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The Troubling Interval 1945-1950
The dark and dusty years of the 20th century Indian history (Part One)

Abstract

In the dark and dust-filled night of India’s independence, truth was made a beggar and perfidy made its malignant tailor. Silence and disinformation, manipulative use of historic narrative have always been the trademarks of officially sponsored appreciation of Indian history. This is especially true of the period 1945-1950. Five unruly years that transfigured the essence of Indian history for the benefit of those who never held in high esteem loyalty to that land, and its people.

Keywords: India, British-India, princely-states, Hinduism, Congress, Gandhi, Bose, Nehru, Vallabhai, Brahmanism

Not long ago one of my attentive Hungarian students said the following: “There is a lot written and said about 1947 independence and the 1950 proclamation of the republic and the new constitution, but concerning the period in between there is a relative silence! It seems to me that there are too many lapses.” He might as well have called it a “troubling silence” since, as it can be imagined, a lot did happen during and immediately after the precipitated departure of the British. The period is all the more important because much of the history of India since Independence cannot be explained with consistency, without understanding what happened during this period. One can almost think that a lot of historians dealing with the so called “post-independence” period have a fundamental problem in defining these few years. We don’t know if it was a new beginning or the continuation of the old with a determined ruthlessness.

The urge to pen this study was always impending in the back of my mind because I felt that it was a period of dust-erupted darkness in which truth was twisted and smudged. It always disturbed me to think of the interim period, it was a period in which most of the “facts” and the “truths” were creatively transformed to suit a well-choreographed plan of operation. It was a period when genuine heroes were portrayed as “quislings” or traitors; a period when traitors and collaborators were accoladed as saviours and let loose as almighty nationalists, a time when false saints were turned into demi-gods. It was probably, a period when a great civilisation
suffered its deepest injuries, a period when a proud civilisation was finally brought to its knees. As a citizen of India, like millions of others, I try to accommodate and digest this heritage in silence. But as a historian I still have to come to terms with what happened in this period. If one is uncertain about the fundamentals of a defining period, how is one to build-upon and move-on to the next stage? It is time to make a statement, put forward a perspective on that period which still has no proper name or a face to contemplate.

The job of the historian becomes extremely difficult, since most of the official documents of the time were drafted in view of what we are supposed think of those events. Since 1861, the time the British Crown took over from the East India Company, public documents and pronouncements were “planned” and surely “managed”. In the same manner, the British were also extremely efficient in managing people who “collaborated” with them. So all information coming from those who were close to British power or those nurtured by it also becomes questionable. The idea that we should work with purpose oriented documents should be brushed aside, since these will only yield what their authors wanted them to and not what scientific and authoritative investigation demands. When investigating this interim period a historian is condemned to prudence and vigilance. Priority has to be given to alternative sources, although one is conscious of the fact that these are difficult to collect and that very few are available to the public. One should not hesitate to put forward a modest historical construction from few honest sources, than build edifices based on purpose-built facts.

The narrative of today’s India is punctuated by the withdrawal of the British in 1947 followed by the debate surrounding the Indian Constitution and its proclamation in early 1950. In such, historians have a tendency to deal with this period as “preparatory years” and inconsequential to the larger picture or the sequential of events. Bidyut Chakrabarty, in his Indian Politics and Society since Independence – Events, Processes and Ideology, says: “Three major ideological influences seem to have been critical in Indian politics colonialism, nationalism and democracy. The colonial, nationalist and democratic articulation of ‘the political’ remains therefore crucial in comprehending Indian politics even after decolonization. Two points need to be kept in mind. First, although colonialism and nationalism are surely antagonistic to each other there is no doubt that the former provoked circumstances in which nationalism emerged as a powerful ideology to articulate the voices of the colonized. Second, colonialism also led to a slow process of
democratization by gradually involving people who were favourably disposed towards the alien administration. Although the author tries to exemplify the complexity of the situation, his semantics and syntax of historiography are not far removed from the norm of the officialised version. A complex situation becomes extremely complex when we mishmash concepts and terms to explain something, when in reality the situation demands honest clarification and not another addition to the existing confusion.

For one thing, just because colonialism provoked nationalism, the resulting nationalism need not become colonialism. If Chakrabarty wants to tell us that the three ideologies coexist in one form or another, then we can give credit to his worthy statement. But how is it logically possible to imagine that there was one consolidated notion of colonisation or nationalism, in a diverse landmass as that of India, especially in the interim period? For all intents and purposes, M. K. Gandhi did not embody Indian nationalism, if he did then there were many who thought contrary to him. The thing to understand about Indian history since the so called Independence is that nationalism and colonialism are not distinct and sequential as Chakrabarty pretends them to be. In reality, in the context of the Indian Subcontinent, both nationalism and colonialism are intertwined or enmeshed into one entity and cannot be separated from one another, they form an organic whole. This is especially true when Gandhi intimately equated Indian nationalism with Hinduism, which in its practical form was nothing other than the political expression of Brahmanism.

When M.K. Gandhi side-stepped into Brahmanism in the name of freedom fighting, he legitimated a silent and salient form of colonialism which was too glad to call itself „nationalism”. None can deny the fact that, from times immemorial, Brahmanism was an integral part of every conquest, tyranny, treason and colonial rule. Every time the country was attacked and invaded this category quickly accommodated itself to become the real ruler, the hand in the glove of foreign conquest. Only did the country have a brief respite during the East India Company rule, as was during the early years of Emperor Ashoka, when Brahmanism was temporarily kept at arms distance, to allow for a brief respite in economic recuperation and cultural flowering. But this was rapidly changed by the coup d’état executed by the British Crown during the 1857 uprising and sealed by the 1861 India Act. Along with the East India Company a part of the

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Indian nation was defeated and brutally put down. And as was expected, Brahmanism in the likes of Gandhis and Nehrus prospered everywhere, they worked hand-in-hand and shared the fruits of India’s toil. Tight collaboration with a colonial system cannot be equated to nationalism, it does not simply make sense. They were all too keen to imitate their foreign partners and pander to their whims and wants. Not only was Gandhi not nationalism by Western standards, he was not even by Indian standards. His resistance to the reform of the caste-system showed that he was strictly in his brahminess, and this “caste patriot” cannot be a symbol of India’s nationalism or anything coming out of that soil.

If the gentlemen who grabbed power during the interim period did not have a nationalist ideology, what then did they mobilise as modus operandi? Anyone who has the time to decipher the works of V.P. Menon, part architect and part chronicler of his own deeds and that of the interim period, will soon realise that there was nothing to do with independence or nationalism, and everything related to do with unhindered power or the cravings for it. Nehru was in a process of monopolising power in his hands, against the wishes of everyone.2 For the historian, what matters is the flow of history and the direction it takes. Anyone with a stern eye fixed on two matrixes, namely that of territorial expansion and the process of centralisation, will notice that since the beginning of the 1800s these two elements were moving in one direction, and with accrued intensity. During the East India Company rule, there was a central authority but its scope was marginal. In terms of territorial ambitions and control, it limited itself to the seaboard and the river valleys. When the British Crown took over in 1861, centralisation gathered pace with remarkable extension of its power and its scope, but by todays proportions it was no way near. And without surprise, the territorial ambitions of Gandhi and associates, and their appetite for power took torrential proportions, with an intensity and brutality not seen since the early 1800s. A period when the Hindu power at that time, the Marathas, rampaged the country, uprooting thousand-year communities and sowing the seeds of irreversible economic disintegration.3 This trend obliges us to re-evaluate, the contribution of the group led by M.K.

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2 V.P. MENON: The Transfer of Power in India, Orient Longmans, Calcutta, 1957, 272

3 As the paramount power in India, mainly dominating the interior India, the brahmin Marathas terrorised the people physically and economically. They used the Pindarees (Rajputs) to decimate and systematically liquidate village heads mainly in the Deccan areas of the country.
Gandhi and his own nature and his way of doing things. Who were these men who came from the north-western rim of India and towards what goals they were working?

Although it is widely written that these men, in the final hours of the British withdrawal, had all had the popular support and were the legitimate for all purposes and ends, the reality is far removed from this. Sweet faced charmers and amiable characters overnight became soured and insecure, especially when it came to dealing with the Indian people, as if, all of a sudden they were finally showing their true colours.

Gandhi himself publicly disavowed himself, his weaknesses and shortcomings. In his „The story of my experiments with truth” Gandhi goes into minute detail about his intimate character. In chapter 6 —A Tragedy, reflecting bad acquaintances and friendship he says the following: „A reformer cannot afford to have close intimacy with him whom he seeks to reform. True friendship is an identity of souls rarely to be found in this world. Only between like natures can friendship be altogether worthy and enduring. Friends react on one another. Hence in friendship there is very little scope for reform. I am of opinion that all exclusive intimacies are to be avoided; for man takes in vice far more readily than virtue.” After cataloguing a long list of his very grave short-comings, M.K. Gandhi solemnly declares, „From a strictly ethical point of view, all these occasions must be regarded as moral lapses…” In both these instances Gandhi has told us everything, although removed from the immediate context of the interim years. His long and intimate relationship / friendship / love / sublimation of British power fits the above described friendship and its consequences; this time not for himself but to a nation already decimated by repression, hunger and disrobed of its inner-most dignity. What is there to tell us that those „moral lapses” did not continue until his last days? As historians, and in the

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name of rectitude, we have to get used to the habit of not showing so much magnanimity towards Gandhi and his trusted undertakers; their true intentions were masked from the beginning and as was expected everyone failed to notice it.

For the purpose of introducing rationality and sanity into the interpretation of Indian history we have to maintain the purity of concepts so that we can isolate them, and analyse their meaning in a specific context. We cannot use the concept of ‘nationalism’ to a multitude of ideologies and personalities that can equally be qualified as something else. Simone Panter-Brick for example tries to make sense of M.K. Gandhi’s ideology in the following manner: „The concept of indiannity can be used to describe the matrix of British India under direct rule, and of a sizeable Princely India, which was autonomous in internal matters. Indiannity equally applies to the India of previous conquerors, with its shifting shapes and frontiers. And although Gandhi admired the indiannity of old and was bent of clearing from it the taint of untouchability, among other desirable elements, he politically adhered to India as shaped by British hands.“ The Soviet Union had to reclassify Gandhi several times, as relations between the two countries evolved, and they had no difficulty in doing so. The Mahatma is quoted as saying, The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow... And he quite often did change his opinion, regularly changed his affinities and priorities; in all of this it should be clearly stated that India as a nation never took a central place in his actions, he always saw it as an adage to something else. He and not India was always occupying a central position. The colonial media, and allotted news items to foreign media, made sure that everything orbited around Gandhi and not India or its people.

Gandhi’s character, methods and his attachments are fundamental to the interim period and beyond because the only legitimacy for the transfer of power to certain people and not others depended upon Gandhi’s personal preferences, Gandhi was the gate keeper. The colonial authorities in turn gave a free hand to Gandhi because he leveraged his power over the masses through a political Hinduism. In essence the system was a round a about system of legitimising certain

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9 Taya ZINKIN: Gandhi’s Legacy (syndicated article), Toledo Blade, April2, 1958.
political actors who were hand-picked. There was no evidence at the
time that these pretenders for power had enjoyed the popular
legitimacy. Outside the urban areas in the North-West India and
Delhi, there is little evidence to prove that they had too much
political leverage. This was especially true when Bose chose the
military option to overthrow the British system of exactions in India
in the late 1930s. In any case the method in which they grabbed
power, illustrates well that they did not have the whole hearted or
even half-hearted consent of the people. In the absence of any
reliable legitimacy how were they, as pretenders to paramount
political power, able to insert themselves into the power structure is
the main question that one has to ask oneself. There is no central
ideology or dogma that enticed these Gandhian elite circles to the
people on the ground.

No fixed ideology or principles, so what does this leave us with? A
group of ruthless men determined to grab power, as soon as the
British hands started to tremble in the final months of the Second
World War. If their British masters fall, they fall. Something had to
be done and should be done quickly and without notice from the
Indian people. They knew their weaknesses very well. While Gandhi
and followers were conducting expensive experiments in poverty, and
succumbing to tactical imprisonments, others were mobilising their
forces from village to village, and their pace was gathering. The
support for a mass uprising to adjoin an armed invasion of British
India by Subhash Chandra Bose was rapidly gaining ground. The
Americans, stationed in India were fully aware of this evolution.\textsuperscript{10} All
the well laid plans could go astray.

Panic reigned in the Congress and its British partnership. What
Gandhi and companions did in the very beginning of the interim
period, according to their own recognition, has all the ingredients of
a coup d’état. By 1943, Subhash Chandra Bose had emerged as the
strongest leader in the hearts and minds of the Indian people,
compared to the designated freedom fighters of the Gandhi camp.
The Forward Bloc, created by Bose after his resignation from the
Congress in 1939, was fast growing, with a momentous transfer of
popular sovereignty to it.\textsuperscript{11} Up to this point the strategy of the colonial
authorities and M.K. Gandhi was to shift the nationalist dynamism
from Bengal and the eastern flank towards Bombay and the western

\textsuperscript{10} The Milwaukee Sentinel: \textit{Subose Chandra Bose Now an Ally of the Japs},
Milwaukee, Apr 18, 1944.

\textsuperscript{11} Special Correspondent: \textit{India’s Part in the War – Congress and Future British
Aims, Obstacles to Federation}, The Sydney Morning Herald, Nov 9, 1939.
flank. The scope of this essay does not permit me take the reader into this part of the history of the designated freedom fighters. But the reader should be alerted to the fact that the job of Gandhi and soulmates was to sap the solid nationalist base built up by a group centred in Bengal. At first Gandhi tried to seduce and control two key figures like Tagore and Bose, but that was a tall order, they were true nationalists, in bone and marrow. British fostered „Indian nationalism” took the upper hand as the British authorities tried to physically isolate and then eliminate Bose and disciples.

Gandhi and his tight-knit legion of freedom fighters, had one final opportunity to clinch power from the British before it was taken from them by force by the real Indian freedom fighters. It was a period of intense rifts and arguments between Gandhi and Nehru but this was intended to mask the development of an alternative strategy to distance the Bengalis from the corridors of power. Since 1905 the British had developed a strategy to divide Bengal in order to weaken the Bengali power base, but it could not be done effectively. The Bengalis had built their strategy of mobilisation of the rural masses, untouched by Congress urbanite apparatus. The influence of the Bengalis was not restricted to the province alone, it was bridged across from most of South India to all of the North-Eastern provinces, and it was gaining pace.

Gandhi and Nehru masterfully introduce Mohamed Ali Jinnah into the game. Jinnah was extremely successful, too successful to be controlled by Gandhi and very much wants a large slice of the cake than it is palatable to the rest. Nehru sees a clear opportunity to satisfy the British wishes to destroy Bengali identity and fulfil his personal ambition of taking control of a vast country, confronting the Bengalis and the Muslims at the same time would be a difficult task. Nehru decided that both aims could be achieved in one go. Hence onwards, exacerbating the relations with the Muslims becomes an urgent priority for the Congress members. „Wavell believed that Congress leaders rejected the notion of parity with the Muslim League because they sought to dominate the interim government. ... The Congress response was to complain that the central government was too weak, and that the interim government should function...as a de-facto independent government...”2 Wavell, previously a military man and Chief of Staff of the Indian Armed Forces knows that this could cause a bloodbath, he does not trust the Congress and does not want to

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concentrate power in their corrupt hands.

On the Bengali political wing, Jayaprakash Narayan who was not an ethnic Bengali, clearly sees what is going to happen. 'Narayan insisted that a popularly elected constituent assembly should be created to properly represent popular sovereignty. Narayan also warned that the interim government could never function as a free government until the viceroy, the British Army, and all other British officials departed. Narayan also feared that, without full popular sanction, the constituent assembly might make a series of compromises that would produce "neither freedom, nor democracy, nor national unity."' Nehru and comrades do not request elections to constitute a constituent assembly, instead they are more keen to get their hands firmly in control of the levers of power. And due to the fact that during the war India had become a hub to operations stretching from North-Africa to Asia’s Pacific Rim, power was extremely concentrated, with powers to almost do as one sees it fit to. The high men of the Congress wanted this power intact, suddenly their complaints about a dictatorial government vanished. Now the only complaints they had were about delays and obstacles that stopped them from making the final grab. Whenever the colonial authorities tried to take a measure to loosen the structure in favour of a wider consultation, the Congress movement rushed to create its own structures to tighten its grip on the power that was seeping out of the British hands, with the strict aim of avoiding others get involved or contest their rising supremacy.

The British authorities were under immense pressure from all corners to create a constituent assembly, in spite of Congress protestations. Once the constituent assembly was put into motion however, Congress worked to create an Executive Committee to oversee the proceedings. Everyone thought that this executive committee was to deal with the everyday affairs of putting the constituent assembly together. No, its function was somewhere else. Once created the Executive Committee then filled it with members it chose, with Nehru at the top; as always was with the Gandhi’s approval. Then when in August 1946 when the Congress finally decided to join the interim government, it transformed the Executive Committee into the new Cabinet. It was a master stroke, the British authorities came to believe that the Committee had the backing of all the members of the Constituent Assembly. And as for the Indians,

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everyone thought the Committee to be a temporary structure. But once the Congress supremoes had they hands on the executive levers of power all internal opposition was squashed or brushed aside, without any consideration to ethics or principles of democracy. It was a simple and straightforward crook’s grab for power. ‘On August 20, Jawaharlal Nehru submitted the Congress list of thirteem nominees for the interim government. Seven Congress members of the interim government were sworn in on September 2, four more were added on September 11.’ During this process the Muslim league members were progressively side-lined with threats from Vallabhai Patel. In an interview Jinnah mentions that Patel threatened to unleash civil war if the League did not heed to Congress demands. In other terms, he would unleash hindu fanatics into urban areas where Muslims lived.

The only people who could interrupt the process of Congress power consolidation were Bose, Jinnah and Jayaprahak Narayan. Bose was isolated and not even in the country and Narayan was either regularly imprisoned in appalling conditions or living a clandestine life, escaping British assassination attempts. Just one man could derail Nehru’s plan — Mohamed Ali Jinnah. In the process to keep Jinnah quiet and keep his confidence in place a quick alteration had to be made to the plan. The famous Life Magazine photographer, Margaret Bourke White writes the following in her autobiography: ‘With freedom finally on the horizon, Jinnah masterminded the game so adroitly that within months he was to win Pakistan. Jinnah announced what he called Direct Action Day: „We will have,” he insisted, „either a divided India or a destroyed India.” On the heels of this announcement, violence broke out in Calcutta. I flew there from Bombay and found a scene that looked like Buchenwald. The streets were literally strewn with dead bodies, an officially estimated six thousand, but I myself saw many more.’

Margaret Bourke White describes the determination of Jinnah and its catastrophic consequences, but she knew little what went on behind the scenes during the period. Like her, historians, have to stitch-in the missing pieces. Concerning Mohamed Ali Jinnah, historians still have the task of asking a simple question and bringing a substantive reply to it. The legitimate question we have to ask ourselves concerning Jinnah is: Was Jinnah groomed for a specific

16 Preston GROVER: India’s Future May Hinge on British Mission (syndicated article), Schenectady Gazette, March 22nd, 1946, p9
purpose as was Gandhi and Nehru were? If yes by whom and for what purpose? It is in the interest of academic sobriety that these questions be answered. But if as Margaret Bourke White suggests that Jinnah was a tactical master who made timely use of his demands, Nehru and his colleagues would have heeded only if his demands were marginal compared to their designs on the rest of India. Compared to the post-independence period and the effect of the Indo-Pakistan conflict on Nehru’s “consolidation” of India, Jinnah surely demanded very little compared to the service he rendered. Jinnah was dealt with and would not hinder the ambitious plans of Gandhi-Nehru tandem. I will develop this idea in a later occasion.

The troubling point and real danger to Nehru’s plot was Jayaprakash Narayan, the most emblematic leader who reflected the real aspirations of the people. If there was a leader at that time who knew his people and their aspirations, it was Narayan. He liked to see himself as a social-democrat but in that lay his undoing. Nehru used this opportunity to portray him as a communist and thus an objectionable element in the eyes of the public in the West.18 Nehru put his fascination for communism temporarily at rest. In his attack, Nehru singled out the ‘The Socialist Railwaymen’s Federation’, headed by none other than then Jayaprakash.19 But once again Margaret Bourke White comes to the rescue of Narayan because she had come into contact with him and met with many left wing intellectuals and activists on the ground. In the same issue of the Milwaukee Journal she says, on the occasion of her book presentation ‘Halfway to Freedom’: „An estimated 80,000 of the subcontinent’s 400 million people are members of the Communist party, she said, but the party’s influence is small. „Unless the governments make the same mistake that the Chiang government in China made, the Communists are not feared.”20 As if to protect the reputation of its own sons the Milwaukee Journal then goes on to list the academic credentials of Narayan, achieved in the best of American universities and tells that he had done this through his own effort, unlike Gandhi and Nehru. The paper also makes it clear to its readers that Narayan has no links to the Communist party.21 Whatever the

outside world might think, did not deter Nehru and Vallabhai Patel to resort to police harassment. Their aim was to make sure that Narayan does not organise a challenge from below. It was becoming very clear what kind of state structure the new India was going to embrace. Compromises, personal ambitions and the need to curtail free Indians dictated the process of transition, if one can call it that.

Some however, think that it was the partition which dictated the characteristics of post-independence India. *Post-colonial India was the mode of government that emerged from the chaos of Partition, a state that absorbed much of the superstructure created by the British.*

Structurally, most of the historians were expected to fall into this trap. By these kind of statements and conclusions that would like to have us believe that the process of partition suddenly made mild, moderate and ethically immaculate democrats somehow become rapacious colonial predators, ready to kill and appropriate with indiscriminate passion. By looking at the immediate events of the Partition, some historians forget to see the simple truths of the „medium” and „long” cycles or stretches of Indian history. The Gandhian propaganda of non-violence masks the logical build-up of the transfer of power without structural changes. The Second World War interrupted but did not alter the planned course of events building up towards the imminent withdrawal of British power from India in 1947.

Those historians who are interested in hard facts and not prefabricated propaganda will realise that Gandhi was brought back to India in 1915 to help the British rule without loss of life to their own ranks and leave at will and without moral or financial consequences. Nehru was groomed to rule India because he was acceptable to their post-independence prescription. Otherwise, in essence nothing was to be different, neither the intensity nor depth of suffering of the Indian people. It was not a relief and never meant to be. Just because the international community started to believe in its own interpretation does not mean anything had changed on the ground. Talking of the dinner parties after independence day the New York Times says the following: „It was a surreal occasion — Britain renouncing and dividing up the jewel of empire with every appearance of satisfaction; India and Pakistan applauding a freedom that would soon be engulfed by bloodshed and war.”

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was just another day in the life of the British Empire. To this surreal picture was added another grand oeuvre of everything being a family affair, where the „independencers” and the „dispensers” of independence brushed shoulders like one big family: „The warmth shared by India’s new Prime Minister and Lady Mountbatten was obvious. It was equally obvious that Lord Mountbatten minded not at all. In contrast to the erupting turmoil across the subcontinent, the scene between imperial lord and victorious revolutionary that night was one of astonishing civility.” According to this description, one would think that this was the re-enactment of the coronation of Napoleon I with the beautiful Josephine at his side. Obviously everything was done to show that it was business as usual, seamless and without interruption; a family event to be short.

Alex Von Tunzelmann pushes the blade a few inches deeper by the following statement: „Thanks to his impressive gift for public relations, the end of Empire was presented as the purpose of Empire – India was as a well-nurtured and fattened chick, raised to fly from the imperial nest while Britain, the indulgent parent, looked on with pride. And so the British were able to celebrate their victory.” The atmosphere was celebrative and jovial between the new breed of native imperialists and their proud British mentors. In this game of smiles and nods the new enemies were the Indian people and their disruptive manners. The first category of such people who still enjoyed relative independence in the subcontinent was the 40% of its territory which was ruled by the princes and kings who had not submitted their sovereignty but were curtailed by British India. Among these princes some were brutal and practised misappropriation of public goods, showing a relative inaptitude to govern. But an overwhelming majority of them were proud to show that their princedom or kingdom was best governed and most developed. There are scores of anecdotes even by the British officials, showing that these princely states coped better when it came to organising relief to the famine-stricken people, while most of the catastrophe took place in the British governed territories. The King of Mysore, for example, was renowned for building dams, universities and other public institutions that would improve the sort and

livelhood of his subjects. These modern monarchs were the obstacles that had urgently to be removed; these were the protective rings of identity and economic subsistence that had to be blasted to make way for Afghan-Mesopotamian clans (the Congress of the time) to take total control of the subcontinent. The flamboyancy of Nehru and his comrades had a colonial tinge to it.

It is not only that the interim Indian state (1945-1950) continues to perpetuate a colonial administration, it openly becomes colonial in its ambition to acquire new territories immediately after the British withdraw from the subcontinent. All this was done in a conception of the new found nationalism. For a historian it is not a question of morality or legitimacy, it is a question of putting the actions of this period (1945-1950) into a historical perspective. When the British do territorial rationalisation in the subcontinent it is called "colonialism" but when it is done with more brutality by the post-British government it is called "territorial rationalisation". When kingdoms struggled against East India Company, modern day official Indian history narrative, pours praise upon the period for being anti-British, even when the East India Company was protecting the people against local tyrants. But when Nehru and team take-over almost 40% of today's Indian territory by blackmail and outright invasion, historians treat it as logical steps taken by a new democratic nation, in its quest to reform and rationalise a very backward society. Except for the territories of the Nawab of Hyderabad, most of the princely states had a markedly higher level of development than the British administered territories. As modern India approached their gates, the princes had much to fear for the future of their people.

The special correspondent of The Sydney Morning Herald writes the following: The Congress Party has never been friendly to them, and recently Pandit Nehru proclaimed that the British paramountcy over the princes must pass to Hindustan (now the Dominion of India) and that the princes who did not enter the Constituent Assembly "will be treated as hostile."26 In short, Nehru was declaring war on the Princes and their people. A few months earlier the sentiment was one of betrayal by the British and fear of a new predator. Phillips Talbot of the Chicago Daily News Foreign Service reported the following from New Delhi: 'Like a flock of frightened chickens various Indian Maharajas and their ministers are scurrying about New Delhi trying to determine their best hopes for

survival after the British leave India. ... With perhaps 10 weeks of British protection remaining, the chamber of princes has fallen into confusion following the resignation of the Nawab of Bhopal, a Moslem ruler, as chancellor. All during the Second World War Britain was massively dependent upon the princely states for a constant flow of army recruits paid for by the loyal rajas, in exchange for the promise from Britain that it will defend their interests and maintain their territorial integrity. Now that the war effort was over, the British, who were stringent monarchists, suddenly changed their mind. It is still not clear if the change of mind was due the change of government in Britain in 1945, or it was part of a larger deal done between the colonial partners and Gandhi’s freedom fighters. Whatever the behind the scenes deal, the reality was that of a colonial takeover, without consulting neither the people nor allowing the princes to choose freely the fate of their country.

From the point of a historical treatment, most historians who deal with this period forget to give the right categorization of the actions of the newly independent India. Our inability to understand the last 60 years of India’s structural tensions is derived from the ambiguities in qualifying the period. Somehow historians implicated seem to make a convenient confusion between territorial consolidation and colonialism. The same thing cannot be two things, either in both cases it is colonialism or we have to be content with the term „territorial rationalisation,” or consolidation. One cannot accuse the East India Company or later the British of colonialism when exactly the same thing, with the same methods was carried out by „independentised” British-India. The confusion on how to perceive the period was partly due to an ambiguous power-play by Pandit Nehru himself.

There is, since 1945, a pronounced stress on all kinds of rationalisation that is portrayed as nation-building and the structure of this system was put together during the interval 1945-1950. What has happened since is the need to consolidate the colonial structure on the part of the newly branded Indian state. The interval of 1945-1950 also laid-down a domestic policy and foreign policy equation that continues to be repeated since. What is more interesting with the period is that the foreign policy initiatives taken by the new Prime Minister – Jawaharlal Nehru and the emphasis of these initiatives. Most of the emphasis of India’s foreign policy initiative at the beginning was about the non-interference in a country’s domestic

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97 Phillips TALBOT: *Indian Princes Have Fears* (syndicated article), Toledo Blade, June 7th, 1947, Toledo, 4.
affairs. The notion of "domestic affairs" in the interim period had a special and sometimes ambiguous connotation to it.

From the outside it very much looked like a newly de-colonised country trying to protect its sovereignty. But in reality it had a practical function - the new India wanted the world to turn a blind eye to the territorial consolidation/colonisation that was taking place within the subcontinent. The charismatic Nehru took to the world stage while his deputy, Vallabhai Patel, was up to his neck in a colonial blitzkrieg in the Deccan and the North-East. They had a hectic agenda - to complete the process of colonisation before deadline of January 1950, by the time which the new constitution was to be adopted. Until the deadline anything could done, borders could be redrawn and territories extended. After this very important deadline international law and world attention could be an obstacle. The Sydney Morning Herald talking of Nehru's double standards writes the following on Nehru’s war on the Nagas, where 30,000 Indian soldiers were mobilised for two whole years: "What was harder for the two Western Powers (Britain and France) to swallow was the fact that Mr. Nehru should have been prosecuting his own "colonial" war in Northern Assam while at the same time castigating Britain and France for their policies in Cyprus and Algeria."28 The interim period (1945-1950) was considered by Nehru and his team of "nation-builders" as a window of opportunity where there was a cloud of dust over the legitimacy and legalities of the British heritage in India.

Nehru and his team of "independencers" were playing the finely tuned ambiguities that were developed and mastered by the British Raj. There were two territorial categories in British-India, the territories directly administered by the Raj and those areas that were under the supervision of the Raj. This latter category were the princely states which were in control of their proper administration but were regularly inspected by the residents representing the Raj. Was this arrangement administrative or sharing of sovereign control? The ambiguities were deep and cultivated to be that by the British colonials. James Onley, a British historian has this to say on the subject: "Princely India was 'informal empire' (protectorates and protected states or territories under indirect imperial rule), comprised of over 600 'native states' and tribal territories, each with its own ruler or chief overseen by a British resident or agent."29

29 James ONLEY: The Raj Reconsidered: British India’s informal Empire and
And he concludes: „While this definition does not differentiate between the formal and informal parts of the Indian Empire, the areas of British suzerainty around British India were informal empire all the same.”\textsuperscript{30} What James Onley tries to illustrate is that there was virtually no difference between Princely States and possessions in the Gulf or Sultanate of Yemen. The main reason why the East India Company and later the British Empire wanted to control both categories was to bar them from falling into the hands of Britain’s enemies or unite to cause trouble to its rule. It was for this that the defence and foreign policy of these states was controlled by the British Empire.\textsuperscript{31} But administratively speaking the princely states had their own distinctive structures and identities, only the financial soundness was supervised by the British Raj. The main reason for this was that the princes were generous contributors to the imperial ventures of Britain in and outside Asia. They regularly contributed troops to the British missions in Asia and Africa. This would be put in danger if they got into financial difficulties. Balancing the budgets was one of the central agreements that tied them to the British Raj.

Unlike James Onley, Sir Conrad Corfield had a direct contact with what is known as the Princely India, and he has a markedly different opinion to Onley’s dry legalistic appreciation: „This (a Durbar of Punjab princes in Lahore in 1921) gave me a chance to see the only Indians who at that time had real power. I was struck by their individuality. Dressed for the Durbar they represented the ancient history and culture of India. Their independent attitude was a pleasant contrast to the subservience of many who served the Raj. Was I right in thinking that the real India existed in their territories rather than the Provinces of British India? My instinct said I was.”\textsuperscript{32}


What Corfield is hinting at is that these princely states were forced, conjured or cajoled into an arrangement of non-hindrance to the British interests but they were never subjugated like the provinces directly ruled by the British Raj. The people who lived in the princely states generally knew who their ruler was and closely identified their future with that of their ruler.

Travelling through the country in the interim years, the Hungarian born Tibor Mende explains how the princes had kept much higher standards and how the people in these princely states escaped the cruelty of famine and poverty. Mende writes: „From the point of view of industry, Mysore is the most advanced among all the states. From the point of view of public education, Travancore, Cochin, Mysore and Baroda possess a degree of instruction superior that of British India. For example, in Travancore, in the South, education started to be organised in 1801, some 65 years before it was done (on the same level) in England. In the same state the level of education is four times higher than the rest of India.”38 By any standards, the princely states did not need the development the newly independent India was offering. What legitimacy did Nehru have therefore to invade and annex many hundreds of princely states and kingdoms? There could be no acceptable answer, except for that India after British India, was structurally one and the same, if not even worse in its logic of unending colonial consolidation. This had nothing to do with good government and democratic rationalisation, and everything to do with an indiscriminate land grab with catastrophic consequences to the people.

What is more interesting, is that while slicing and dicing of Punjab and Bengal was agreed without the slightest consultation and approval of the people concerned, a gift to Jinnah and his very cooperative Muslim League, at the same moment and in the same indiscriminate manner countries were quietly being annexed to the British heritage. It is greatly insufficient to consider the new acquisitions to be weakly or too small to survive on their own. The kingdoms of Travancore, Mysore and the state of Nizam covered most of South India (the Deccan plateau) sometimes bigger than some medium sized countries like Spain or Italy. Apart from the desperation of the state of Nizam, none of these states expressed their animosity or enmity towards British India and there was no reason to consider that they would change their position overnight.

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38 Tibor MENDE: L’Inde devant l’orage (translation into French by Jeanne N. MATHIEU), Club des Éditeurs, Paris, 1950, 88 (The author of this current essay tried to make a fair retranslation from the French text to English).
after the British packed and went back home to their remote island. The princely states were not a danger and there was no need to mince them with the hunger and poverty stricken territories of the new India.

The germs of Nehru’s rule, which brought so much unacknowledged economic mismanagement, starvation, disease and death, had their roots in the interim period. Those few forgotten years were the defining years to what befell the people of the subcontinent. Personalities from North-West India like Gandhi and Nehru, and many others were hand-picked by the British to accomplish specific missions, like loyal sons of the British Empire. The Second World War and the sudden collapse of the British power in the Far-East seriously diverted their plans and quick adjustments had to be made in the years 1942-1945, to cope with all eventualities. This rectification, due to international strategic compromises and accommodations to personal ambitions, dictated the interim period of 1945-1950. These years in turn dictated the future of the Indian Subcontinent and its people.
Ramachandra Byrappa: The Troubling Interval 1945-1950 The dark and dusty years of the 20th century Indian history (Part One).