religiously informed cultural identity" of the north Indian Muslims from the late nineteenth century and its enlargement into a claim of nationhood. But this assertion of nationhood, she affirms, did not become a demand for exclusive statehood until the late summer of 1946. Her discussion of popular mentality, it seems, still does not go beyond the newspaper reading and poetry appreciating public; the non-literate Muslims on the streets of Lahore or the peasants in the Bengal countryside remain largely excluded from this narrative until the riots break out in 1946. But the Pakistan movement, as we have already noted, had started embracing a wider public from a much earlier period, as it "meant all things to all people"; [180] once the riots started the campaign only reached the point of no return.

However, it will be equally fallacious to argue that Jinnah did not lead, but was led by Muslim consensus, for, as Mushirul Hasan has demonstrated, consensus there was none. In Hasan's view "the two-nation idea" was itself "grounded ... in the mistaken belief" about such Muslim unanimity.'!' At the political level, the League was equally "faction-ridden and ideologically fragmented" as the Congress was, and at the popular level, even at the height of communal distrust and conflict, there were sizeable sections of Muslim

and accepted partition "as an unavoidable necessity in the given circumstances" .119 For Sumit Sarkar, however, this "comrnunalism" had not yet been normalised in Indian public life. Indeed, there was more communal harmony at the barricade lines-as evidenced in the popular agitations, peasant struggles and industrial actions of the 1940s-than at the negotiating table.!" The Congress leadership, instead of harnessing these popular emotions and risking another round of mass movement, accepted the tempting alternative of an early transfer of power, with partition as a necessary price for it. For Sarkar the communal riots that broke out from August 1946 do not form a part of this popular politics. The subaltern historians, on the other hand, Gyanendra Pandey for example, have argued that the conventional elitist partition historiography has been seriously constrained by its self-imposed aim of "establishing the 'causes' of Partition". "1 It is for Partha Chatterjee a non-question, as it was all decided by the "all-India players" and it is "historically inaccurate" to suggest, at least for Bengal, that the partition campaign involved any significant mass participation."! Pandey, therefore, redirects his historical gaze away from the 'causes', to "the meaning of Partition for those who lived through it, the trauma it produced and the transformation that it wrought" .193 In his view, the "'truth' of the partition" lay in the violence it produced, and he, therefore, endeavours to unravel how this violence is "conceptualised and remembered by those who lived through partition-as victims, aggressors or onlookers". 194

But Pandey is certainly not alone in this new discursive terrain. It needs to be mentioned here that the agenda of partition historiography has significantly shifted grounds in recent years from its previous preoccupation with causes to a greater interest in the experiences. This is proved by the recent spate of publications focusing on the memories of partition, on the creative literature that recaptures this traumatic experience and on the visual representations of that "epic tragedy".195 Historians are now evidently less concerned about causes, and more introspective about the "afterlife" or "aftermath" of partition in South Asia.196 In other words, they look at how partition impacted on post-colonial history and politics, how partition memory defines community identities and affect inter-community relations, thus emphasising a historical continuity. They self-consciously deny the year 1947 and the foundation of the two nation-states the privilege of being treated as "the end of all history" .197

Apart from partition, another thorny issue that figured prominently in this episode of transfer of power in India was the fate of

565 princely states after the lapse of British Paramountcy. The British Crown, through informal pledges and formal treaties, had committed itself to defending the states in lieu of their surrendering some political rights. But the Labour government decided to wriggle out of that obligation in view of the altered political realities and the practical difficulties of defending the states after the transfer of power to British India. So the Cabinet Mission announced on 12 May 1946 that Paramountcy would end with the demission of power and the rights surrendered would return to the states. These would be free to enter into either a federal relationship with the successor state(s) in British India or such other political arrangement with them as they would think best suited to their interests. The declaration, therefore, by default, gave an understanding to the princes that they would have the option to remain independent. Nothing was done to rectify this in Mountbatten's 'Plan Balkan', which simply stated that the states would have the liberty to join one or the other confederation of provinces or could stand out independently. In the 3 June declaration, the policy towards the states remained unchanged."! But then Mountbatten realised that Congress leadership, particularly Nehru and Patel, did not like the idea of independence for the princely states, as this would not only disrupt law and order, but would seriously jeopardise India's future economic development. So he now decided to persuade the princes to accede to India by surrendering rights only in three areas, i.e., communication, diplomacy and defence, where they did not previously enjoy any right. Patel, who was now heading the new State Department, agreed to accept the scheme, provided the viceroy could offer him "a full basket of apples" .*199*

But that was a tough task, as already by early June the rulers of a few larger states, like Bhopal, Travancore, Kashmir and Hyderabad had expressed their desire to choose independence. A beleaguered viceroy was left with little choice other than resorting to arm twisting, if he had to persuade Congress to accept dominion status and partition. In the end, as Ian Copland has suggested, "accession was facilitated by pressure-subtle, gentlemanly but relentless pressure from the viceroy and his ministers". [200] Yethe failed to deliver the full basket. Although by 15 August 1947, the majority of the princes had signed-with a profound sense of betrayal—the Instrument of Accession (IoA) to India, there were some adamant rebels as well. Kashmir and Hyderabad chose to remain independent, Junagadh signed an IoA to join Pakistan, while few other smaller states failed to return the signed documents by the due date. So it was ultimately

the strong-arm tactics of Sardar Patel and his deputy V.P. Menon that secured the integration of India. They emphasised the anomalies of the IoA that such anachronistic monarchical enclaves could not survive in the newly independent democratic India. In course of next two years all the princes were pressured to renegotiate their loA, surrender their rights, open up to constitutional changes and democratisation-in lieu of fat Privy Purses and sometimes prestigious sinecures in foreign diplomatic missions-and the states were eventually merged into the contiguous provinces. *As* for the rebels, Junagadh's ruler was forced to escape to Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir had to accede to India and sign an loA in October 1947 in the face of a Pathan invasion, thus preparing the context for the first Indo-Pak war of 1948. And finally, the Indian tanks rolled into Hyderabad in September 1948 to smash the Nizam's ambitious dream of independence. [201]

The integration of princely India has been a subject of intense controversy. Ian Copland (1993, 1999), for example, has raised serious and justified questions about the ethics, morality and legality of the unilateral repudiation of the Crown's treaty obligations; he has also chastised Mountbatten for his early indifference to and later overbearing treatment of the princes. The methods used by Patel to bring in the flippant rebels into his basket have appeared to be of "dubious legality" to Judith Brown.[202] But for some other historians, James Manor, for example, the demise of the princely states was historically inevitable, for those archaic autocratic regimes were already relics of the past and did not deserve another lease of life. "The paradox of two different Indias", writes Manor, "was clearly destined to pass away".[203] In new independent India, few shed tears for the hapless princes, whose luck had now clearly run out.

Demission of power in India did not, however, immediately mean the end of Britain's imperial ambitions, as the old notion of empire now evolved into the more dynamic concept of the Commonwealth of Nations, where old colonies would be "in no way subordinate in any aspect of domestic or external affairs", but would be "freely associated and united by common allegiance to the Crown". [204] Mountbatten took it as a personal mission to persuade India to accept dominion status and remain within the Commonwealth. India in 1947 found its hands forced to some extent when Pakistan accepted the Commonwealth membership; but the new constitution, promulgated on 26 January 1950, proclaimed India a Republic. However, British "pragmatism", as D. George Boyce has argued, managed to overcome this challenge to the "Crown, so central to the whole

101. Tomlinson 1985: 158.
102. Zachariah 1998: 190, 195.
103. Pandey 1969: 172.
104. Menon 1957: 436.
105. Brasted and Bridge 1990.
106. Moore 1983: 18-31.
107. Darwin 1988: 71-72 and passim.
108. Boyce 1999: 141.
109. Shaikh 1993: 95.
110. Quoted in Moore 1979: 28.
111. Singh 1987: 109–11.
112. Moon 1973: 97-98.
113. Jalal 1985: 59.
114. Hasan 1997: 70-77, 91-99.
115. Moore 1988: 123.
116. Details in Sen 1976.
117. Hashmi 1992: 248-56; 1999.
118. Das 1991b: 164-65.
119. Hashmi 1992: 249.
120. Kuwajima 1998: 144.
121. Talbot 1996a: 61.
122. Quoted in Gilmartin 1988: 184.
123. Talbot 1996a: 111.
124. Gilmartin 1988: 186-221.
125. Talbot 1996a: 148-49.
126. Kuwajima 1998: 167-68.
127. Quoted in ibid: 134.
128. Singh 1987: 136.
129. Kuwajima 1998: 131, 167.
130. Gopal 1975: 307.
131. Mahajan 2000: 97-104.
132. Gupta 1987: 9.
133. Moore 1983: 63-64.
134. Pirzada 1970, 2 513.
135. Mansergh 1977, 7: 285.
136. Ibid: 582-92.
137. Ibid: 837-38.
138. Jalal 1985: 201–2.
139. Asim Roy 1993: 120.
140. Moore 1983: 122.
141. Ibid: 158.
142. Quoted in Wolpert 2000: 344.
143. Das 1991b: 161-88.
144. Joya Chatterji 1995: 191–240.
145. Das 1991b: 189-203.
146. Talbot 1996b: 57–76; Hasan 1997: 87-91.