

MAKING SENSE OF INDIA'S HISTORY



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To my wife Beáta

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Preface

Most of the time academics love their countries and hate the systems that disfigure and destroy them, it was no different with me when I decided to research into what I considered to be a dysfunctional Indian System, that was plaguing the proper functioning of the Indian Civilisation. I wanted to know why the system was destroying the only positive thing that was holding the country together. The beginning was tumultuous and traumatic as I witnessed layers of anti-civilisational corrosion at work. I was deeply disturbed, angered and worried.

I was in my early forties when this torturing trauma hit me straight in the bosom. This was made even worse by a climate of prejudice, disparagement and disrespect I found myself in the years I researched and wrote these studies. A certain academic community was projecting its vision of India and Indians which was not mine nor of my countrymen. Having no defence or recourse against this discrimination, I attributed it to the civilisational failures of my country of birth. It no longer procured its best sons and daughters the rightful respect and acceptance. Undeterred I had to recentre myself and my focus. To get going I had to come to terms with certain things, I had to fix a certain number of objectives. I had to come up with some pretty good reasons why I should dedicate so much of my time on this research rather than divert my attention to more fruitful preoccupations that would procure a better life to my wife and children.

I realized that the greatest injury to the Indian Civilisation was done by institutionalised lies and misunderstandings of India's history and its people. My simple aim was to break this flow of distortions and untruths, in the hope that a few might change their attitudes towards a wounded civilisation that is bleeding for help on a daily basis. My central question in this collection of articles was: how did a fundamentally violent foreign system get implanted into a peaceful and mindful civilisation?

Introduction to the volume:

India's history should not be a Pandora's box. We often get the impression that when the real history of India is revealed that everything would be thrown into a turmoil, further increasing the steam in the country's socio-political cauldron. All the more reason, it is thought, to stay in the strict confines of imposed practices of prudence and self-censorship. It seems that most historians are willing to settle for a history of India from 1947 with flashbacks to the Vedic period. Everything in-between is abandoned to the British "Shakespearean" construction, leaving no place for the Indian historic reality. It is the responsibility of everyone dealing with India's history to put things right and restore a long awaited objectivity. For no nation can be strong until it feels the strength of its roots; for no nation can put an end to its sufferance until it tends to its wounds; and no nation can know where it is going until it knows where it is really coming from. Abandoning the writing of India's history to that of the British tradition would be to legitimising its colonial criminal misdeeds and its efforts to cover-up those misdeeds. Nothing of this period should be taken as a given, everything should be reconsidered and reappraised.

As one can expect, a sense of lacklustre towards Indian history is encouraged because there are so few authentic archives and historical records. All records not in connivence with the legitimation of British rule were destroyed. Whatever exists, exists because the British colonials left them there for the posterity, to sweep cleaning their atrocities and historical injury to the Indian civilisation. This paucity of authentic historic records is probably the reason why we often witness people saying and writing that India is vast and mysterious, with a millennial history. It would probably take the lifetime of several thousand historians to demystify Indian history and make sense of its extensive perimeters, to separate the real from the mythic, the centre from the periphery. Then there is the question of centrality: what are we looking at? From where and at what level? After a long period of reading India's history, what is published and accessible, one becomes sure of at least two basic assumptions. Firstly, Indian history is like a banyan tree, where the branches themselves have roots but at

the same time are connected to the main trunk of the tree. And at times whole new banyan trees are intermeshed with the main trunk, but where the trunk might not be that evident. One could easily confuse the branch for the trunk. Secondly, India's history is mainly written by the British and if it is not, it mainly follows the same structures of narration. Like a recipe, the ingredients are the same, although the end results might seem different. The original recipe is of British tradition. And most importantly the "British" narrative has an important structural function, namely that of permanently handicapping the Indian civilisation and therefore eternalize British rule or influence in the world of creative thought. It follows a pattern of creating knots of permanent conflict. This purpose supposes that all historic figures put forward by the British "history workshop" as key figures of Indian history are in fact part of the British historical structure. A structure that made heroes out of traitors and villains out of the proud sons of the Indian civilisation. A British narrative that made fact out of fiction and the reverse, faking a civilisation while trampling on the real on a daily basis. Going against this tide and creating a counter wave should be the aim of Indian historians, and those expressing true curiosity towards the Indian civilisation. My attempt in the following articles / chapters is a modest beginning, in the hope that others will be persuaded to do the same.

1-Federalism in India¹

Insight into India's political structure and its colonialist traits

Federalism in India is more a well-publicized project than a working reality. Like democracy and the published principles of Gandhian equality and self-determination, federalism in India is no more than a statement of good intention. Pandit Nehru and the small clique of political opportunists freely spoke of India's diversity of cultures and ethnicities but when it came to creating a federal framework to accommodate this multiplicity of aspirations for nationhood they were less than willing to look around for best practice. Instead, they repeatedly made the excuse of India's specificity and the need to find a 'home-grown' solution. The best examples of federalism are often stated to be those where there is a strong in-built tendency towards administrative and institutional decentralization, where local political self-definition is strongly reinforced by a corroborative local administration and fiscal system. In India, however, the idea of local government did not come to prominence until the 1990s. One therefore has to ask oneself the question that: if all the fundamental elements of federalism are absent, what is the appropriate word or adjective to describe the form of the Indian political structure? At closer attention one might discover that although the Indian situation might not be that ugly as historic logic leaves us to think, it is non-the-less deeply disturbing. Since a careful examination of the nature of federalism in India will forcefully lead us to ponder upon the colonial state of the sub-continent. One is left to consider the real possibility that colonialism did not end with the withdrawal of Britain from the Indian sub-continent. On the contrary, it might have been deepened and intensified, leaving no possibility for federalism in India to gain credibility. Before going into the heart of the matter I have to alert the reader that the study of Indian history is filled gaps, false assumptions, misplaced sympathy and wishful thinkings. This means that objective inquiry will assume diverting from long established „tendencies” in the

¹ Byrappa, R. (2009). Federalism in India. *ÖT KONTINENS: AZ ÚJ- ÉS JELENKORI EGYETEMES TÖRTÉNETI TANSZÉK TUDOMÁNYOS KÖZLEMÉNYEI*

study of Indian history. To begin with there was an explosion of good intension from scholars, like the rest of India observers, since it was thought that India gained independence through non-violence. Given the background of the World War Two bloodbath, non- violence was a very commendable thing. Added to this there was a 'poor country' assiduously trying to build a democratic system when everywhere it was considered to be a rare commodity. So whatever out-of-the-norm action was forgiven as a 'false-step' of an infant democracy, it would have been deeply irresponsible to aim criticism against it. This was topped-up by the charisma of Gandhi and Nehru who commended esteem and respect at home and abroad and directing criticism against them was almost treated as sacrilege. In this respect the popularity of Mahatma Gandhi was used as a protective shield behind which all murky dealings were possible. Finally let us not forget the fact that like all 'long and arduous' independence struggles the Congress, as a spear-head movement, had supportive groupings all over the world. These groups in the United States and Europe were mainly dominated by left-leaning, Fabian, intellectual circles where academic participation was high. Therefore one can easily assert that critical evaluation of Indian history was for long marred by sympathy for Congress leaders. This is one of the reasons why post-independence history of India very much resembles the 'official' history of India – the great Indian leaders who forced the cruel and corrupting British out of India. But the immediate period surrounding independence and the creation of the Indian Union was toned-down; it is very sparse and stands like the pillars of the ruins of the Greek Pantheon.

For our purpose, the period spanning from 'Government of India Act 1935' to 26 January 1950, when the Indian Union (the Indian Federal State) came into being is very important. This might partly explain the nature of India's federalism. Let us start by considering the following argument: Imperial Britain did not colonize one single entity called India. There were literally hundreds of small entities, kingdoms, principalities and semi-empires collected and collaged into the Indian Empire of Great Britain. The fact that the Mogul empire was piecemealed and conquered by the British does not mean there was one

India. The Mogul Empire was mainly spread across the Gangetic plain. The kingdoms of Punjab to the north-east and Marathas to the south had put a strong resistance to the invaders and were late comers to the Indian Empire. The British Empire in South Asia was a loose administration; it was an umbrella organization of crown appointed commercial activities, conquered territories, protectorates and conscripted allies. The common objective of pushing the British out of South Asia cannot itself give legitimacy to a post-independence territorial integration. The colonial administration had a clear and pressing dilemma on its hands: should the Indian Empire be transformed into a new 'Federal' State or should it broken-up into a multitude of viable states?

The negotiations leading to the enactment of the 'Government of India Act' in 1935 tried to engage this reality but failed to provide any clear-cut answers. The novelty of the act however was its direction towards federalism as a political structure that India should adopt before gaining Independence. But the importance of this move was undermined by the fact that State structure was still colonial, and with impending war in Europe, Britain strengthened its administrative control rather scaling it back. The breathing space to the new federal aspiration was constricted by Britain's war preparation in Europe. The central administrative organs became more important than at the height of the conquest and consolidation. The so called All India Services became ever more important. One of these services called the Imperial Police Service took strong foothold with indisputable presence even in the remotest corners of the 'British Indian Provinces'. The Indian Imperial Police consisted of an Inspector General, Deputy Inspectors General, District Superintendents and Assistant District Superintendents. The Subordinate Police Service in each province consisted of Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, Head Constables and Constables. Although the colonial authorities had an array of instruments of law and order enforcement at their disposal they preferred, for internal administration, to rely heavily on the District-level services to keep order. This minute administrative detail was going to have a profound, if not fatale, influence on the Federal State of post-independence India.

The tradition of District Administration was brought to India by the British, who adapted it to the pre-existing Tehsils and the Talukas from Mughal Rule in India. (During Akbar's reign the authority at the district was placed in the hands of a Foujdár).² During the British Rule the Deputy Commissioner of the district was the most powerful officer of the empire, responsible for the collection of revenues and for the maintenance of law and order.³ The 'federal experiment' under 'Government of India Act' of 1935 was showing its true colours. Political decentralization was countered by administrative centralization – a corner stone to the power structure that would continue even after the British-Rule in India came to an end. It is important to remark that: given the practical reality of central authority most provinces refused to subscribe to the idea of federalism. Even symbolic existence of federal approach was abandoned with re-establishment of provinces being ruled by governors who were appointed by the central colonial organs. The District as an organ of central power will be analysed at length at a later stage of this paper when we look into the workings of the federal state after 1950.

The failure of the 'Government of India Act' of 1935 does not mean that a more enlightened project for federal state would be put forward. One of the hurdles to the British conception of federalism was Congress itself. From the onset the Congress movement refused to integrate the word 'federal' into the 1935 constitution, and this objection remained as India became an 'union state'.⁴ When the British negotiators proposed discussions on their federalist conception, the Congress leaders refused to take part in any Round Table Conferences organized to this extent. This in part was due to Congress's own constitutional preparations summed-up in the 'Nehru Report', presented at the annual session of the Congress in December 1927. *"The government structure envisaged by the Nehru report was unitary rather than federal in form"*⁵ In the words of Sumitra Kumar Jain: *"[...] on the whole, the Nehru Committee recommendations were for a centre-oriented constitution. The committee was*

² See Keightley, 1847.

³ For an in-depth study on the administration of district see Baghwan Sharma, 2003. Or see Braibanti, 1967, 347-348.

⁴ Jain, 2005, 91.

⁵ Jalal, 2000, 303.

inspired by a strong and stable constitutional system, which, in view of the country's history and existence of divisive forces, should be capable of maintaining national unity [...]"⁶ (Here I have to alert the reader to the fact that Sumitra Kumar Jain makes references to divisive forces of the country as if India was a unitary state even before the British rule! He does not consider the possibility that 'divisive forces' can be interpreted as nations struggling for self-determination.)

The reason Congress refused to embrace Federalism was evident. Adopting the federalist principal would mean accepting the 500-something principalities and kingdoms, some of which were bigger than France in geographical terms. What irritated the Congress was that the princes enjoyed a high degree of sovereignty under the British rule, although it brought about widespread economic difficulties at the same time. The idea of a nation was more in line with the kingdoms than the all-inclusive super structure that Pandit Nehru and colleagues were hastily putting together. This relative strength of the Rajas was demonstrable during the period prior to the 'Government of India Act of 1935': *"Both British officials and Indian nationalists pursued princely allies, but the princes, for better or worse, exercised significant autonomy throughout the protracted constitutional negotiations, inaugurated in 1927 and finally suspended in 1939. It reveals the difficulties that the princes encountered in any effort to present a united front, as well as the multiple constituencies in Britain with conflicting agendas in India."*⁷ The Rajas were satisfied to take part in some sort of loose political structure, similar to the one they had established with the British colonial regime. They would have accepted the idea of a loose federation or confederation. But they were not willing to dissolve their monarchical (autocratic) authority in favour of something more binding but without foreseeable assurances on autonomy. From the point of view of the princes it was not a matter of their own person; some of them were deeply concerned about the future of their subjects. The people were against the 'white' invaders and wanted them to leave the region. It was a collective wish

⁶ Jain, 1994, 69.

⁷ Ramusack, 2004, 245.

that the British 'quit' the region but people were not rebelling against their much honoured and 'beloved' Rajas, although some of them crooks. One should not forget that this popular legitimacy of kings or princes was never in question.

If one looks at the map of Colonial India, to the bare eye it might seem that a patchwork of more than 40% of the territory was in the hands of the princes. At least from the Third Round Table Conference in London (Nov.–Dec. 1932) there was talk of the Princes getting at least 40% of the seats in the federal legislature which shows their territorial importance.⁸ For the British, leaving alone the princes had an undeniable advantage of reducing the cost of overall administrative burden; like this the colonial occupiers could maximize their attention on the conquered territories. What is important to see in this context is that the kingdoms and princely states were not conquered, officially or unofficially they were not part of 'Colonial India'. Ramusack notes: *"The importance of the British renunciation of an aggressive policy of direct annexation can be overemphasized since some changes in territory continued. After 1858, however, the number of states and their boundaries remain relatively constant until 1947 and it is useful to observe their evolution over the long durée, even though much of the scholarship on individual princely states is usually limited to a few decades or the reign of an individual prince."*⁹ The withdrawal of Britain from the region would reinforce this stark reality. From point of the princes this was all too evident. But given the geographical situation and the world political order at the time the princes were willing to go as far as accommodating to a new 'federal' structure. They thought, or were led to believe that the departing colonial power would add its weight to such an arrangement. Even until 1942 the British government under the Labour Party was giving guarantees to the princely states that their territorial integrity would be defended by land, sea and air.¹⁰ But they were proven wrong, since as Congress increasingly started to occupy the political landscape the British were as usual realistic and felt it wiser to dump their

⁸ Ramusack, 2004, 262.

⁹ Ramusack, 2004, 170.

¹⁰ Ramusack, 2004, 268.

princely 'baggage'. This quick reversal of the situation can be found in the eruption of the Kashmir conflict in October 1947 when neither the 'British guarantees' nor the 'Standstill Agreements' with newly created India and Pakistan worked.¹¹

The angle of thought of Congress was in favour of a structure that would totalize political and economic power in the hands of a few at the centre, in New Delhi. The Congress movement and its financiers were not in accord with the political configuration envisaged by the princes. Several issues were working for Congress and giving credibility to their mission of creating one India. Seeing that they had very little 'peoples' legitimacy or no extensive ground organization concurrent to that of the Communist Party of India, Congress was decided to give itself an ideological legitimacy. The main theme was political, social and economic modernization – a fight against age old structures of backwardness, which definitely included the system of princely states. This move to modernization was laying down the foundation for a very centralized system. We will briefly examine the real reasons behind this new ideological move.

Firstly, we have to comprehend Nehru's drive towards 'social democracy'. Frank Moraes analyzing the ideological content of the Indian Constitution came to the following conclusion: "*Nehru was specially interested in the enumeration and drafting of these directive principles, since it had always been an article of faith with him that political democracy was incomplete without economic and social democracy. Significantly, in his speech on the Objectives Resolution he recalled the revolutionary examples of only three countries – America, France and Soviet Russia.*"¹² For the purpose of the present study we have to realize that these countries at the time were practicing 'entrenched' centralization. In the case of America (USA) Nehru was influenced by the economic interventionism (New Deal) of President Roosevelt. France was a good example of central control where President Charles De Gaulle's regime was trying to put forward an economic policy to give France

¹¹ Jayapalan, 2001, 239.

¹² Moraes, 1959, 434.

an air of 'Great Power'. Given the fact the Pandit Nehru also dreamt of giving India a 'global presence', pursuing the path of post-1945 France was all too evident. But the example of Stalin's Soviet Union was more promising, thus his wish to see India as a 'Union State' rather than a 'Federal Republic'. The Soviet Union is a good example of central planning and by following this path India would consolidate itself rather than fall to pieces. The so called 'Soviet' republics were autonomous if it were not for the Five Year Plan system of economic control. Whatever the political form was pencilled in the draft of the new constitution, the move towards centralization was inevitable in view of Nehru's plans for the economy.

Like all 'presentable' socialists Nehru commissioned the seven richest businessmen of the Crown Colony and one economist (who was close to the Tata Family) to conceptualize the future Five Year Plans.¹³ National Planning Committee (NPC) was set up by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1938 as think Tank. The NPC came up with the so called 'Bombay Plan' in 1944. In the words of Prof. Dwijendra Tripathi (quoted in The Hindu Business Online): *"The authors of the document recognized the need for planned development, emphasized state ownership and control of key industries, and concurred with the idea of a centrally directed authority to ensure successful implementation of the economic plans. Although they assigned a legitimate role for the private sector in the future economic set-up, they candidly conceded that it would have to function under tight state direction."*¹⁴ This meant that State-level and local initiative would be circumvented in favour of New Delhi and the powerful business community.

Big business had an interest not only in centralization but also in the creation of one big national market where they could set their own rules. In the words of A. Vaidyanathan: *"During the colonial era, government's economic policies in India were concerned more with protecting and promoting British interests than with advancing the welfare of the Indian population. The administration's*

¹³ Thakurta, 2004, September 7; the author enumerates the following as the participants who conceptualize the Bombay Plan - J. R. D. Tata, Ghyanshyam Das Birla, Purushottamdas Thakurdas, Lala Shri Ram, Ardeshir Dalal, A. D. Shroff and Kasturbhai Lalbhai, assisted by economist John Mathai who was close to the Tata group.

¹⁴ Thakurta, 2004.

*primary preoccupation was with maintaining law and order, tax collection and defence. These activities absorbed the bulk of the meagre public revenues. As for development, government adopted a basically laissez-faire attitude. The government supported and encouraged large investments in building the railway network.”*¹⁵ Native businessmen had watched this cosy relationship with envy. They very much wanted to make a repeat of this pattern of relationship, but this time they are pulling the levers. The central logic of the Bombay plan was that the Central Government decides on the scope of the projects and delegates the realization to the few private conglomerates. This requires that the privilege system elaborated by the colonial rule be maintained – thus the need to centralize the administration of the economy. The idea of federal states participating, either on the decision-making level or on the implementation level were conveniently forgotten.

Added weight was given to the forces of centralization by Mahatma's pronounced fight against 'untouchability', the practicalities of which were picked up by Dr. Ambedkar. Mahatma Gandhi on his triumphal arrival from South Africa (1915) quickly realized that something was missing from Congress's struggle against the British – popular participation. There was no theme that was drawing in big crowds. People were accustomed to rulers coming and going, borders displaced as numerable conquerors moved up and down the Indian plains. Thus something new was needed to grab their attention. Gandhi came up with an ingenious and novel idea to draw the crowd – a freedom fight against all injustices, especially social ones. Anthony Parel summarizes it as follows: *“Indeed, when Gandhi looks at the real world, he often sees people with no apparent harmony, a world of destitution, domination, and humiliation. This can occur for Indians living under colonialism, untouchables trapped by ancient assignments, women allotted their inferior places, the unemployed deprived of taking care of themselves, or the modern consumer held hostage to exploding desires. Gandhi's focus on real people with real needs in concrete situations means that he seldom wanders into the realm of political perfectionism. Rather, he speaks to how the current institutional arrangements*

¹⁵ Kumar & Desai, 1983, 947.

of society and the economy enlarge or diminish the ability of individuals to govern themselves.”¹⁶ Gandhi was aiming to bring about a social revolution and he succeeded in putting at the heart of agenda topics like ‘untouchability’.

Unfortunately, the Mahatma did not have a magic formula to bringing tangible results. This was passed on to people like Pandit Nehru, V. Patel and in the case of untouchables to Dr. Ambedkar. Dhananjay Keer provides us with proofs of what was going on in Ambedkar mind: *“The article (by Dr. Ambedkar) asserted that if the protection of the Britishers were withdrawn, those who did not condescend to look at the Untouchables would trample upon them. In another article Ambedkar stated that the Swaraj wherein there were no fundamental rights guaranteed for the Depressed Classes, would not be a swaraj to them. It would be a new slavery for them.”*¹⁷ Ambedkar felt that social issues like that of the untouchables have to be dealt with at national level; otherwise he thought the cause would be lost. *“Dealing with the suggestions for village Governments (favorite theme of the Mahatma), Ambedkar said that the village was a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism and added that the village republics had been the ruination of India. He was glad, he proceeded, that the Draft Constitution had discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit.”*¹⁸ It was evident that key members of the Congress like Dr. Ambedkar were more inclined to build a new nation on social lines, a conceptual nation that would disregard existing regional or local forms of identity. *“Ambedkar made his first speech in the Federal Structure Committee [...] He told the Princes that the Federal Structure Committee could not blindly give to the States what they wanted. This put the Maharaja of Bikaner on his legs, and he replied that nor could the States sign a blank cheque either. Ambedkar, emphasizing his point, said that before a State was allowed to join the Federation, it must prove that it had necessary resources and the capacity to give its citizens a civilized life, and the main condition laid down by Ambedkar was that the States' representatives to the*

¹⁶ Parel, 2000, 51.

¹⁷ Keer, 1990, 341.

¹⁸ Keer, 1990, 409.

Federal Assembly should be chosen by election and not by nomination."¹⁹ Ambedkar it seems refused to treat the situation of the Untouchables as 'trans-national' question. The Untouchables were in a sense a social community that cut across nations in the India Subcontinent. He feared that power of 'numbers' would be lost if too much power was concentrated in the States. From his point of view there was every reason to shift power in favour of the Centre, where the Untouchables could stamp their will and wishes. One can say that the period prior to the independence of 'British India' is fundamental to the examination of federalism in India, since the notion of federalism assumes that states of equal status willingly coming together to form a federal entity. This is not the case of India.

India is officially presumed to have gained independence on 15th August 1947, an assumption that a lot of historians too frequently make. This leaves many to treat the political developments hence onwards as internal 'adjustments' of a newly formed nation – a judgment that is deeply prejudicial to objective inquiry of history of this very particular region. What in fact happened was that 'British India Provinces' (a little more than 50% of today's India) was given the status of 'Dominion' with Lord Mountbatten acting as its Governor General.²⁰ What happens from August 1947 right up to 1950 is the British Dominion of India setting in motion a period of conquest to acquire the remaining 50% of the territory.

What is presented as the 'accession' of independence on 14 August 1947 can at the same time, given deeper historical research, be interpreted as the biggest, fastest and cheapest act of colonization ever in recent times. In the words of Barbara Ramusack: "By December 1947 Patel began to pressure the princes into signing Merger Agreements that integrated their states into adjacent British Indian provinces, soon to be called states or new units of erstwhile princely states, most notably Rajasthan, Patiala and East Punjab States Union, and Matsya Union (Alwar, Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli)."²¹ For

¹⁹ Keer, 1990, 409.

²⁰ Revised Statute from The UK Statute Law Database: Indian Independence Act 1947 (c. 30).

²¹ Ramusack, 2004, 273.

kingdoms like 'Mysore', 'Hyderabad' and 'Punjab' decolonization actually meant outright colonization without replacement, although it had distinctive culture, history and well refined language. In the case of the kingdom of 'Punjab' division, disarray and dispersion were the consequences of decolonization. Here was a territory, where all Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus peacefully lived next to one another for hundreds of years, being devoured by two newcomers to the region – India and Pakistan.²² Pandit Nehru, a man known for generosity and sensitivity towards the weak and oppressed, did not see the need for Sikhs to have their own official language – the Punjabi. But he saw it logical and necessary to raise Hindi, still new and poorly developed language, to the status of the 'official' language for all India – a bright example of decolonization, and the birth of federalism with 'Indian' characteristics. And by the time the Indian Constitution came into effect (26th January 1950) *"Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, with extensive experience in the states' people's politics of Gujarat, and V.P. Menon, his administrative deputy, secured integration with skill, determination, and Mountbatten's active collaboration. Integration was not a foregone conclusion but once the process began it was carried through with extraordinary rapidity."*²³ This instance of the history of India is one of the most disturbing and needs to be given consideration.

The new nation 'India' had a fantastic appetite for swallowing-up nations which were several centuries its seniors, with Napoleonic ease. Here were a group of cotton-cladded gentlemen, grey-headed, soft-spoken, devoted to peace and democracy on earth, committing acts worthy of despots. One of Pandit Nehru's opposition to the princely states was the absence of democracy. He considered it impossible for democratic institutions to co-exist with the sovereign privileges of Princely Rule. One could readily subscribe to this if it were not for one minor detail: the people (or the subjects of the raja in question) were never consulted through plebiscite or referendum. In almost all of the cases the Prince and close advisors were given a veiled ultimatum to pool-in with the new Union state or accept forceful take-over. Were the brave

²² Singh, 2008, 27.

²³ Ramusack, 2004, 247

'freedom fighters' scared to apply a decent dose of democracy to their actions? The answer is all too evident. The fathers of the biggest democracy in world were fearful of democracy and its consequences. Later on, we will see this tendency continue through the use of instruments like 'President's Rule' and 'Emergency' wiping out all illusions about Indian Federalism.

The immediate political consequence of this 'blitz nationalism' was that all nations which were under the protection of the 'British Raj' were no longer nations – they became 'sub-nation' entities which were not worthy of the trust of the central authority in New Delhi. Balraj Puri explains that this was partly due to: "[...] the fear generated by the partition of the country about centrifugal potentialities of subnational identities."²⁴ He goes on to explaining that: "The urge for unity –treated as being synonymous with uniformity – was very strong in the initial years of independence as can be seen from the way princely states were treated. Under the India Independence Act, they were required to cede only three subjects – defence, foreign affairs, and communications – to the centre. The legislature of each state was free to decide its constitutional relations with the union government. But nationalist sentiments within the states and what could be called coercive persuasion of Sardar Patel at the centre forced the states to accept the constitution that was being framed for the erstwhile British Provinces".²⁵ Whatever the constitution might emanate as ideal form of coexistence, the central power base was keen to maintain the colonial administrative structure and in many instances increase the grip on the newly 'conquered' states. Federalism it seems was a non-starter from the beginning.

In order to 'totalize' power at the centre the central government and the Congress aristocracy had several means at its disposal: constitutional, economic and administrative. These three categories can be complemented by the all engulfing and omnipresent propaganda on the exploits of the 'freedom fighters' against whom any contestation will be considered as 'un-national' activity. This meant that federal concept was very nominal and an incremental centralization was adopted at its place – a strategy that was

²⁴ Jain, 2005, 91.

²⁵ Jain, 2005, 92.

sometimes tacitly facilitated by the constitutional ambiguities. Whenever the constitution went against the designs of the centre, more potent means were found in order to show the outside world that everything done is constitutionally (legally) viable and thus should be accepted as such.

One would like to suppose that a liberal minded socialist would not be akin to means used by Joseph Stalin or a more dogma oriented Mao Zedong. But one is unfortunately deceived, since Pandit Nehru thought that the British were too liberal towards the princes and the non-occupied territories. In his mind the constitution has to be the instrument of the Centre. Anton Pelinka elaborates: *"As a result of the worry on the part of the Congress Party led by Nehru that the states could gain too much jurisdiction to the detriment of the union and Indian national interests, the Indian constitution contains provisions that enable intervention in the states by the federal government. For this reason, the constitution provides for a state governor for the states who is intended to counterbalance the chief minister and the majority of the state assembly that legitimates the latter. Governors are representatives of the federal government in the individual states, even vis-à-vis the state governments."*²⁶ In short, very little has changed since British rule. Saying that the State governors are used by the central government has also meant that they became instruments of the Congress Party which had a total control of the federal state and its institutions – the interests of the Congress Party and of the federal State were invariably inter-twined.

In the pseudo-colonial situation of the Indian political system one would think that the notoriously independent judiciary in general and the Supreme Court in particular will give meaning to federalism by defending the constitutional rights of the States in the face of a dictatorial central government. Pratap Bhanu Mehta despairs: *"The Supreme Court in particular carries enormous authority. But despite this, constitutionalism remains a fragile aspiration. For one thing, the courts have used their powers to facilitate a modus vivendi rather than articulate clear constitutional principles. [...] The institutional weakness of the Indian judiciary makes it unlikely that judicial*

²⁶ Pelinka, 2006, 121.

principles will carry the due weight of authority in society at large any time soon."²⁷ This apart, it has to be said that the Supreme Court, like the constitution, is part of the newly created Republic of India. It is a matter of survival for it to keep the status quo of the new diktat from the Centre. It is thought that loosening of the centre's grip on the states would further weaken the judicial framework. The Supreme Court obediently stays silent when President's Rule (direct rule by the central government) is imposed on a union state, by the request of its governor.

Rabindra Kumar Sethy enumerates the states that fell victim to President's Rule (Article 356 of the constitution): "*Besides PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) and Andhra (newly created state out of Madras) the major victim of use of Article 356 was Kerala (created under S.R:C. by the fusion of Travancore and Cochin princely ruled states).*"²⁸ On 31st of July 1959 the Central Government of Pandit Nehru announced that it will impose President's rule in the State of Kerala. Mr. Namboodripad, the then Prime Minister of Kerala State, was leading a government dominated by communists and was determined to undertake profound reforms that intended to modernize the states' economy, which would in time ensure social equality. One of his actions consisted in setting a program of land redistribution and a parallel program of nationalization of the water supplies. This was the instance when he was toppled by the Centre by means of President's Rule. Strange that a man so entrenched in socialism as Pandit Nehru should be troubled by an enterprising communist as Namboodripad. Sethy continues: "*The imposition of President's Rule in all cases was technically not sound. It exposed the intolerant attitude towards non-Congress governments.*"²⁹ This became a general rule as B.D. Dua concludes: "*In 1991-2, the central government used presidential suspensions in both Meghalaya and Manipur to make room for Congress (I) coalition governments in these states. In April 1992, it imposed presidential rule in Nagaland and sacked the Nagaland governor, M.M. Thomas, for accepting*

²⁷ Chopra, 2006, 173.

²⁸ Sethy, 2003, 71-72.

²⁹ Sethy, 2003, 73.

*the advice of his non-Congress chief minister, without prior consultation with the centre, to dissolve the state legislative assembly."*³⁰

Maybe the Pandit was not to be blamed. Sethy makes very critical incursions into the matter under examination but fails to assess the problem in the perspective federalism or question of nationhood. The Kerala question sheds light on the darkest designs of 'politico-industrial complex' that the Congress Party put in place during the early 1950s. By 1959 Mrs. Indira Gandhi, daughter of Pandit Nehru, was in full control of the Congress Party and some would say even the government. The case of Kerala was dangerous in the eyes of Madame Gandhi for several reasons.

Firstly, there was the immediate danger that the landowners (especially the tea plantation owners) would withdraw their support to the Congress which would lead to tumbling of Congress's feudal power structure. One has to note that like some religious organizations, the Congress Party gained control of the masses through local feudal lords who enjoyed predominant economic power in any given electoral constituency. Thus the protection of this small but powerful community of landowners was very much in to protecting a 'client-customer' relationship that the Congress Party enjoyed with the landowners. This was especially true in the former princely states where Congress had little or insignificant echo.

Secondly, there was fear that if the communists succeed then Congress would have lost all possibility of political 'entrenchment'. By small practical steps the communists in India were blowing an ideological blow to Jawaharlal Nehru's much spoken socialist thinking. In short the communists were building realistic support to the idea that Pandit Nehru's socialism was humbug. If realized this would rob a key element of Congress's strategy to build a 'popular' party (at this juncture the reader should know that in the 1950s Congress was still a badly structured, northern-based upper middle-class party). In this way well organized and pragmatic communist parties would gain the upper hand.

Thirdly, one realizes that, contrary to popular projections, the communists in Kerala treasured a deep feeling of nationhood. All the panoply of their actions

³⁰ Dua, 1994, 46.

and reforms were consciously or unconsciously designed to strengthen the ,Keralite' nation, which can be considered as a coherent and neatest example of nationhood. Since ethically, linguistically, culturally and historically the ,Keralite' nation displayed a high degree of ethnic harmony. Namboodripad's economic reforms meant that nationhood could be transformed into a real, viable and even prosperous 'nation-state'; and this would set a dangerous precedent, especially in Punjab and Andhra where a similar situation could be witnessed.

Finally, the evolution of strong federal states would put in danger the interests of the big Business Houses in two manners. At the first instance strong and contending federal states would put halt or slow-down the monopolistic tendencies of big business interests, since they would be more likely to support local enterprises. In the case of Kerala, the communist government was going even further; it envisaged nationalizing elements of the economy which were vital to the development of the Keralite nation. Furthermore, 60 years of central government behaviour has shown that its main function was to divert resources away from the states in favour of Big Businesses. The emergence of strong union states would interrupt resource accumulation at the centre; which then redistributed them to big businesses in various forms and measures. The pressure on Congress to maintain a strong control on the acquired territories was very high. After all Congress would have been nowhere without the financial and media support from Big Businesses.³¹ But even discounting Big Business, for strong men of Congress and Madame Gandhi in particular the situation in Kerala and likewise were difficult to digest. The next 50 years of almost uninterrupted rule of the Congress Party has been an unrelenting effort to subjugate the non-British Provinces of the South Asian peninsula by all means at their disposal.

Apart from the arsenal provided by the constitution the Centre has a wide panoply of financial and economic levers that keep States in check; in an acute dependency. The tax sharing system is devised in such a way that the states get only a third of the tax revenue while the centre reserves two thirds for

³¹ Chopra & Bakshi, 1986, 76.

itself. It has to be noted that although the federal government gives back half of its revenues as designated grants, but nothing is sure. The main problem is that the centre decides on what taxes can be levied and most of the lucrative elements like VAT are more favourable to the centre. As one specialist puts it: *"The centralist state's anti-redistributive bias can be seen, from a number of tax deductions it has allowed in respect of the individual income tax and the frequent exemptions granted. In contrast with the centre's excess of tax revenue over its revenue expenditure, the revenue from the state taxes has been generally less than one-half of their expenditure."*³² To bridge the gap the states have to pander to centre's generosity and goodwill. Furthermore, help would be forthcoming to only states that show political obedience if not allegiance. *"The rationale for federalism in India is cultural and social, rather than economic, and the federation is highly centralized in order to counterbalance centripetal social forces. [...] The states assert their autonomy for cultural and political reasons, but remain financially dependent upon the centre."*³³ One might be tempted to argue that the states can get round this hurdle by temporarily borrowing from the open market. But here too the centre steps in since it regulates how much and in what form states can borrow to finance their deficits: *"The centre has used the opportunity thus provided to allocate the lion's share of market borrowing to itself. Over the 35-year period 1951–1985, the centre has raised a net amount (measured by the total market loans raised less the market loans repaid) of Rs. 34050 crores as market loans. In contrast, the state governments have raised no more than around Rs. 5800 crores. This financial imbalance on this account is the logical extension and another clear manifestation of the centralist bias inherent in the Indian constitution."*³⁴ Furthermore, the Planning Commission fixes 'quotas' on what states can borrow. And this is done in a completely arbitrary manner, without clearly defined rules or standards. What this leads to is an asphyxiation of development by state (provincial) agencies. This leaves the Congress

³² Singh, 2008, 85.

³³ Blindenbacher & Koller, 2003, 494; (The International Conference on Federalism 2002 was held in Saint Gallen, Switzerland from August 27-30, 2002.)

³⁴ Singh, 2008, 92.

sponsored business trusts to fill the vacuum for their own benefits without concern to the common good. These trusts cannot be hindered by the state-level administration since the federal government has its own administrative layer which neutralizes any local administrative initiative. Furthermore, state governments cannot implement policies which are not approved by the centre for lack of structures of implementation.

The federal state, true to colonial of the British Rule, has maintained the position of the district administration which is centrally controlled. K. S. Rao, a specialist in the matter puts it as following: *"The District Collector is the ultimate boss of the district, responsible for every single event which happens in his jurisdictional area. In spite of the size of the districts, attendant lethargy and complexity and corruption, the institution of the District Collector is one of the most powerful ones in the country."*³⁵ Unlike the United States and Germany where State-level administration is in the hands of the state authorities, a vital part of the state administration is in the hands of the federal government. This makes the state (province) look like a political egg-shell without controlling anything or little within its bounds. What is more, the District as an administrative unit is seen by some as a political instrument of central government: David Potter has this to say: *"From the early 1970s onwards, it seemed that loyalty to the Prime Minister and the party in power in New Delhi began to become part of the IAS reward structure. [...] The Emergency, imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1975, drove home these tendencies. Evidence which appeared in the Shah Commission of Inquiry Reports after the Emergency suggested that many district officers' obediently carried out the instructions emanating from politicians and administrative heads issued on personal or political considerations."*³⁶ Any semblance of impartiality evaporated. The true colonial nature of India's administrative structure resurfaced. As B.D. Dua explains: *"Political support for the IAS may also be more precarious now, as a stronger commitment to democracy continues to spread and deepen amongst India's lower classes, thereby making the ,imperial hauteur' of the ICS tradition appear*

³⁵ Rao & Sharma, 2003, 402.

³⁶ Potter, 1994, 87.

*increasingly anachronistic to increasing numbers of voters. Ending the ICS tradition may then become a political issue, and then a Prime Minister and his/her party might finally act to dismantle the colonial framework within India's post-colonial bureaucracy."*³⁷

As we have seen the Congress Party and in general the Central Authorities in New Delhi have used a nominally federal structure to embed a *formidably cunning and in many ways brutal form of colonialism*. As B.D. Dua puts it: "*What India has practiced so far is a mockery of federalism, the consequences of which are for all of us to see in Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Assam, and in the northeastern states of India.*"³⁸ The main traits of a democracy, politically effective and economically efficient, are that where people are empowered to attain a high degree of 'self-determination'. If true, this would have indeed given federalism in India an opportunity to lay roots. Paradoxically democracy does not serve the federal principle in India. One of the reasons for this can be that like federalism it has a nominal role. Democracy does a fine job of covering-up the colonial tensions in India's political structure; where the real power lies with the centre, which controls the administrative apparatus and a myriad of economic levers. One of the reasons why the central aristocracy, especially the Congress party, is not committed to federalism in India is because of their refusal to address the 'nationality' question. From their perspective giving full federal powers to the states would pave the way towards a full and formal demand for nationhood. Many states where leftist parties have a strong presence, political pressure to open-up the debate is growing.³⁹ If there were a Bismarckian federal approach adopted in India, where the Centre and the Union States would share equal status, then demands for statehood might recede. But the colonial nature of India's political and administrative structure does not give signs of recess.

³⁷ Potter, 1994, 93.

³⁸ Dua, 1994, 46.

³⁹ Vora & Palshikar, 2004, 344.

2-Patriotism, propaganda and punishment in British-India (1914-1919)⁴⁰

Abstract:

That the British have been repeatedly iniquitous for the best part of their existence, none would contest. But to many it would come as a surprise that millions of Indians, Polish and other oppressed nations voluntarily laid down their lives to defend the very system that was trampling on their liberties as an atrocious tyrant. The fate of these valiant soldiers and how their descendants were treated illustrates well how the British attitude, historically, was always insidious, guileful, oblique and surreptitious. Both the Polish and the Indians were victims of the British underhandedness.

Britain has an excellent record of monopolising and delegating devastation and misfortune. This cannot be truer than in the case of the First World War and its devastating consequences. This is what happened with Indian soldiers in the western front, apart from paying their generous dues for “good British governance”, most of the “dependencies” were encouraged by a system of over competitive bidding to contribute handsomely to the war effort, a war that was unilaterally decided by Britain for the good of everyone. A system that would strengthen Britain's grip over the ever weakening colonies. What is amazing and even more perplexing is that they surely knew that defending the devil would certainly lead to their own down fall. But still most of them did not even make their participation or contribution conditional to a concrete promise or the honouring of it. What is more worrying is that most of them gave-away the best and brightest, and most of the times vital resources that were most needed to the well-being of their own population. The main question that comes to one's mind is what was it they were seeking to achieve? They knew well, that a victorious Britain, thanks to their generous contribution, would never allow them to break-off from their oppressive bondage, so what was that

⁴⁰ Byrappa, R. (2017). Patriotism, propaganda and punishment in British India (1914–1919). In *Az első világháború irodalmi és történelmi aspektusai a kelet-európai régióban* (pp. 13–35).

precious something that they were trying to achieve? Teach Britain a lesson in civilisation, corner it to change its awful methods of underhandedness? As historians it is vital we ask ourselves this question. Since the appropriate answer would shed light on the elites of these colonised territories and their relation with the colonials, and what it meant to the people under this double tutelage. The participation of these colonised nations, given the underhanded methods of the British, in the First World War, reveals a lot about the legitimacy of these colonised elites and what role the British played to maintain the local rulers in power, although nominal. Was their participation a pay off?

The picture is not that black and white for all involved. It very much looks that part of them were recruited to play the role of the generous donor to attract and extract far greater sacrifices from others. Which illustrates how sophisticated and elaborate the British system of colonial extortion was, and this also shows that pride and patriotism was categorised as a weakness to be exploit by it. The colonial policy and diplomacy was masterful in creating a sense of pride of belong to an empire. What is more devilishly genius is it used this administered pride into making the half-starved colonial population into forgiving the only mouthful of rice for the glory of the British. This was particularly true of the population under the direct rule of the British, but the overflow of generosity was mainly coming from the 500-odd princely states in the Subcontinent. Strange was the fortune of these states during the British rule of the Subcontinent and especially the period spanning from the just before the First World War to the months before the British colonials packed-up and left, without the will to help the princely states from the predatory policies of the newly crowned Jawaharlal Nehru.

Strangely enough the same could be said of the Polish nation, which was fighting for three different empires. What is more troubling is that because the theatre of operations of the conflict between these empires was based in what is now Poland, the main part of the fighting and civilian casualties were Polish. Here also the main questions to be asked could be: Who were the Polish really

fighting? For what goals were Polish hoping to achieve?⁴¹ Did the Polish elites knew what they were doing and what it was costing them?

The participation of these two countries in the First World War is a perfect example of how Britain uses pride and patriotism of others to its own advantage, and what is more it transforms the best of these two qualities into powerful weapons and turns them against its progenitors. The example of these two countries and their tribulations also explains the difficult positions of nations that are ripped apart by empires and those that are surrounded by it. Above all, the Indian and Polish context during the First World War, explains how nations desperate to gain their independence go to the extremes of self-destruction in the hope of a better reincarnation. For the promise of their enhanced autonomy or reconstituted identity they were willing to sacrifice the bravest and the most capable, in short the finest. These suicidal actions further pushed them deeper into servitude and the vices of their ungrateful protectors-persecutors. Finally, the experience of these two nations constitutes a lesson that should not be overseen, that when you are dealing with certain countries you should remain face-to-face and look in the eye and never turn back to them.

The sacrifices made by these two countries during the World War One can in part be explained by their problem with the question of identity. On analysing the reigning sentiments during the late 19th and early 20th centuries one gets the impression that there was before anything else an attempt to reconstitute shattered identities. The 1820s onwards the European adjustment within its confines and its relentless conquests beyond its perimeter had robbed many nations of their well cherished identities. This was especially the case in the territories occupied by Britain, where the method of conquest and occupation was through ethnical lines and the corruption of part of the elite that were pushed to treason, making it impossible to heal the wounds of division. As a consequence, strong, centuries old identities simply collapsed, creating a vacuum behind them. Structurally bandit countries⁴², like Britain, always had

⁴¹ Motta, 2013, 65-66.

⁴² Tagore, 1917, 13-65; Tagore explains in great detail that baptism and the modern nation-state, later transformed into imperial states, structurely share the same characteristics.

their identities renewed after each spoil but we cannot say the same of their victims.

The conquered nations on the other hand left to create an identity from honest means and whatever was left of their national identity. It is very important to stress that they were not abandoned to create an honest and positive identity but structurally forced to be honest and subservient and thus to adopt an identity that originated in this subservience. There was no strength and no space for creating an independent identity. The elite was corrupted and compromised, feeding from the same spoils as the British. So the one's left to create this were at the lower levels, the poor peasants – in short the patriots. It was these strong local identities that formed the mosaic of nations that constituted British India.

On the other hand the nationalism of the elite level meant compromise and selling out to the British. Lacking legitimacy at the lower level, the so called national elite were intimately tied to the foreign oppressor like the British Empire and its survival. How is this legitimacy created is of major importance. If we can answer this we can understand much of the history of colonization, decolonization and the aftermath. May he be a rebel leading a military rebellion, or the one waging a pacific campaign of non-resistance, the ultimate attitude and choice of opponent of the coloniser becomes the deciding factor. In an opposition, real or normal, to the coloniser there is never a single group or person. Although the so called nationalists have one common enemy, the situation of the coloniser is diametrically different, it has the luxury of choice, it can choose its enemy, or set a hierarchy in its choice of final opponent. Rather than have a negative connotation, being the main enemy or adversary of an empire in certain contexts was a boon for masquerading nationalists. This recognition by the colonials meant power, prestige and prosperity. The fates, logic of economic extraction and method of keeping the distance from the people keep both sides tightly linked like two twins. This was one reason why, most of the ex-colonies of Britain readily joined the Common Wealth and continued trade and diplomatic relations as if nothing had changed before and after decolonization. So there existed a strange

compromise and coexistence between a true and authentic patriotism and a mishmash of nationalism subservient to the wishes of the avid colonial.

India in terms of identities, at the time of the World War One, existed in the minds of several hundred Indian elites, but not beyond this. The British colonials had the patience and perseverance to create a huge empire in the Subcontinent but were never willing to create a unification beyond that of an administrative one. But even this, was not a positive identity since it was a one-way system. It was a system of well organised graft, lift and plunder which constantly reduced the people to poverty. The only section of the population that the British India had enriched were people like the Nehru family and the traders of Bombay and Gujarat. One area into which the British were willing to allow the incursion of the local urban elite was into the legal profession, the judiciary during the crown rule was an increasingly lucrative business,⁴³ where barristers had to come from the local environment for better mitigation.

The Sikh population, and in general the so called "marshal races"⁴⁴ were an exception in the sense that after the so called Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, the armed forces of British India were mainly composed of what the British authorities amiably termed the "marshal races", more precisely the Punjabis, the Rajasthanis, a smaller contingency from Maharashtra and Nepalis. In terms of territories, population and tax revenues collected, these marshal races constituted a minuscule proportion compared to the other regions of India. The province of Bengal provided substantial part of all revenues collected, but were prohibited from taking part in the armed forces of British India. The whole of South India, hugely important both in terms of tax contributions⁴⁵ and population constituted around 2% of the whole armed forces. Which meant that outside Nepal, which was not really part of the rest of India, British India created a military province where the majority of its forces were recruited in.

This was combined with the concentration of the British induced nationalists of Western India, in the likes of Nehru and M.K. Gandhi. After the 1857 Sepoy

⁴³ Indian Statutory Commission, 1988, 365.

⁴⁴ Macmunn, 4; Amazon thinks the date to be 1933 but in the original scanned copy, in the possession of the current author of this essay, there is no precise date of publication mentioned.

⁴⁵ Indian Statutory Commission, 1988, 349.

Mutiny, the British Crown refused to use the well-integrated territories of the East India Company, which was all of India except parts of Bombay Presidency, Rajaputana and Punjab. The political base of British India under Crown was going to be these few selected areas, because they were also foreign to the rest of India, in this sense they shared a commonality with the British coloniser. In terms of communities, like the Mesopotamian Brahmins, most of these provinces were home to communities that were not Indian, their origins were Afghan-Persia-Mesopotamian. Their attitude towards the Bhumi-putra (sons-of the soil) was that of conquest and exploitation, haughty and high-handedness, placing themselves exactly on the same level as the colonials. This crystallised in the irreconcilable hatred of the Bengalis, a community which constituted the backbone of the East-India Company. Let us also not forget the fact that the Bengalis had overwhelmingly defeated the Sikhs in the two Anglo-Sikh Wars. At the time of the East-India Company a good two thirds of its local forces came from Bengal and a predominance at the lower ranks of officers. The East India Company had a policy to integrate and recruit, whenever it was possible, members from all regions and communities, to reflect the diversity of the primary nation. The British Crown, which in reality organised a "coup d'état" against the Company rule, could not risk depending upon these Bengali dominated units because there was a strong loyalty towards the Company, due to high wages and generous pensions paid by it. The British Crown, through force and arm-twisting, had managed to constitute a power base in the North-West corner of India from 1840s onwards. It is from this base that the rest of India was reinvaded and vandalised with a particular brutality by the so called marshal races and their British masters, sharing the spoils of war with intoxication of unchecked power over the Indians.

The Indian princely states on the other hand had strong identities but these identities were not entire. The colonial presence of British was present everywhere in all its exuberance to remind everyone that nothing could really happen without its approval. Paradoxical as it might sound, the dependency on each other led to a double identity. Here we have to divide the group into two categories: the kingdoms which sometimes had hundreds of years of

lineage and had established state institutions, although they might not closely resemble the institutional set-up of states in the West; and on the other hand we had literally hundreds who called themselves “Rajas” (kings and princes) who owed their whole existence and livelihood to the largesse of the colonial ruler, who in turn cherished a feudal set-up for the conquered territories.

The Kingdoms, mainly of the South India (The Deccan) were literally hundreds of years old, sometimes larger than the Britain itself. These Kingdoms possessed strong identities, and in a majority of the cases, were much better governed than the territories held by the colonial authorities. These kingdoms were forced to form alliances at one time or the other with the East India Company⁴⁶ and later with British India. What this alliance in reality meant was that these kingdoms should submit to certain conditions in order not to be absorbed into British India. The conditions varied, but in the majority of cases these kingdoms had to abandon their foreign policy, meaning forming alliances within the Subcontinent and even with foreign powers, in the likes of France, the great imperial rival of Britain. Further down the road, these conditions also meant hosting a garrison of troops from British India and paying for their maintenance. The supposed purpose of such an arrangement was “the protection” of the kingdom, but in reality British India troops were garrisoned there to show the local monarch who the boss was. The kingdom could also maintain standing armies to a limited sense but they had to come under the command of the British Indian Army. As if this was not enough, the kingdom had also to pay for the cost of maintaining a “Resident” delegated by the central administration of British India.

Life in such monarchies could be hell or heaven, the determining factor being the attitude of the Resident and the Commanding Officer of the garrison. In other words, the Monarch was forced to be in good terms with the colonial levers of British paramountcy. For most monarchs this was seen as taking away their manliness, traditionally the population had seen him or her as the defender of the kingdom and their interests against the meddling by foreign powers. This precious belief also gave them their identity. In the eyes of the

⁴⁶ St John, 2012, 98.

people the monarch was no longer omnipotent, no longer able to exercise marshal attributes as Kshatriya (warrior). The question was always on how these monarchs should regain their self-esteem and earn the respect of their people. Some tried to increase the amount spent on pomp but had to increase taxes, the majority decided to gain the respect of their people and rebuild the lost identity by concentrating on the economic management of their kingdom, trying to modernise their territories by introducing reforms that would improve the everyday conditions of their subjects.

Unfortunately for these monarchs, the colonial authorities in Calcutta and later New Delhi, could get involved even in these matters.⁴⁷ The reason for this was simple, the steady up-keeping of the British garrison. If the kingdom is badly run, then there was a risk that the tax revenues would not be sufficient to pay for the up-keeping of the Resident and the Garrison; armies could not be stationed and de-stationed at ease and according variations in tax revenues. To stabilize the situation, the imperial authorities regularly asked for reports on the economic management of the kingdom, and according the proposal to develop were either altered or approved judging upon how everything affected the revenue position of the colonial government. There was a fine line between dissuasion and encouragement.

The essential factor of this involvement was that to protect his legitimacy vis-à-vis the people the monarch needed good management of the kingdom in all spheres, state and society. And in turn, he or she further needs the good offices of the colonial government and its representatives stationed in the kingdom. The reclaiming or the reconstruction of the new identity was intimately connected to the British will. There seemed no escape for the monarchs except accepting the situation as it was and trying to make the best of it. But as historians what we have to be sensible to is the fragility of this identity and the acute sense of manipulability on the part of the British colonials, especially during the period under the British Crown.

The "Rajas" were the inadvertent fruits of the early mismanagements of government under East-India Company, and the land reforms implemented

⁴⁷ Biju, 2007, 142.

during the tenure of Governor-General Lord Cornwallis (1786–1793). This master stroke of English government in action was called the "Permanent Settlement". As usual, whenever their own prejudices prevented them from see the realities on the ground they resorted to imposing their prejudicial vision without paying any attention to the later consequences. As S.C. Ray succinctly puts it: *"It was considered expedient to attach a considerable body of influential persons to government, to conciliate them, and to confer upon them a certain amount of social position and status by giving them a valuable stake in the country. The idea was to enlist their aid and co-operation in pacifying the country which was then in a troubled state, and in securing its future tranquillity, and to count upon valuable advice in adjusting the relations between the rulers and the ruled at a time when the former had scarcely established a settled government and a reputation for a just and sympathetic administration."*⁴⁸ The Permanent Settlement created a new class of leaders whose loyalties were shrouded in a cloud of floating ambiguities. And it is very important to understand the structure of this loyalty, to understand the almost blind and infatuated obedience that certain class of people in the subcontinent showed towards the British Empire⁴⁹ in general and during the First World War in particular.

Historians reflecting on the political system of the 18th and 19th century colonization of India often forget the simple fact that the geographical and administrative consolidation was done by a gigantic corporation – the East India Company. This is qualitative different from a direct colonization by a country. The criteria on which the East India Company governed the subcontinent were: operational legitimacy and economic efficiency. It received its legitimacy on the basis of it creating order in a continent where the likes of the Marathas were creating havoc. Let us not forget that the situation was so dire that young "collectors"⁵⁰ in their teens from the Company were open-heartedly welcomed by the villagers, deep in the rural areas. This goes to say that there was a real need for order and whoever gave it was legitimised

⁴⁸ Ray, 1915, 13.

⁴⁹ Dutt, 1900, 63.

⁵⁰ The term „Collectors" was used in the East-India Company official jargon to describe the exclusive group of highly trained officials who collected taxes but also administered a district, in which their authority was unparalleled.

by the masses. It was enough that someone declared his intentions not to harm the meagre and fragile life of the villagers.

Economic efficiency on the other hand had its complexities for those who were not acclimated to the local situation, it meant, mobilising a whole new mixture of experimentation in government. The commercial logic and the imperatives of good government meant that the Company had to delegate parts of the administrative burden without abandoning the overall control of the colonised or subjugated territories. The East-India Company saved on human resources not only for want of saving money but also to avoid being a casualty to heavy bureaucracy and corruption. The consequences on the model of government were immediate and long-lasting. The Company delegated functional deeds to local people. The Permanent Settlement, was one such lethal experiment that did not do great harm to the colonial system but destroyed the socio-economic fabric of the traditional, Dravidian, Shaivism-oriented, society in the subcontinent. What happened was that, given ambiguities and complexities in the land appropriation and distribution system, and given the proximity to the local population, lot of the local elite were hesitant or against the system altogether. So what happened was that the peripheral Mesopotamians (Bombay, Gujarat, Rajaputana and Punjab) started bidding for these positions when they were auctioned off. The colonials were all too happy to push the hot potato into some else's hands. Like this, these Mesopotamian businessmen got the possession of huge tracts of land almost for nothing. What happened to the people and the misery that ensued can be a subject for another debate in another context. Coming back to the issue of loyalty between the colonials and the Mesopotamians, together they established a double and well intertwined system of colonialism. Loyalty has to be seen not only in its collaborationist aspect but also in its Mesopotamian aspect, meaning colonization within colonisation. Structurally what this meant was that a local population, of the patch-worked subcontinent, came under double tutelage. The interests of one collided with the other, cemented by a common interest of keeping the local population in a water-tight subjugation. It was a loyalty of tyrants but also loyalty germinating from gratitude for the

cheap ascension to royalty at a cost of a great civilisation being reduced to its knees.

In short, a majority of these Rajas had a “zemindari” (tax gatherer) status inherited from the times of the Moguls, and as they prospered on backs of the Indians and as they gained greater confidence through their friendship with the colonials, most of them elevated themselves to the status of “prince”, a move that was sanctified by the British Aristocracy. Historically there might have been some genuine princely states, as in South India, but a majority in North India and the province of Bengal were created by the colonials through the “Permanent Settlement”. Over the decades British India mothered them with legal and fiscal leniency, allowing them to get established and lay root to the same delegated colonial system. On the part of these princes therefore, loyalty was the acknowledgement of gratitude for the historic fact relating to the largesse of the Permanent Settlement and continued administrative support rendered to them over many decades. At the same time it was a loyalty in the form of fraternity, since both Princes and the colonials jointly administered the subcontinent.

What is important to point out therefore, concerning the question of identity, is that we have to pay careful attention to the origins of the identities of countries and communities, if we want to understand their commitments, especially when we are talking about life and death. This is especially true when we are considering the engagement of troops from the Subcontinent, fighting for the benefit of Britain. This engagement can be interpreted as a crisis of lost identities. As a consequence the engagement of certain groups, communities and nations can be interpreted as a strategy to either reclaim lost identities, reaffirm weak legitimacy or consolidate newly formed identities at the expense of others. In the spectrum of identity or the search for it, it is a consequence of a well organised and constantly re-plastered loyalty. Upholding this loyalty, periodically showing sprouts of enthusiasm and other acts of reverence, were at the same time a means of reinforcing of one's own identity.

It was this identity and its fragility that the British Government decided to exploit for their total benefit during the long years of the First World War. This

strategy was used without any hesitation with all colonies and dominions, white, black, brown and any other imaginable colour and creed. But the main burden was endured by the young men from the Subcontinent and Australia. The ingenious strategy the British mobilised, with the collaboration of the military government of British India, was a three step strategy. The first step was to create an intimate relation between local patriotism and loyalty to the empire. The second step was to create a competition among subordinated patriotic groups and communities. Finally, telescoping of minor incidents into major events, to maintain the patriotic fever and consequently the flow of resources to the British war effort.

The ingenuity of the system of despoliation of the Indian population consisted in a voluntary system, leveraged by a relation of dependency and interdependency. The British cleverly promoted the idea, among the friendly princely states, that you do not leave a call for help from a dear friend unheeded, their bonds of friendship should be defended at all costs. The introduction of the strategy was always the same. Select a princely state that enjoys good relation with the British India and most probably with the members of the British aristocracy. Once this done, it goes about using the local patriotism, jealousies and rivalries among the princely states to create a momentum of competition, a kind of bidding of who can do more. And the momentum is set going, it will not stop until the make or break point. In this way, at regular intervals – military expeditions here and there, funds that might have been accumulated were appropriated by the British. When Britain stepped into World War One, naturally this process was triggered once again.

In a well-orchestrated campaign in the dominions and the colonies, the British Government sent out posters that depicted a proud mother lion on a hill top backed up by four equally proud and fierce-looking cubs. Under the main caption "The Empire Needs Men" there is a list of countries to which the message is mainly addressed to, if by chance anyone doubted: Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand. Further down the poster another caption reads, "*All answer the call. Helped by the YOUNG LIONS / The OLD LION defies*

his Foes. *ENLIST NOW*.”⁵¹ This was the first phase of the British war preparation, enlisting the dominions and colonies. Similar posters and advertisements were diffused within Britain but mainly Scotland, Ireland and Wales, with markedly less attention on the home-counties.⁵² The dominions were eager to show their good will. Australia was one of the biggest and regular contributor, and it was the most willing dominion, since Canada at this time was experience domestic tensions within Quebec. Getting Australia on-board was primordial to the British strategy. Since this would trigger the further adhesion of not only the Irish and the Scottish, on a voluntary basis, but also push the other colonies to openly declare their material support towards the British war engagements.

After a coincidence of affinities and diplomatic arrangements, Australia did concede to Britain's demands of help and solidarity. What it did not know at the time and could not control was the timetable of this help, and the way in which the “diggers”⁵³ would be used. If they had have known the full scale of their rising engagement, they probably would have hesitated to commit their men. The political class very quickly realised that they were in for a long haul. The Australian Government, and especially its new Prime Minister W.M. Hughes, introduced a massive propaganda campaign in support of Britain's war effort. The Australian War Memorial describes the situation as follows: “*Australian First World War recruitment poster. Towards the end of 1915, a War Census of the Australian population showed that 244,000 single men of military age were available for enlistment. Accordingly, on 26 November 1915, the government with W.M. Hughes its new leader, promised Britain 50,000 more troops - in addition to the 9,500 per month being sent as reinforcements for the 60,000 Australians already overseas. This poster depicts the national symbol of the kangaroo against a backdrop of advancing soldiers. The full title reads: 'Australia has promised Britain 50,000 more men. Will you help us keep that promise?'*”⁵⁴ What becomes clear, from this is that Australia very quickly becomes the victim of its own patriotic aspirations.

⁵¹ Wardle, 1915 March.

⁵² The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 11, 10.

⁵³ Australian slang word for soldiers.

⁵⁴ Syno, Unkown, 1915.

Building its identity in relation to Britain had driven it to evaluate the costs of war as secondary to the love of the mother country. Now that the casualties were mounting the Australian Prime Minister deemed it more appropriate to increase the burden on his people rather than pull back before things became catastrophic. In reality, the new Australian Prime Minister had no other option, the young Australians were in the mood for war, rather than *"to rot in a deadly peace"*⁵⁵ they wanted to go out and show their spirit of courage in combat. As if this was not enough, his predecessor, Prime Minister Joseph Cook, had strongly, if not whole-heartedly committed Australia's defence forces for the use of the British Empire. Prime Minister Joseph Cook in a speech in Horsham, Victoria on August 1, 1914 had declared: *"Whatever happens, Australia is part of the Empire right to the full. Remember that when the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war. That being so, you will see how grave is the situation. So far as the defences go here and now in Australia, I want to make it quite clear that all our resources in Australia are in the Empire and for the Empire and for the preservation and security of the Empire."*⁵⁶ In his declaration the Australian Labor Party leader Andrew Fisher, had declared to the House of Representatives on August the 3rd, 1914: *"We shall pledge our last man and our last shilling to see this war brought to a successful issue."*⁵⁷ The War Memorial also displayed the copy of the message sent to Britain by the Australian government, and the one-sidedness of the whole affair. The dispatch reads as follows: *"In the event of war Commonwealth of Australia prepared to place vessels of Australian Navy under control of British Admiralty when desired,"* and the dispatch continues, and here it becomes really interesting in terms of Australia's open-end engagements, *"Further prepared to despatch expeditionary force 20,000 men of any suggested composition to any destination desired by Home Government. Force to be at complete disposal [of] Home Government."* And the final engagement is underlined in the original archive, *"Cost of despatch and maintenance would be borne by this*

⁵⁵ ABC News, 2014, August 4.

⁵⁶ ABC News, 2014, August 4.

⁵⁷ ABC News, 2014, August 4.

Government.”⁵⁸ The “*coup de maître*” of the English diplomacy is the structure of the arrangement. Australia was not lending its forces to Britain, it was in charge of the physical and material well-being of the troops but not the use of them. This meant the system costed zero funds to the British treasury. And in the event of casualties or disability, all future costs will also be borne by the Australian people. And the pinnacle of the strategy was the quagmire part, those troops that were sent, were placed by Kitchener and others in strategic regions that turned up to be hell on earth. Therefore, as part of the troops were consumed by this living hell, the Australian Government was forced to send a stream of fresh troops to support the older contingents. If the Australian Government decided not to, then it would be committing a political suicide, leaving its own citizens to die a terrible death in the hands of a lethal enemy.

In reply to this generous offer of Australian help, the British government buys advertising space in the columns of the Melbourne Herald on the 7th of August, 1914, with the following message: “*His Majesty's Government gratefully accepts the offer of your Ministers to send a force of 20,000 men to this country.*”⁵⁹ The advertisement in the Australian papers was very simple, almost without habitual pompousness and excitement. The text and background wanted to hint that to get a more enthusiastic reply, the Australians had to do much more, something exceptional. The advertisement expressed a certain mild satisfaction but at the same time there floated an air of disappointment. The tactic of jovial *denegrement* worked its magic because Australia later introduced a more emphatic national propaganda campaign. This time with a poster with the map of the country, where in the middle is barred and in its place “New Germany” written, with all major cities having German names.⁶⁰ Starting by a minor gift Australia was quickly sliding into a major engagement, a war partly provoked by Britain was surely becoming that of Australia with unmeasurable costs.

The example Australia had a deep moral impact on India and was at the same time setting a standard. It had attained the status of dominion and after

⁵⁸ ABC News, 2014, August 4.

⁵⁹ ABC News, 2014, August 4.

⁶⁰ Unknown, 1915, *New Germany*.

the war hoped for even greater autonomy from the mother country, it could even attain independence it was hoped. For India this example was seen as a possible path to freedom, a very amicable way of getting Britain out of the subcontinent, maybe not totally but partially and then with time attain full independence. The only thing was that maybe for Australia, Britain was the mother country but for India it was the mother of all ills. There had to be another compelling reason to support a European war of its colonial master. As in the case of Australia, Britain through the collaboration of British India, makes sure that Indians do not see the European war as the war of Britain or their making. It was fundamental to portray the war as that affecting the security of the Subcontinent. By the visual aspect and the choice of colours, British India prepared a poster that must have cost much less than other posters circulated in the British Dominions, or the poor aspect was chosen to fit the low technical capacity available in the Indian printing community. The poster has simple graphics, where a Sepoy stands in a combat position with a red back drop of the British Indian Empire. The caption was, with an immense dose of irony, "*This Soldier is Defending India*". There was a blank added at the bottom of the poster, to all messages to be printed in hundreds of local languages.⁶¹ The message was clear, India would be used as the main supply base as it was during all Britain's colonial wars in Asia, the Middle-East and Africa. Here as it was with Australia and other dominions, the structure was similar, the war had to be Indianised, and Indians had to be made to believe that it was fought in their interests.

Within British India, during 1914 the initial mood of the masses as well as the elite circles was to see it as an opportunity to cash on a weakening Britain. To these posters were added later postcards and posters, which were more provocative, openly challenging the men of the dominions and colonies like India to show what they are made of. In a postcard and poster version, clearly aimed at India because of its hesitancy, the illustration has a Union Jack in the middle of yellow background, with a bulldog Britain in the middle, with each of the red strip edges defended by a puppy bulldog, on each of it written the

⁶¹ Unknown, 1915, *This Soldier is Defending India*.

name of a domino or a colony. The caption of the postcard was direct and provocative: "*Are we afraid?*" in the upper left hand corner, while on the upper right hand corner the answer reads: "*NO!*"⁶² Soon after, a poster with more colour than the earlier ones, and markedly of better quality, was produced, appealing to the loyalty and patriotism of the Indian fighting forces. The poster had more pomp and conveyed a sense of declaration of the highest authority. The characters of the caption is in gothic letters, reinforcing its official and compulsive character. In the graphics of a mast and the floating flag of the Viceroy of India, the proclamation reads: "*Our Indian Warriors staunch and true, have proved their worth to all: To guard the flag, they dare and do - At England's battle call!*"⁶³ This is more of a beckoning to duty than a call for help. The reason for this that the English thought that the magic of their superiority will make the passive Indians move in a subservient manner.

To be true, it was not the intention of the English to motivate and ignite a sense of patriotism in the official British India territories. It was the first and foremost duties of M.K. Gandhi to help the authorities in raising voluntaries. As it later became evident these forces were reserved for service in Africa, the Middle-East and for the defence of the Subcontinent itself. The ease and speed at which the Germans had succeeded on the Eastern Front could have induced the British to think that the defence of India proper should be given greater consideration. So the centrality of the propaganda strategy had to be to attract the support of the Princely States. They regularly reiterated their subservience to the Emperor and had a personal sense of allegiance. On top of this, most of these princely states and kingdoms were much richer than the blood-sucked British India. It was thought that they could defray costs of the participation beside England, their friend and master. Here the three step strategy kicks in, after the massive inputs of Australian participation, the papers all over the empire were full of it; the fever of goodwill had reached its peak.

⁶² Unknown, 1915, *Are we afraid? No!* Unknown. The item is in the possession of the British Library but it is still trying to identify the real designers and those who put it into circulation. This lack of information, in a system that is used to documenting every move, is an itself an interesting aspect to the story.

⁶³ Unknown, 1915, *Our Indian Warriors*.

The main focus of the British propaganda Indian elite that were British educated, young men that could act as role-models for many of the other of the elite that had always competed with each other and especially competed to win English-favouritism. This role model aspect would have even greater effect on the thousands of others who belong to the lower stratum and aspiring to rise to greater heights. First among such role-models was Prince Ranjitsinhji and he created a huge momentum for the support of the English cause in the north-western part of India, and this later snow-balled into the rest of India, especially the Deccan and South India. The news dispatches from New Delhi were unequivocal in their laud for the Prince. Unfortunately, access to the Indian newspapers of the time is difficult but the same items were reported in the British newspapers, which are readily available in digital format. On November 20, 1914, The Glasgow Herald, for example, reported the event of Ranjitsinhji's decision as follows: "*Prince Ranjitsinji, Jam of Nawanagar, will proceed to Europe shortly on active service.*" And is followed by a well chorused description of the Prince's achievements, "*His Highness Maharajah Jam Sahib of Nawanagar is of course the famous cricketer. He was born in India in 1872, and was educated in his native country and at Trinity College, Cambridge. He made his first appearance for Sussex County Cricket Club in 1896. He was head of the Sussex averages the same year and during the period 1896-1900. He went with Stoddart's All England XI. to Australia, 1897-8. He is an all-round athlete.*"⁶⁴ Everything is done to show how good an English gentlemen he was. In the same column, under the caption of "Indian War Grant" one of the princely states in Punjab province offers 50,000 rupees towards the expenses of the war.⁶⁵ The ball is set into motion, and all the princes and kings soon start to queue up. The Nabab of Hyderabad and the Maharaja of Mysore were the most generous in their donations. The Hyderabad ruler promises to send the entire team of horses outside the minimum required by his court,⁶⁶ he knew well that this would have a terrible impact on the economy where horses were very much prized for transportation. As for the Maharaja of

⁶⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 20, 7.

⁶⁵ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 20, 7.

⁶⁶ Marquess of Lansdowne, 1914. September 9, 573.

Mysore, he was the most generous. Unwilling to risk the lives of his subjects, he made a payment of not less than 5,000,000 rupees to the British.⁶⁷ It was a big cost to his treasury but he decided that he will not sacrifice the lives of his people for a quarrel that did not concern them in the slightest. At the same time, another reason could be that British India maintained few garrisons in Bengal and South India, and did not encourage these nations to join the armed forces. But anyhow, all is done to kindle their sense of patriotism. Reflecting on the mood in India, the Glasgow Herald came up with this caption: "*Brave Indians, worthy descendants of Great Warriors.*"⁶⁸ The British authorities moved every rock and stone to provoke committed engagement from the Indian princes.

Although the British were ever so thankful for the generous donations, and offers of material and human support, they were very weary that this outpour of generosity would be short-lived. This was a big problem, since most of the top ranks in the army and government knew that the war would be long and arduous. The first one to be concerned with this eventuality was Lord Curzon, the ex-Viceroy of India. On the 18th of November 1914, basically declared that the news coverage of the exploits of the Indian troops has to be amplified ... otherwise the flow of resources will stop: "*Indian troops were surely entitled to the reward of having their achievements made known in their own country.*"⁶⁹ This was an invitation to create news specially catered for the Indian public. Given the ambiguities and tendency to make news into propaganda, one can imagine what this would licence the direct and indirect mouth pieces of the British Empire. The press does not wait for long, it initiates an avalanche of scoops to flood the reader with anecdotes and heroic exploits. The caption of an article in The Glasgow Herald, a few days later, came up with this caption "*Praise for the Indians*".⁷⁰ Later down in the same column, an English serviceman describes how brave the Indian soldiers were and concludes, "[...] *I would not like to be fighting against them.*" The strategy becomes more

⁶⁷ Marquess of Lansdowne, 1914. September 9, 573.

⁶⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 11, 11.

⁶⁹ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 19, 9.

⁷⁰ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 24, 8.

explicit when the Glasgow Herald reports the on the African expedition in Egypt, in the early months of the war: *"In the early days of the war the writer expressed regretful doubts as to the possibility of employing the Maharajah of Bikanir's Camelry, quite one of the most important and efficient units of the Indian Imperial Service Troops, in any sort of European warfare."*⁷¹ Indians can win anywhere, was the message trumpet, if only they could engage whole heartedly on the side of Britain. This form of telescoping, minor incidents or possible acts of heroism into major successes pulled in wave after wave of funds, material and men from India to the battlegrounds of Britain's making. The pinnacle of the British achievements, in terms of telescoping, comes in the form of a testimony of the Maharaja Idar of Gujarat: *"We Indians believe that those who die in battle go straight to Paradise. To die in battle is not to die. Our names live, and we are proud; our families are still prouder. Now is a very good time to die."*⁷² In all probability, the Maharaja Idar of Gujarat who was very close to Britain, wanted the rest of India to support the war effort of Britain without hesitation, even if it meant the ultimate sacrifice of lives of young Indians. On the 3rd of October 1914, The Glasgow Herald gave this enumeration of the participation of Indian troops: *"All fighting classes of India are well represented – Sikhs, Dogras, Jats, Rajputs, Baluchis, Mahrattas, and Pathans [...]"*.⁷³ The material and blood debt of Britain towards India and especially the princes and kingdoms had accumulated to immeasurable proportions.

Britain did not pay its dues. Even while Indians were bleeding for the pride of Britain and its prestige in Europe and around the globe, it was carefully planning and conspiring the demise of precisely those who had bled their heart and soul for it. To begin with, under the pretext of war and vigilance, British India was quietly and maliciously increasing its grip on the workings of India and planning the aftermath of the war in which it would crush the princes and the kingdoms that were so readily willing to lend it a willing hand. Throughout the period of Crown rule, it was a one-way road to ever increasing military dictatorship in

⁷¹ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 24, 6.

⁷² The Glasgow Herald, 1914. November 25, 10.

⁷³ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. October 3, 6.

India. The best illustration of this was the Sikh passengers of Komagata Maru issue and the way the British India handled the situation. The Komagata Maru, carrying Sikhs, was refused permission to enter the port in Vancouver and had to make a return journey. The Sikhs, had thought that they had a free movement inside the British Empire, especially as their kin was wasted in the muddy marshes of Ypres, France, under British command. The British did not allow the ship to reach Calcutta, fearing the news would light angry reactions in Bengal and elsewhere, instead it was allowed to debark 12 miles from Calcutta. This angered the Sikhs, which gave-in to the provocation, violent protests ensued. The British had dispatched para-military forces there who readily fired into the angry crowd, killing 16 and arresting 32 for consequent torture, which was customary in British jails.⁷⁴ This incident combined with the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919) were a long string of incidents that were intended to punish the freedom-loving Sikhs, a constant reminder to let them know who was in control.⁷⁵ The punishment for the princes and kings of the subcontinent were left for a later date, it was part of a bigger plan – the independence of India.

For some the support extended to Britain during the First World War, was due to the erosion of identity, and patriotism was seen as a sure path to reclaim it. But none did realise that Britain had inserted itself into this calculus. In one way or the other it was impossible to be patriotic or adhere to an identity without the mark of gratitude, loyalty and subservience towards the British encrusted into it. The British knew well this aspect of local identity of hundreds of princes and several kingdoms, and they regular activated this patriotism according to their needs. Come the First World War, Britain triggered this patriotic button like in many other occasions, but this time the price was much higher than anyone could have imagined. None did imagine the punishment that Britain was progressively applying to the Subcontinent, neither did they imagine that within less than 30 years most of the princely states and Indian kingdoms would be

⁷⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 1914. October 3, 9.

⁷⁵ Narain, 2014, Introduction.

wiped out, erased from the Indian landscape. This was the vision of Britain paying its dues, a lesson for future generations.

3-Predatory Nations at the heart of the Indian Federation⁷⁶

Systemic resilience and its possible corrosion– Part 1

Abstract:

Domination in South Asia is explained through the double prisms of foreign colonialism and the caste system. It is deemed by an overwhelming percentage of historians and experts that South Asian history can be explained through these two filters. Indeed, there is some truth to this but it is my hypothesis that a much more dangerous form of domination exists that has for long gone unnoticed. After careful observation one can discern a highly sophisticated and deeply entrenched form of domination resulting from the competition between what we can call: *Predator Nations*. It is my conviction, until proven wrong, that the division of civilisational South Asia in 1947 and the consequent cycles of national consolidations have been a tailor-made opportunity for Predator Nations to feed upon the dismantled and disarmed nations that were not ready for either disintegration or reintegration. Although this process was in the making over several centuries, as predator nations established their diasporic power bases, it is only since 1947 that there is no paramount power to keep these predator nations at bay. In a sense, the creation of new national borders in 1947 was nothing more than the creation of fences within which predator nations can prey, unhindered. If my thesis is right, the historic trends point to a situation where the conflict between the predator nations could come into the open. This points to tensions and risks of disintegration, creating further disturbances in the peaceful resurgence of the *South Asian Civilisation* at a crucial juncture of world history.

Keywords: *Predator-Nation, Predator Diasporas, Integration-Disintegration, Indian Federal Structure, dysfunctional democracy, Civilisational South Asia*

⁷⁶ Byrappa, R. (2019). Predatory Nations at the heart of the Indian Federation. *ÖT KONTINENS: AZ ÚJ- ÉS JELENKORI EGYETEMES TÖRTÉNETI TANSZÉK TUDOMÁNYOS KÖZLEMÉNYEI*, 2016(1), 51–71.

Methodology: Logic and rationality seem to go astray when it comes to analysing and understanding modern India and its structural issues. James. K. Galbraith, son of the famous Canadian-born American economist and political commentator John K. Galbraith, tried to give an understanding of the 2008 financial and economic turmoil by using the concept of 'Predatory State' to explain the true nature of the crisis. Galbraith took the right direction but fell short of mentioning the groups that had high-jacked the crucial parts of the United States' state apparatus, and through it had dominated global governance. He was describing the end results of the process and predatory nature of certain groups. The United States is fast becoming a republic dominated by ethnic groups, rather than a citizenry that strongly believed in egalitarianism. Galbraith could not bring this structure to the specific 2008 problem he was addressing. Although his work is very pertinent, it does not give the whole picture. I would like to build upon the groundwork laid by J.K. Galbraith and make my own modest contribution by testing my theoretical snippets in the context of India in its historical structural evolution. Before going to the specifics of *Predator Nations* in India, I would like to construct a preliminary outline of the *theory of predation*, borrowing from research concepts done in natural sciences. We have to see how domination of one group over another is brought about and entrenched inside a state. Given the limitation of essay requirements, on size and scope, I have decided to divide the study into two parts. In part one the conceptual frame-work will be built up. Here I will piece together a rough structure of the theoretical framework. While in part two, in a separate essay, the specifics of each of the predator nations in India will be detailed and their doings illustrated.

Introduction:

When we think of a country's history we generally think of unitary states with unique histories with a pattern of continuity and not multi-ethnic or multi-national states. In the Indian Subcontinent there are regular earthquakes in the sphere of public memory, revealing a deeper problem. What was a constant for the last 65 years has suddenly being pulled down, sometimes literally as was

the case of Nehru's statue recently, and there is talk of reclassifying the Taj Mahal as a Hindu temple. Are these tectonic shifts in a society in constant emulations? Is it a necessary reassessment of the recent past in order to produce greater social and political harmony? Societies periodically go through upheavals and adjustments but what is happening in India cannot be described as following any of these patterns. Quite often experts blame India's dysfunctional democracy and jingoistic politicians, who, unable to offer any material improvement in average Indian's living standards, take a short cut into irrational nationalistic tendencies and religious bigotry. They might be right as far as the nominal and generalized picture is concerned but fail to explain the inner dynamics. National integration stopped when Prime Indira Gandhi was assassinated by the Sikh separatists. With her death the power of the state as the paramount power came to a grinding halt. In a sense the Jawaharlal Nehru – Indira Gandhi period provided the function of the paramount power after the British withdrawal. What we are witnessing since then is economic, social and political segregation and disintegration. The roots of these trends however dated back to earlier times.

Since the fall of the Vijaynagar Empire (1336-1646) and the decline of the home-grown paramount power in the Subcontinent, it was mercilessly attacked from all directions and swathes of hungry migrants, fortune-seekers and con men from all corners converged upon it, wave after wave. They brought with themselves their cultures and ways of ethical conduct that were contradictory to that of the Indian civilisation. From the fall of the peaceful civilisation that was defended by the Vijaynagar Empire, it has been one relentless effort by these groups to pull down the whole edifice of what we can legitimately call – the Indian (South Asian) Civilisation. From thence onwards, the structural history of the subcontinent has been *predation* disguised as statecraft. In this context the celebration of the memory of the Indian Civilisation for example can go two ways: either we can remember the *perdition* (loss) of it or the *predation* that destroyed it; either way there is nothing really much to celebrate. It is equally true that the choice of the Indian state with its colonial heritage, since the birth of the Mogul Empire (1526-), is either to

celebrate predation or to shake-off the colonial and the predatory heritage by celebrating the legitimate memory of the Indian (South Asian) Civilisation, its glory, mourn its predation, or give hope of a revival by learning the necessary lessons. Of course there are suggestions that neither path is advisable, meaning that the selective celebration as being the practical way out of this conflictual dilemma. Currently the situation is that of a civil-war among the predator nations and communities; those that caused the collapse of the Indian Civilisation in the first place.

Unable to find a sense of direction, the paramountcy of the Indian Federal Structure has lost its legitimacy. Indira Gandhi's ambitious 20-point program, launched in 1975, was to build-up the *raison d'être* of the federal state by giving it a strong developmental direction. The idea was to eliminate all possibilities of religious or communal affiliations and associations between the federal state and particularistic interests. The state function was that of a leveller, protect those that needed protection and slap those who needed to be slapped. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's objective was to associate the state directly with the Individual, in the hope of creating a dynamic and active citizenry. The plan further hoped that this would create a virtuous cycle of development with a total mobilisation of the population, putting India back in its historic path of development, similar to Communist China today. The physical elimination of Indira Gandhi and her son, Rajiv, put an end to this. According to my thesis for example, the 1991 economic crisis can equally be seen under a different light. It can be argued that it was engineered to structurally remove the Indian State's paramountcy as a non-communal actor in society, and assigned it directly to serve the purpose of predatory nations.

For purely analytical purposes therefore, it is long overdue to construct a new theoretical framework because the array of analytical tools currently available are insufficient to give us insight into how India has evolved during the last seventy odd years. In a recent publication an expert was perplexed by the following fact: "*In 2014, then candidate Modi campaigned on a plank of reforming the state to improve governance and deliver inclusive growth to India's 1.3 billion citizens. Over five years in office, the Modi-led BJP government*

*largely ignored administrative reforms that would bolster India's state capacity. Having earned a second consecutive parliamentary majority with a decisive victory in the 2019 general election, Modi and his colleagues have been given five more years to deliver on this promise."*⁷⁷ It was a mystery to this expert but it should not be one. From the time of Emperor Ashoka, the role of the paramount power, in keeping the equilibrium and the rules of the game between various communities, had played a key civilizational function. Today there seems to be a lapse in this function. My theory of the *predator nations* can to a large extent explain why Prime Minister Modi refrained from implementing reforms he had earlier promised. It would provide the historic structure to his non-action in terms of administrative reforms. At the beginning even if my proposition serves to partially explain the chaotic situation in South Asia, and India in particular, I will feel that I have added to a better understanding of today's India and its historical development.

Preliminary theoretical outlines of the Theory of Predatory Nations (TPN)

There is no such theory as the 'Theory of Predatory Nations' as yet, only semblances of it, as I try to put it together. In this predation is used to explain how certain groups, communities or entire nations try to dominate others, to appropriate power and economic resources to fulfil their urge to survive and to dominate. In international relations every nation-state is supposed to be of similar instincts and every single nation-state knowing the dangers and opportunities of this predatory instinct. In the international arena the significance of this theory is known through other theoretical frameworks, like the realist school of thought expounded by E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau. Although their efficiency is not proven to a convincing extent these theoretical works however try to give a rational framework. Where relations between various entities can be understood in terms of an urge to dominate or reversely to avoid falling victim to this domination.

⁷⁷ Vaishnav, 2019.

What makes the theory very potent however is the context of a composite state, which is home to a multitude of communities, ethnicities and nations; all preserving their distinctive characteristics. The United States and most of the post-colonial states are of this nature. Most of these sub-units of a composite state do not have the appetite to change their status as a sub-unit, neither do they want to challenge the state nor dominate its instances from inside. However some of these units are made of different animus. Each unit competes to control the whole or vital parts of the state-structure. Each and every one of it has a unique strategy to satisfy its desire to dominate, cloistered in the state framework. As James K. Galbraith described the situation: *"It is in the nature of predators, when unchecked, to run wild."*⁷⁸ The essential function of a state, its institutional outlay and the rule of law, tradition of tolerance and responsible citizenry is about keeping at bay all temptations of predations, in the Weberian tradition. According to some historians the foundation of the modern states was to curtail predation.⁷⁹ State and constitutional institutions are there to check this kind of unhindered predation, so it is evident that legal and constitutional checks and balances are an impediment to predator nations and communities.

From this, what follows is that predation and domination are very similar in their outward consequences, they are however distinct in purpose and substance. Domination does not always mean the destruction of the dominated. It is in the interest of the dominator to keep the dominated more or less safe and alive, otherwise the structure of the resource base of domination will collapse. In the Indian subcontinent the caste-system could be a very good example of this. It is not in the Brahmin's interest to physically destroy the lower levels. If it happened he would fall from his pedestal, which obviously is not his aim. His resource base would collapse. Predation on the other hand does not always mean that the physical well-being of the prey has to be secured. Predation means consumption and the physical disappearance of the prey. This said, domination can be transformed into predation in extreme

⁷⁸ Galbraith, 2009, XII.

⁷⁹ Smail, 2012, 7-34.

phases of survivalist strategies. The caste-system could be transformed from a system of domination to a system of predation if it is deemed that parts of it, the *Dalits* or the *Adivasi* (repressed communities) and *religious minorities*, are no longer needed for the survival of the system. It is vital therefore to understand the essence and the differences of these concepts, and how the transition is made from one to the other. This is one of the reasons why there is so much confusion about colonialism: is it a system of domination or a system of predation?

Domination:

The German political economist and sociologist, Max Weber in his *Economy and Society* (1922) provided us with an elaborate and structured definition of domination: *"Domination was defined above as the probability that a certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons. It thus does not include every mode of exercising "power" or "influence" over other persons. Domination ("authority") in this sense may be based on the most diverse motives of compliance all the way from simple habituation to the most purely rational calculation of advantage. Hence every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience."*⁸⁰ In this succinct definition Max Weber touches the various aspects of domination from family life to that of complex stratified social systems. A few paragraphs later Weber also goes onto explaining how the system of domination survives. He says that the system *"attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy"*. Which directly has an influence on the habituation of obedience. In short, domination seeks obedience from the dominated. Strategies of constraint and physical elimination come into consideration only when cultural accoutumance fails. Even this violent phase is temporary, until the pattern of obedience gets re-established. Domination therefore seeks to establish authority and legitimacy over a group of people

⁸⁰ Weber, 1978, 212.

through obedience and compliance by imposing a belief-system that sustains and perpetuates a particular matrix of domination. In comparison we will realise that predation has some fundamental differences, which puts it in a category of phenomena that can cause systemic danger in economic, political and social spheres.

In a context that is similar to South Asia, an expert on South and Central America gave his vision of how domination over there was related to political economy, more than any other reasons; this corroborates with the Weberian vision of domination.⁸¹ This said there are elements of predation in the same domination. Fernando Santos-Granero, the expert in question, himself gives an indication of this double aspect of historic domination in South America: "Terms used by members of capturing societies to refer to captive slaves—and sometimes also to servant groups and tributary populations—were multivocal; they could designate "strangers," "enemies," and "captives." This suggests that, at least in some Amerindian worldviews, all strangers were considered to be potential enemies, and all enemies potential slaves."⁸² All systems of domination have a "*them and us*" factor but the Amerindian example clearly indicates sharper borders. This leaves open the possibility that domination can be transformed into predation. Given the similarities between the Amerindian and Indian set-up, it is possible to imagine that similar structures are at play.

Defining Predation:

Before coming to the process of predation and the various historic structural stages of it, we have to attempt to define the concept of predation. Simply defined, it means 'the action of attacking or plundering'. But Collins English language dictionary goes further and defines it as 'a relationship between two species of animal in a community, in which one (the predator) hunts, kills, and eats the other (the prey)'. Still remaining in biology and zoology, Robert J. Taylor wrote a very interesting book titled *Predation* in which he tried to give us a wide

⁸¹ Santos-Granero, 2009, 14.

⁸² Santos-Granero, 2009, 106.

spectrum of definitions of predation. Rather than repeat all of these here I would choose a few examples that would be relevant to this study. Starting from a simple definition of one animal preying on another Taylor takes us to different complexities of predation in a progressive manner:

- a) Predation occurs when one organism kills another for food
- b) Predation occurs when individuals of one species eat living individual of another
- c) Predation is a process by which one population benefits at the expense of another
- d) Predation is any ecological process in which energy and matter flow from one species to another⁸³

While the action in context-“a” is one-to-one process, which in context-“b” is species (group) bound. From context-“c” things become more specific, it is about one (cultural) identity sharing swathe makes off a living on another. Context-“d” is a real matrix where all energy is siphoned off in a million and one ways from one group by another, leading to a total control of the prey “resource base”. Consciously or unconsciously Robert J. Taylor has given us a neat structure of predation at the human-level. As he explained: *“The development of theory of any sort requires, as a necessary first step, abstraction and simplification of the processes under investigation. Given the complexity of predation, the theory of this process will best emerge from precisely defined assumptions manipulated with impeccable logic.”*⁸⁴ It is precisely this deep receptacle of simplicity I was looking for to pour the presumed complexities of the Indian history. These simple formulations, tailored for the natural world, rang a strong echo when I read them because I was thinking the same of the human world. I had this tendency to see things slightly different than others. While others saw consolidated nation-states, I saw consolidated domination and not integration. Reading authors like Robert J. Taylor convinced me that I was not

⁸³ Taylor, 1984, 3-4.

⁸⁴ Taylor, 1984, 6.

off rails in thinking that in some regions we are ruled by predator nations and communities, similar to what was happening in the natural world.

State Structures and Predation:

Although there are at times a lot of similarities between animal and human communities, we have to see how the process of predation takes place among human-beings specifically. For this, research done by Daniel Lord Smail on the subject takes the right direction. Smail says that, in its recent form, predation started as a system of debt collection in Medieval Europe and the manner in which it was undertaken. Not surprisingly predation comes from the Latin word 'predare', meaning plunder by predator money collectors. The most interesting aspect of the study is how this happens in relation with the state structure: *"Predation was a state-sponsored spectacle of violence. More accurately predation was a service, bureaucratically bound up, packaged, creditors in exchange for a small fee consisting of a percentage of the debt ... the state as a protection racket."* And he continues: *"The scale of the practice, in the cities I have studied, was startling. Predation exceeded, by distance, other vectors of court-sponsored violence. Spectacles of predation outstripped penal spectacles of pain and humiliation by several orders of magnitude."*⁸⁵

Smail shows us several things concerning the nature of predation. Firstly, how state organs are privatized, how they become instruments of private needs. And secondly, as a consequence of the earlier characteristic, how predation becomes a generalized system of government at every level, how it becomes the primary means of interaction between state and society. Predation becomes the defining element of public morality, attitude towards rights and of course the defining element of identity. Ultimately, it is the primary function of the state to serve the people but it does not mean that it should become the servant of particular groups of people. However, once this happens, the general socio-political vocabulary changes. To understand this we have to understand the various stages of predation.

⁸⁵ Smail, 2012, 13.

STAGES OF PREDATION:

Predation is a multi-stage process as well as a multi-level strategy endemic to certain communities who internalise predation as their core ethical value.

Stage one - making predation an ethic:

The acquisition of this value is the first stage. Here James K Galbraith's interpretation of Thorstein Veblen serves the purpose of giving a tangible explanation. By reading Veblen one can understand why. Veblen relates predation to what he calls the leisurely classes. Basically, he asks us to watch the level of inequality in the general population and the treatment of women to get an idea of the level of predation and he is not kind in the choice of his words: *"The early differentiation out of which the distinction between a leisure and a working class arises is a division maintained between men's and women's work in the lower stages of barbarism."*⁸⁶ Without overtly mentioning it, Veblen also brings in the concept of property and privilege and demonstrates how both are interchangeable in the creation of predation.⁸⁷ This said, as mentioned earlier, privilege produces same results as property and thus need not be physically tangible. The only thing that matters is to create differential, although Veblen stresses the physical part, it need not be that. As we will realise in the context of the Indian subcontinent, an illusory differential does the magic as well. Provoke reverence and deference, that's what counts in the end. An ethic of differential of status is a prerequisite to predation.

Stage two – making predation a core element of identity:

The second phase is a real strategic move, predation has to be elevated to be a community trait, it has to become a common cultural phenomenon,

⁸⁶ Veblen, 1899, 22.

⁸⁷ Veblen, 1899, 24.

predation thus becomes part of the identity of an ethnic community. As Veblen puts it: *"The predatory phase of culture is attained only when the predatory attitude has become the habitual and accredited spiritual attitude for the members of the group; when the common-sense appreciation of men and things has come to be an appreciation of men and things has come to be an appreciation with a view to combat."*⁸⁸ This has a dual purpose: to solidify the predatory community and at the other end to identify the prey, hence forth to create 'it is us against them' stratagem or attitude.

Stage three – state capture:

The third phase is to sway power over the governing institutions, directly or indirectly, and according to James K. Galbraith, this is when the calamity starts to befall: *"What remained was rule by predators, and in particular the transfer of the power of supervision, of regulation, to the organized business and banking lobbies. This is the fundamental source of calamity that now overtakes us, and it is vital to understand why."*⁸⁹ The phase takes predation deeper. It is a transition period when the *abrupt predatory transformation* (APT) is prepared. It is also a crucial period when structures of dependency are created. All phases in the predation strategy are important but this is a determining phase. The objective of this period is, as mentioned earlier, to gather and strategically leverage a maximum of influence. State and private group relations are complex and are further complicated by the nature and degree of independence of the state. But for our purpose, for the predator community, state is an extra community element that is foreign and needs to be conquered; it is an alien element that has to be reduced to its knees. What the predator most prizes therefore is the ideal moment to gain control of the state-structure. In the evolution of the state-structures and governance there are cycles of low and high intensity of control and command. Peace reigns in times of high intensity. And as leaders start to feel that this peace is a given it falls into

⁸⁸ Veblen, 1899, 19.

⁸⁹ Galbraith, 2009, XIV.

a trap of thinking no vigilance is needed. Thus this complaisance leads to dissatisfaction of the masses and the body politic is fevered by ever frequent crises due to external factors and the incapacity to handle them internally - a systemic problem.

It is a historic fact that predation happens at periods of low intensity. Here a two-way strategy is deployed by predatory communities. One is to make a deal with the decaying power, to keep it on infusion and use it for gaining lateral power. The other method is to support a viable alternative, in the hope that the existing power structure will collapse in a short period. Both have their benefits and their risks. What is extremely interesting, when it comes to predatory communities going this way or the other is that they decide not to accept this dichotomy because it is either win or lose. When a predator community wins it is guaranteed privileges and access to executive power to strengthen itself. However, if it loses, it will simply be annihilated. For communities looking for a long term penetration strategy, win or lose dichotomy is not an option. The successful predatory communities adopt a very interesting strategy that guarantees them an optimal result, as James K. Galbraith explains: *"The experience of the past decade permits a very simple summary explanation: they set out to take over the state and to run it – not for any ideological project but simply in the way that would bring to them, individually and as a group, the most money, the least disturbed power, and the greatest chance of rescue should something go wrong."*⁹⁰ The final two phrases of this statement are most revealing. He talks of the "least disturbed power" and "greatest chance of rescue." To crystalize this optimal outcome, the community splits into two, moderates and radicals, and whatever branch wins, it will have enough leverage to rescue the other. This does not mean that it will be 100% rescue. Some of the front members will be ritually sacrificed to protect the overall position of the community. After continuous sequences of this power play the predator community moves to a final stage.

Stage four – attaining preponderance:

⁹⁰ Galbraith, 2009, 126.

The ultimate stage is gaining preponderance. What we are used to witnessing and what the lessons of history teach us is how these predatory groups, after gaining power try to totalise it and maximise it. What is surprising is that predatory communities, in their big majority, are very wary of seeking total power in a very visible manner. Let us not forget that predatory communities, as was witnessed by Galbraith, are not looking for brute power, they are looking for effective power that can be operationalised, to entrench the long-term invisible control. The reason for this is that visible and brute power very quickly becomes resented and becomes target for regime change with the risk of physical elimination of the community. Creating temporary and sometimes permanent coalitions therefore becomes a realistic strategy to adopt, for the predatory communities.

It is at this point that public memory becomes a primary element of the overall strategy of predatory communities. Public Memory should not be equated with Collective Memory. The principle role of public memory is to deflect negative image to others and reflect a positive picture of the predator community. Once power is gained by means that are either dubious or unpraiseworthy in the eyes of the general 'prey' communities, public memory could ideally be used as a legitimising force to the predators. For this purpose, either a parallel reality has to be created or the reality of others has to be appropriated and transformed into its supporting function of the predators. Sometimes this could mean designation of local heroes into traitors while elevating the predators as heroes and saviours. Public memory could play a bigger role in the systemic *abrupt predatory transformation* period.

After centennial domination of the 'prey' people regime change could mean one predatory nation replacing another before it. Here public memory has a double function. The first is as a legitimising structure, saying 'from today we are in control'. For this to happen, public memory has also to play a second role, that of uprooting and eradicating the memory of the other predatory groups.

If there are several predatory groups, then memory becomes selective and remains incoherent compared to other memory systems. The preponderant predator, in order to gain overwhelming control, has to eradicate the memory of certain groups but at the same time has to accommodate the memory of 'allied predators', in a temporary adjustment. Under these circumstances, selective memory could be highly contradictable and conflictual. In this sense, Public Memory does not enjoy consensus but what it does have is a temporary negotiated settlement, until the next battle for control is engaged. Public memory is therefore the product of a negotiated settlement between various predatory groups. If this cycle is repeated over and over again, public memory then becomes a 'negotiated memory'. The legitimizing force behind this memory is a long process of negotiation and not any kind of ethical or historical research. Lacking in popular appreciation, lacking any scientific basis Public Memory loses all its social and cultural value. If one considers public memory as potential means of creating social and cultural cohesion and even harmonization, then negotiated memory provides the impression of social cohesion but what is important to know that it could be reappraised at any moment. Negotiated memory, as its base meaning indicates, should produce stability in the preservation of any particular segment of memory, a result of a negotiated settlement. It is one way forward when no one group has a dominant position to impose a unique interpretation. I am certain there are cases of this nature around the world, but as we will see this is not the case in India in a majority of cases. There is no permanent and definitive settlement, only temporary agreements and adjustments.

In conclusion to the first part, I would like to affirm that in certain contexts, public memory can be considered a commodity that is transactional between predatory groups, it is a result of bargains and negotiations. This type of memory is far removed from the classical scenario where memory is more or less legitimated by independent experts as well as receiving popular support. This memory is therefore collective and serves the purpose of further cementing the various segments of society. The negotiated selective memory on the other hand has no legitimacy other than that given to it by the various part-taking

predatory groups or nations. This radically reallocates the economic, socio-cultural and political function of public memory. In short public memory becomes weaponized to serve the 'inner-colonial' conquest of a particular or group of predator nations, within the context of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic composite countries. In the next part I will try to introduce these theoretical snippets to the Indian and South Asian context to see how they stand the test. In such, my ambition in the next part is to see if a theoretical framework of predatory nations can be accommodated to the Indian subcontinent.

Predator nations in India and the context specifics

There is no doubt that history of South Asia was seen in the prism of colonial designs in the past. And this tradition was perpetuated by so called "Indian Nationalists", to whom the British way of thinking was mother's milk. Another reason being that colonial consolidation, initiated by the East India Company, of the now divided parts of South Asia continued after 1947. As India's foremost historian Romila Thapar puts it: "... colonial administration sorted out Indian society and wrapped it up into neat packages. Unfortunately nationalist historians did not unwrap these packages. We still have them and they have become part how we see ourselves in contemporary society and politics."⁹¹ There is an embarrassing show-like routine of anti-colonial rant by populist politicians and the glorification of the mythical past with one single aim: avoiding the reality of today and of yesterday. As Romila Thapar explains: "*Ancient India was projected as a virtual Utopia, starting with the Vedic age and culminating 1500 years later in the so-called 'golden age' of the Guptas. It was supposedly a period of unchanging prosperity. Society functioned according to the norms laid down in the shastras, so historians did not have to investigate the reality.*"⁹² Every aspect of Indian History was about who is assigning what labels and to what period. My effort always was and will be to

⁹¹ Thapar, 2012, 32.

⁹² Thapar, 2012, 33.

change these labels so that they correspond to the reality and serve the purpose of giving us a clear insight into structures and dynamics of the history of India.

In earlier essays and conference participations I tried to develop the concept of "*Fringe Mesopotamia*" as opposed to the rest of India and this structural dialectic could be instrumental in explaining many political and socio-economic evolutions in India, both recent and not so recent. In conjunction with the earlier purely theoretical appraisals, I would like to introduce the concept of "*Predatory Nations*" to the research of South Asian history, to explain the conflictual and contradictory nature of historic narrative in India. I will proceed by giving some general aspects and characteristics of the predator nations in India.

Specific characteristics of predation and predatory nations (communities)

a) *Perimeter/border cultures*

Geographically, all of them sit on the perimeter of India (and South Asia before it was divided). For this reason, historically they were all perimeter cultures. Structurally this is an important factor in the sense that the movement of these predators has been from the perimeter to the centre ground. As Anthony Gideon explains: "*Here again, we have a case where historians and philosophers, claiming for the most part to describe particular circumstances, have provided ideas that have helped to constitute those very circumstances.*"⁹³ Scholars like Max Müller and British state-sponsored historians have been writing the history of the perimeter people and cultures and giving them a centrality and legitimacy over the real. Marginality has taken over the central ground and incapacitated South Asian Civilisation. As Ian Angus aptly puts it: "...thinking civilization from its periphery..."⁹⁴ One has to understand the loosely federated nature of the Indian polity before the cascade of invasions, to know that these communities were almost independent. They knew that

⁹³ Giddens, 1985, 216.

⁹⁴ Angus, 1990, 33.

they were between two civilisations and not integrated as in today's nation-states. For them: "Life at the frontier consists in escaping civilized constraints ..."⁹⁵ Paul Lawrence speaks of degrees of foreignness, when he explains that: *"Demographic and social relationships within such are commonly both variegated and more fluid than in central areas, and expressions of identity often prove to be correspondingly composite."*⁹⁶ Oneness and composite forms should not automatically mean that there was uniformization in the South Asian context.

The strategy adopted by perimeter people was to maintain a strong inner identity and give an outer identity that is common to each of the perimeter groups and sub-groups. Maybe this is the key to understanding today's nationalism in South Asia. The perimeter, over centuries, became a collection point for waves of migration. This constant sedimentary change cannot allow for a constancy in the formation of identity. As Ian Angus sums it up: *"Plurality of emigrations means that the 'other' is now inside. There is no national origin that can give unity to a people and define its destiny."*⁹⁷ To this Homi K. Bhabha added the idea of a tented community on the move: *"The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the 'middle passage'..."*⁹⁸ So it is logical and natural to believe that the perimeter people do not have the same cultural and moral baggage as people who have been rooted for centuries in one place.

People on the move as Ian Angus explains and 'middle passage' as Bhabha describes them must possess a special mind-set. Angus argues that this cannot be anything other than a garrison mentality: *"... the beleaguered sense of small communities threatened by wilderness and other communities outside, asserting themselves through an undifferentiated, unquestioned morality within. The garrison exists in the wilderness and constructs a border to attain*

⁹⁵ Angus, 1990, 33.

⁹⁶ Lawrence, Baycroft & Grohmann, 2001, 51.

⁹⁷ Angus, 1990, 33.

⁹⁸ Bhabha, 1990, 291.

order, identity and self-protection."⁹⁹ This is reinforced by interesting study by Charles Tatum on life on the borders. He says: "Each cultural zone has a particular cultural genealogy that is historical in terms of different colonial origins and the different concerns that grow out of them."¹⁰⁰ This boils down to saying that the perimeter cultures defined themselves as being fundamentally different from South Asia. They constantly internalised cultural elements from the mainland, what was necessary but kept their basic attitude "it is you and me... and I am coming for you" attitude. The Vedas preached something different, living the moment was the name of the game, this was the mainland. Ernest Renan is in line with the Vedas when he affirms: "A nation's existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life."¹⁰¹ An attitude not shared by the fringe and perimeter people of South Asia. As Erich Fromm would say: "By necessity the criteria in authoritarian ethics are fundamentally different from those in humanistic ethics."¹⁰²

b) Geographical leverage

Interestingly all the four communities are at pivotal positions of the Indian subcontinent. In a way they are geographically situated in the four key corridors of India (South Asia), the main arteries of trade and gates used by foreign conquerors. These geostrategic positions gave the Predators to leverage their position vis-à-vis the invader, asking for advantages once the local Indian civilisation, the heritage of both Emperor Ashoka and Vijanagar, was pulled down and the invader system was progressively built-up. Every invasion was thus an opportunity to take their own ambitions for control and conquest much deeper into the Subcontinent.

This is one of the reason why mystical memory is introduced into post-Indira Gandhi Indian politics, to explain how they came to dominate the Indian

⁹⁹ Angus, 1990, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Tatum, 2000, 94.

¹⁰¹ Bhabha, 1990, 20.

¹⁰² Fromm, 1949, 8.

socio-political sphere. For the predators it is out of the question to state that they accompanied the invader and were part-takers in the proceeding plunder. True colours cannot be avowed so memory has to be invented, which is not that easy given historic records and the deeply entrenched oral history tradition. Max Mueller, German master-creator of Indian Aryanism, provided the ideal solution – going back to those times of which no records exist. Thus the collaborationist past is progressively transformed into a romantic mythical and mystical memory. This legitimacy is then used to establish control of the 'mainland cultural system' (MCS). Once the cultural consolidation happens, a new chapter is opened for political and geographical control beyond that of core predator territory.

c) Collaborators to invaders

The first and foremost characteristics of these predator nations is that during the period of great invasions (7th-17th centuries) of the Subcontinent by hostile powers from outside, these nations collaborated with the invader, in part or the whole period of foreign invasion and rule. These border, perimeter, fringe communities had their own way of helping the enemy or invader to pillage the pillars of South Asian Civilisation, to drain it of all its vital energies. Some of them rushed to finance the invasion while others gave their military prowess; and took pride in doing so. For the active collaboration and many services rendered by the perimeter people invaders generally compensated them handsomely. One noted historian of repute describes the situation as follows: *“Especially in north India, a different set of global forces also played an important role in shaping the social structure. Here, certain ascriptively defined groups achieved a rare kind of domination over economy and society. Their landholdings and resource bases were institutionally protected from the competition of the marketplace; they received lavish state subsidies and became the object of various development policies aimed at preserving their society in traditional form. Moreover, they were also encouraged to develop martial values and to view other groups in society as inferior and rightly subordinate to their quasi-*

feudal lordship.”¹⁰³ Before anything the one thing that the invaders did was to bestow status upon these willing collaborators, thus giving them legitimacy over a society and political system, a power that they did not have before. This bestowed power after the so called independence went unquestioned.

There were other ways in which status was transacted. Trade and finance were the other instruments of active collaboration. In the early 17th century for example, when the British started pitching tents in the subcontinent, they came empty pocketed. The journey to Britain and back would take six months, they were regularly in need of supplies and money to finance their military adventures. They did not have any problems because traders and bankers, all originating from the perimeter, would rush to their help. One historian gave visibility with the following statement: *“The accumulation of wealth among Indian merchants and bankers was potentially destabilizing for the regional states, because the interest of the former were more consistent with those of the Company than of the Indian nobility. The European trade settlements attracted merchants and bankers from all over India. Their role as collaborators and conspirators was so prominent in Bengal that the first major military encounter between the Company and a provincial army, the battle of Plassey (1757), has been described as 'a transaction, not a battle'...”*¹⁰⁴ Loyalty to the mainland and the South Asian Civilisation did not rank high in the priorities of the perimeter people, they were more interested in moving from the perimeter to the centre of the power constellation.

Diaspora, mobility and multi – resource base

All most all of the predator nations in India have extensive diasporic networks outside India, acting as a support base of finance and logistics. Inter-diasporic loyalty prevails over loyalty to the Indian nation. And this is logical because of the feeling of one consolidated nation. Contrary to the other communities, they possess a world view of their ambitions and a vision of how to develop

¹⁰³ Washbrook, 1990, 480.

¹⁰⁴ Roy, 2013, 1129.

their nation, in what they consider to be a borderless world. This multi-spheric position gives them leverage in all directions.

In his thought provoking book on maritime trade in early South Asia, Kenneth R. Hall provides us with a map of maritime trade from 1250-1500 CE, in which he divides the maritime activity into seven zones. In these, the two most important zones are centred on South Asia.¹⁰⁵ These two zones were bustling with literally thousands of ethnicities and communities but what is interesting to note is that the maritime part of these two zones is dominated by two diasporas, one principally in the Bay of Bengal while the other pulls the levers in the Arabian Sea. Between the dates mentioned by Kenneth R. Hall, these diasporas have more outside than inside the Subcontinent. The capacity of these nations to gather resources outside the perimeter of South Asia is enormous. The structure of trade in those early stages and the lack of trust meant that people of the same community went to targeted destinations and settled there. This practice grew into a vast operation of global proportions: "Pre-modern trade, especially the high-volume trade that flourished throughout the IOTE (*Indian Ocean Trade Ecumene*), needed on-site agents to represent the interests of traders sending goods from far away, and everywhere there was trade those on-site agents established diaspora communities."¹⁰⁶ There are some scholars that think these were temporary settlements: "... Indian coastal communities had already developed all kinds of profitable ties with East Asia, East Africa, and Central Asia in pre-colonial times. One of the key characteristics of this so called 'trade diaspora' may be the fact that most of it consisted of 'temporary' or 'circular' migration."¹⁰⁷ But in retrospect, we realize that these temporary communities transformed themselves into power communities in the host countries.

Since these diasporas were literally anchored into many ports outside India, the community branches inside India were well equipped with speculative information and could leverage their position with the help of the diasporic network. And in time of need, resources could be moved around, one coming to the rescue of the other. Thus prevailing over the others.

¹⁰⁵ Hall, 2011, 327.

¹⁰⁶ Clark, 2006, 391.

¹⁰⁷ Onk, 2007, 11.

Fanatical outlook / attitude

Manuela Utrilla Robles gave us a comprehensive definition of fanaticism to work on and build upon: "... fanaticism could be described as a passionate and unconditional adherence to a cause, an excessive enthusiasm or persistent monomania regarding certain subjects, in an obstinate, indiscriminate, or violent way."¹⁰⁸ And she continues: "It alludes to any belief shared by several individuals or groups of individuals. In cases in which fanaticism outweighs rationality it can reach extreme levels, to the point of justifying the killing, torture, or imprisonment of human beings, and it can mask the unconditional wish to impose a belief considered beneficial for the fanatic, or for a group of fanatics."¹⁰⁹ I would like to suggest that predatory cultures ingrain predatorism in such a manner as to make it into a subterranean instinct or characteristic close to fanaticism.

Sitting on the perimeter has also pushed these predator communities to develop a strong sense of religious and ideological self-righteousness. And all have a fanatical outlook, political or religious. This ideology has a purpose, namely that of unifying the predatory community under one banner. To conquer, both nationally and internationally, first the community has to be unified under one banner before attempting to conquer other splintered communities who possess no such unity. More often than once, these ideologies are uncompromising and unforgiving. Since these groups are exclusive, they expect their members to display a high degree of loyalty, especially when occupying key functions in the state apparatus in India and in diasporic host countries.

Maintaining a relative sense of superiority vis-a-vis the presumed prey community

¹⁰⁸ Robles, 2013, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Robles, 2013, 1.

In the study of history concepts like 'superiority' occupy little space. Historians generally relegate these topics to sociology or behavioural sciences, unwilling to understand how these contribute to the structural foundations of historical trends. Especially in a country that puts the caste system at the heart of its existence, it becomes an absolute necessity to study and understand the dynamics of concepts like superiority and how they influence the flow of history. In a more narrow sense, as history is the struggle for vital resources, the armoury of such concepts would help understand how this struggle takes place and how it evolves in time. In the Indian subcontinent the caste system is but one element that exemplifies resource appropriation. On a larger scale, at the level of the whole of the subcontinent, it takes the form of ethnic group or nation's projection of superiority. What I want the reader to understand is that the caste system does not integrate the whole of the Indian population into one big monolith. It has to be accepted, for the sake of analytical pertinence, that there are other forces of integration at work. Predation is certainly one of these forces and in turn one of the most potent aspects of predation is the group demarcation by a deep-rooted sense of superiority. As such one can assume it to be a cultural cement for the group, built-up over a long period.

Haughtiness, inherited from their British masters is mimicked to utter perfection in South Asia by the predator nations. Even when the member of these predator communities has nothing, he or she has the haughtiness which in times can be used as an asset to gain favours and compliance from those suppressed people that have difficulty in distinguishing the extent of the predator's power. Here I am obliged to quote Veblen in full to illustrate my point: *"A group may evidently attain such a predatory attitude with a greater or less degree of completeness, so that its scheme of life and canons of conduct may be controlled to a greater or less extent by the predatory animus. The predatory phase of culture is therefore conceived to come on gradually, through a cumulative growth of predatory aptitudes, habits, and traditions this growth being due to a change in the circumstances of the group's life, of such kind as to develop and conserve those traits of human nature and those traditions and norms of conduct that make for a predatory rather than a*

peaceable life.”¹¹⁰ Paraphrasing Veblen, Galbraith says the following of what could be the description of the predator communities and nations: “*The leisure classes do not work. Rather, they hold offices. They perform rituals. They enact deeds of honour and valor. For them, income is not compensation for toil and is not valued mainly for the sustenance it makes possible. Income is rather, a testament by the community to the prestige it accords the predator classes, to the esteem in which they are held. It is a way, in other words, of keeping score.*”¹¹¹ One only has to walk the corridors of governmental and para-governmental offices to realize that Veblen and Galbraith have drawn our attention to a very important reality. Elsewhere, both authors go on to explaining that in fact predation (scheming) is a fulltime job of these “leisurely classes”: “The relation of overlords to underlings is that of predator to prey.”¹¹² Galbraith is more outright in his opinion when he compares predation to parasitism.¹¹³

Conclusion:

Predation is a much more dangerous phenomenon than colonialism. Colonial domination can be overthrown, conducted to palpability and progressively tamed by civilized conduct. Predation, in its pure form, on the hand is about elimination and replacement. The obvious examples are the Americas and Australia. Historians, generally, have avoided seeing India in a similar light. There are many reasons for this. One being that it is extremely convenient to see India as a single, monolithic, block. Another is that the situation on the ground confounds all attempts at rational definition. It is very difficult to disentangle the multiple processes at work. There is colonialism and predation but in different and variegated forms. In this I have tried to outline the conceptual framework of what predation could mean in South Asia. In the next essay of the series I will try to investigate the reality of predation by

¹¹⁰ Veblen, 1899, 20-21.

¹¹¹ Galbraith, 2009, 127.

¹¹² Galbraith, 2009, 127.

¹¹³ Veblen, 1899, 209.

reflecting on dynamic communities to see if they exuberate signs of predation, if their actions fall into the same pattern of predation described above. This will provide us with concrete analysis of the state and condition of the Indian federal system and the state of its resilience.

4-Punjab: when a “community” assails and conquers the “State”¹¹⁴

“Democracy” and “National Community” are theoretical concepts and mechanisms that mutually strengthen each other. A strong devotion to establishing a national community should inevitably pave the way forward to the building of democracy as a process whereby sub-national communities are harnessed together, and as an institutional set-up to entrench the viability of the national community. This basic theoretical framework is elaborately embraced notably by Jürgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson. What I propose to do in the current study is trying to transpose the above-mentioned theoretical structures to historical evolutions in South Asia and more particularly the Indo-Pakistani border region – the Punjab.

Introduction:

The last sixty years have shown that the cohabitation of Punjab inside the national structure, on the one side of the border or the other, has been extremely difficult and deeply contested. How has democracy fared in the Subcontinent? How has it contributed to forming the respective “national communities” in this troublesome region? How strongly has Punjab integrated into the Indian national community? These are some of the questions to which I would like to bring a historical assessment. The study will mainly concentrate on the specific strategies adopted by this divided nation and make a comparative evaluation. We also focus on how the “territorial, communal and ethnic” entities used democracy to dock themselves to the wider “national community”. On a theoretical side we will go on to seeing how ethnic communities become the real movers behind conceptual and “imagined communities”. All of this will of course be preceded by a brief historical review of Punjab before its eventual division and bifurcation. Added to this, weight will be given to the demonstration of how a community gaining power in one area

¹¹⁴ Byrappa, R. (2010). Punjab : When a “community” assails and conquers the “State.” *ÖT KONTINENS: AZ ÚJ-ÉS JELENKORI EGYETEMES TÖRTÉNETI TANSZÉK TUDOMÁNYOS KÖZLEMÉNYEI*, 8, 273–288.

of state-structure moves to other areas, in the hope of controlling the whole system.

As I have done in my earlier studies, I would like to express the customary cautionary note on the methodology of historical analysis in this part of the world. It is often assumed that analytical concepts developed in the Western world have difficulties fitting into the South Asian context. There are many reasons to disagree with this belief. Discounting for cultural specificities universal concepts should maintain their analytical substance; they continue to be powerful tools of historical investigation. If we encounter difficulties it is because of other reasons: because there is a big divide between the supposed and the real, because there is a gulf between the nominal and the real. Making a slight shift towards the actual elements moving historic dialectic will help us gain an informed understanding of history of the Subcontinent.

A brief historical review of Punjab (up to partition in 1947)

Punjab as a nation might have had ups and downs in its historical development but what is interesting to notice is a linear ascendance of the Sikhs at the detriment of other communities, especially the Hindu. Sikhism was in a way conceived as an ideological cement to the newly constituted Punjabi nation and its state structure. The fundamental traits of this new religion give us an insight into the socio-political situation of the Medieval Kingdom of Punjab - it was a melting pot of antagonistic sects and customs.¹¹⁵ Without some sort spiritual order, political order would be very difficult to maintain. So it was Guru Nanak, the founding father of Sikhism, who conceived a religion which transcends these divisions by including the best elements of all the religions (of both Hinduism and Islam). Sikhs were parallelly given, through customs and attire, a military aspect, in line with customs sometimes adopted by Islam. This double identity, as we will see, was of mixed blessings to the historical development of Punjab and its people.

The Shield and the Sword of the Empire:

¹¹⁵ Tambiah, 1996, 101.

Punjab was a land dictated by military imperatives. This was true for the Punjabi rulers and subsequently to the British Indian Empire, who were keen to develop it as a bastion against local tribes and not so distant Russian Empire. The direct consequence of this was dual: firstly the militarization of the Sikh and Muslim Punjabis within Punjab was very high. Secondly, the infrastructure development of the country was considerably high compared to the rest of British India. Considerable amount of resources went into building pathways, rail, agriculture to support army supplies and building of telegraphs as efficient means of communication etc.¹¹⁶ All these efforts were made in order to enhance physical and educational capabilities of the Punjabis, particularly those of the Sikh community who were thought to be the most able fighter breed of all.

Since the end of the so called "The Second Anglo-Sikh War" on the 12th of March 1849, and subsequent annexation of Punjab on 30th March, 1849, the Sikh enrollment into ranks of British army was high. The invading forces suffered more than 2000 casualties at the hands of the Sikhs and were positively impressed by their fighting tenacity.¹¹⁷ Rajit K. Mazumder in detailed study recounts how the Bengali content of the British Army in India was progressively replaced by the Punjabi and Sikh elements; especially after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. By 1858 the Punjabi content of the British Army in India went up from 30,000 to 75,000.¹¹⁸ The proximity of Russians in Central Asia was the next stage of development for the Sikhs. In 1880 the Punjabis represented 18.8 percent and by 1925 it is 45 percent, with Sikhs alone representing 12 percent of the British Army in India.¹¹⁹ These numbers are even more extraordinary when we realize that the military expenditure represented more than 50 percent of the budget, of which almost 60 percent was spent on military personnel.¹²⁰ In those years this amounted to enormous financial resources being pumped into the Punjabi

¹¹⁶ Mazumder, 2003, 87.

¹¹⁷ Rose, Newton, & Benians, 1988, 555.

¹¹⁸ Mazumder, 2003, 11.

¹¹⁹ Mazumder, 2003, 18.

¹²⁰ Mazumder, 2003, 20-22.

economy. Apart from these valuable financial resources being milked by the Punjab there was another very important consequence.

The British army becomes the cradle for Sikh nationalism. Through the time passed in the British army Sikhs start to nurture and expound their sense of being unique. A momentum of "esprit de corps" was developed. This experience, of being in contact with the modernity of ideas and perceptions, gives the Sikh community a sense of confidence in their capacities. In a sense the perception sinks in that if the British pay special regard to them it is because they have something more to offer than the rest of local lot. There was a general acceptance that the British succeeded in subjugating a big part of India because of their discipline, and Sikhs possessed more or less the same qualities. The common dream was that sometime in the near future Sikhs would be able to manage similar exploits. Thus was born the ethos of the Sikh national endeavor.

The tradition of recruiting Sikhs into the Indian Armed Forces continued well into the period after India's Independence. Since the withdrawal of the British Commandment Sikhs naturally filled important positions, enforcing further the recruitment of Sikhs to key positions in the armed forces of India. This delicate position of massive participation in the military structure on the one side and wanting to create a separate Sikh nation-state on the other complicates the situation for both sides. For India, given the tensions with Pakistan, it could not risk revamping its armed forces. For its part, the Sikh community would have lost its clout as well as the economic pitfalls if it tried to quit India's Armed Forces. But at the same time both were aware that this was an unhealthy situation. Future government negotiations on Sikh demands and their conduct have to be understood in relation with this delicate relationship. The Sikh community from the start tries to cash in on their privileges in the Army. In March 1931 Nehru praised the Sikh community to reinforce this awareness.¹²¹ As Myron Joel Aronoff puts it: *"Any analysis of the Punjab political system has to take into account extensive central influence in community and state affairs. It is this*

¹²¹ Darshi, 1999, chapter three.

interrelationship between smaller and larger centers of power which determines the course of Sikh politics..."¹²²

A final stand against dismemberment:

As the Punjabi elite realized that the British colonizers would leave the Subcontinent they tried desperately to avoid the division of their land on communal lines. Their method of building support for their cause consisted in opening two fronts. On the one side they tried to win the British deciders to their cause by using the "loyalty" card. In essence reminding their colonial masters that the Punjabis were, are and will be loyal to the British and their interests in South Asia, and sometimes even beyond. It is therefore the duty of the British Authorities to return a well deserved favor by preserving the territorial integrity of Punjab. Parallely they tried to gain ascendancy in the "independence movement" in order to weigh in the eventual debate on territorial partition. In a way showing the Congress and the Muslim League that without the accord and active participation of the Punjabis and the Sikh community in particular, dealing with the British would be a difficult task. It was their strong belief that these two lines of defense would eventually reinforce each other¹²³. They were convinced that this strategy would not backfire, even up to 1945 when everyone else was persuaded to the contrary.

It has to be mentioned that Sikhism might have been the forgotten community since British India contained three active communities: Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. In this they might have a responsibility. As V.P. Menon points out: *"A very salutary provision had been made for the resolving of major communal issues in the Constituent Assembly as between Hindus and Muslims; but the Sikhs, who were one of the three main communities of India, had been ignored. Baldev Singh urged that this provision should in fairness be extended to the Sikh community as well."*¹²⁴ But as he later points out: *"It was obviously more difficult to raise with any other party the position of the Sikhs in the*

¹²² Aronoff, 1980, 156.

¹²³ In August 20-21, 1944, an All Parties Sikh Conference lead by Baldev Singh came to the conclusion that "no settlement would be acceptable to the Sikhs if it was not based on prior consent" – see Grewal, 1998, 174.

¹²⁴ Menon, 1997, 291.

Constituent Assembly when, through their own decision, they remained outside it."¹²⁵ And maybe due to their absence the Article 25 of the Indian Constitution makes reference to Sikhs as being a sub category of Hinduism along the same lines as Jainism or Buddhism.¹²⁶ (Article 25 was bitterly contested by the Sikhs in the later years) This well illustrates the point made above that to the last minute the Sikh leaders believed that the British, as usual, would weigh in favor of the Sikhs. They seemed to overlook the fact that Britain after the World War II had changed and that a new rationale was born with the arrival of Clement Attlee and the Labour Party at the helm of Great Britain.

Jinnah had warned the British on the trouble that would ensue if they persisted in their plans to split Punjab and Bengal provinces.¹²⁷ He was not only referring to his personal wishes but was also referring to the economic and ethnic composition of these two provinces. None-the-less Jinnah was sympathetic to their demands only in as much as offering Punjab autonomy in a larger Muslim state. From his point of view ceding to Punjabi demands would be to reducing his chances of building an economically and militarily viable country. Punjab with all its economic and military strength would become the centre piece to his nation-building design. Secondly, he was not foreign to the fact that Punjab itself was a mini-empire with a diversity of people and national claims. As such having an independent Punjab, with its entire economic and military prowess intact, would be more dangerous than having a Hindu giant on his door-step.

Nehru and Congress for their part had their own concerns. Being a mini-empire Punjab was not only a Hindu-Muslim communal divide, but there was a linguistic divide between Hindi and Punjabi speakers. In 1944 C. Rajagopalachari uttered the possibility of the east Punjab further being divide on linguistic and cultural lines.¹²⁸ But there was no mention of division based on communal lines since there were practical obstacles for such a decision. And at that time the Sikh community focused more on the communal than on their

¹²⁵ Menon, 1997, 29.

¹²⁶ Dang, 2000, 93.

¹²⁷ Ahmed, 1997, XVIII.

¹²⁸ Grewal, 1998, 174.

linguistic identity. After the partition “...The displacement of Muslims increased the Hindu majority, and the Sikhs were transformed from a small, dispersed minority into a substantial, compact minority in Indian Punjab (East Punjab). Further, the urban – rural demographic pattern of post-independence Punjab was such that the Hindu population was concentrated largely in urban areas.”¹²⁹ And given the fact that two-thirds of the State's population was Hindu; it would be difficult to create Hindu “urban-enclaves” surrounded by Sikh rural community. This would have led to deep economic and infrastructural imbalances. Patel and Nehru refused to contemplate a state for the Sikh community.

Nehru at odds with East Punjab and the Sikh community:

Pandit Nehru, throughout his experience in the freedom struggle, had misgivings concerning the Sikh community. Historically, the Punjabis and especially the Sikh community always colluded with the British at their own convenience. Only at the final stages of the struggle did the Sikh community join the movement to oust the colonial power. He was also deeply discontent with the “traits” of radicalism this community seemed to represent. It had all the social and organizational ingredients to transform it into a potent political organization. This would disrupt his designs to transform India into a modern democracy built on individual freedoms. What was to come immediately after the independence seems to give reason to his fears. After the declaration of independence on both sides there was an eruption of violence all over Punjab but especially in the areas dominated by the Sikhs. Pandit Nehru, accompanied by Pakistan's newly appointed Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, visited the troubled areas and notably had the following reminder to warring Sikhs: “India,” he declared in a broadcast, “is not a communal State but a democratic State in which every citizen has equal rights. The Government is determined to protect these rights.”¹³⁰ This was going to be an uphill struggle for Nehru and his reformist colleagues.

¹²⁹ Deol, 2000, 93.

¹³⁰ Moraes, 1959, 362.

The political spectrum of East Punjab was divided into three distinct formations: the urban moderates, the rural interests (mainly Hindu) and the radicals represented by the Akali Dal (Sikhs). After the partition, the moderates and rural interests decided to cohabitate but the Akali Dal decided to stand outside and defend its corner.¹³¹ This move later will prove to be strategic one in the sense that it will become an arbitrator in very functional way. The Akali Dal does not engross all of the Sikh community; a part of it quietly immerses itself in the Congress hierarchy. From 1952 onwards they take on the function of agitator whenever the state government is dominated by the Hindus. Consequently the then Chief Minister, Bhim Sen Sachar, a close friend of Prime Minister Nehru, adopts stronger measures to maintain law and order but at the same time tries to accommodate to Akali Dal's demands.

Things however, take turn for the worse when in May 1955, the Akali Dal launches an intense period of agitation against the imposition of restrictions on holding public meetings and organizing processions. And 'on 4 July, the police entered the precincts of a Sikh shrine to arrest some of the agitators who were evading arrest. This enraged the sentiments of the Sikh'.¹³² And as usual more atrocities were committed. The main aim of these agitations was to show the Center that Bhim Sen Sachar had no means of controlling the situation on the ground. The man maneuvering to replace Sachar inside Congress was Pratap Singh Kairon, who after being an active member of Akali Dal moved to center-stage in the local Congress section. He presented himself as a man who could face up to the Akali Dal. And with the approval of Pandit Nehru, Pratap Singh Kairon became Chief Minister of Punjab on 23rd January 1956. And by October 1956 Kairon wielded enough power and persuasion to merge the Congress and Akali Dal together.¹³³ This strategy of one side creating trouble and by another side clamping it down became a practice which not only kept him in power but also pushed Sikh domination to the centre of the political domain.

¹³¹ Arora, 1990, 26.

¹³² Arora, 1990, 51.

¹³³ Arora, 1990, 59.

What the above illustration shows us is that a determined community can rely on a tight organization and control of its membership to catapult itself into any domain, may it be political or economic, to further its interests. Democracy might have been destined for individuals to express their choices, but the fact remains that, communities can empty the essence of democracy and fulfill their own interests. (It has to be noted that in 1951 Sikhs constituted 35 percent and Hindus 62,3 percent of the whole population of Punjab.) In the case of the Sikh community, in the above section, we saw how a numerically small community can get hold of the "security" or "law and order" dialectic and use it to its own advantage. On the one side we the Akali Dal of the Sikh community, creating the trouble, and on the other hand "moderate" Sikh community providing "law and order". The end result is that Sikh community dominates the political issues, in Punjab, for more than a decade. The entrenchment of this domination is maneuvered through the placement of Sikhs in key positions in the governmental structure and distribution of economic goods to the Sikh community. And this in turn creates a resource and structural concentration to push the Sikh community to the next level of struggle and emancipation.

The Sikh Community aspiring to the purity and nationhood:

Part of the Punjabi elite tried desperately to keep a semblance of secularity to avoid further dismemberment. From their perspective secularity guaranteed territorial expanse with a sufficient resource base. In fact, the political journey of Sikhism for the last century of courting secularity as long as it dominated the Punjabi empire; then transforming itself into a socio-religious community when political opportunities become challenged. And after the inevitable partition, it struggles to re-establish itself, through linguistic grounds, into a political community.

Linguistic axioms to create a state, was an ongoing process but these arguments were marginalized by the radicalism represented by Akali Dal activists. As usual the dialectic between the radicals and moderates continues. When the radicals momentarily exhaust all their persuasive resources, the moderates step in with more presentable demands axed on an incremental

process. In essence the situation of the Sikhs in the post-independence decades was to show the Centre that the actual state of Punjab in its present form does not accommodate the national aspirations of the Sikh community. To which the Centre produced a customary explanation saying that a status of “nation” cannot be awarded on communal lines. The States Reorganization Commission of 1955 investigated the demands of the Sikh community once again and yet again came up with the conclusion that there was no case for dividing the present Punjab State.¹³⁴ To temper the situation however, a regional plan was adopted in 1957 to recognize both Punjabi (in Gurmuki script – literally meaning the language of Guru Nanak) and Hindi (in Devnagari script) as official languages of the state.

It has to be remembered that from New Delhi's point of view a linguistic argument cut very little thread. Since both Hindi and Punjabi differ very little in content, and Hindi being almost two thirds of the states total population they failed to understand the logic of Sikh protestations. But the bi-lingual formula could not be extended to the political sphere since it would mean the creation of two “sub-legislatures”. This would mean going against the principle of administrative and territorial unity. After a fast by Sant Fateh (a moderate) Sikh leader, Prime Minister Nehru decides to the creation of commission (Das Commission) to inquiry into all Sikh grievances and report to Parliament. After several months of patient hearings the Commission announced candidly that there was ‘no cause of discrimination against the Sikhs in Punjab.’¹³⁵ It was the commission's view that the Sikhs were not subjugated to any form of abuse or discrimination by the Hindu majority. The radicals were disillusioned and retrieved themselves to reassess their future strategy.

But the Central Government was nervous about the situation. It rightly feared that the Akali Dal might get even more radical, even embrace armed struggle as an option. Being a border state the national security issue was taking the upper hand. It has to be pointed out that the Sino-Indian Border Conflict of 1962, putting China at a handshaking distance with Pakistan was flaring up

¹³⁴ Aggarwal, & Agrawal, 1992, 68.

¹³⁵ Aggarwal, & Agrawal, 1992, 72.

security concerns in New Delhi. Another factor to consider was the positive contribution and sacrifices incurred by the Sikh military community in Sino-Indian Border Conflict (1962-1963). These two issues seem to have weighed heavily on the Central Government's decision to set up a Parliamentary Committee on the Demand for Punjabi Suba (Punjab Nation) on the 6th September 1965.¹³⁶ It is interesting to note that the Parliamentary Committee and the Punjab Boundary Commission of 1966 which followed both set to work on 'linguistic' lines. This goes to showing that the Central Government was refusing to heed to radical demands but was more open and sympathetic to moderate demands. And accordingly the Reorganization Bill became an Act on 18 September, 1966. By this Act Punjab was further divided into two provinces – Punjab (Suba) and Haryana, with some districts integrated into Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.

When considering the split of Punjab into Punjab Suba and Haryana the Central Government refused to use communal criteria. It also had to weigh economic and administrative practicalities, access to water being a particularly important issue. This meant that not all areas demanded by the new Punjab Suba were accorded to it. The Center had also to take into consideration the fact that India has literally hundreds of vernaculars and ethnic communities, and not to speak of the thousands of tribal communities. If it were to set precedence then every community would be queuing up for nationhood and territorial claims. For a newly created India this would create havoc. One has to remember that a communally sensitive Kashmir is situated on the borders of Punjab. But the Sikh community was once again submerged with despair and protest was general. The concern was on the part of Sikhs was that Sikh areas were awarded to neighboring states, especially the city of Chandigarh which was kept outside. In the new situation however the Sikh community had everything to be content with. *"In 1951 the Sikhs constituted 35 percent, while the Hindus 62.3% and other religious groups constituted 2.7% (of the total population of the State). ... As per 1981 census, the Sikhs constituted*

¹³⁶ Aggarwal, & Agrawal, 1992, 75.

60.7% of the State population ... the Hindus constituted 36.9%.”¹³⁷ This goes to show that in terms of the democratic set-up Sikhs had an overwhelming superiority. None-the-less the clamor of discontent becomes more visible than ever before.

From nationhood to statehood – the struggle continues:

The Sikh community takes pulse of the democratic and federal system of India and comes to the conclusion that it cannot handle the inert obstacles present. Search for a radically new beginning was in the making. What becomes evident in the Sikh community's struggle is their drive to create a state composing solely of Sikhs, establishing a form of unitary state guided by religious principles -Khalistan. And beyond this, there might have been a keen desire to create a base from which Sikh power could be expanded. After suffering setbacks on the political methods, the Sikh community (at least the radical part of it) turns to preparation for a prolonged armed struggle. In the words of Harnik Deol: *“In the early phase, the existence of Akali Dal as a powerful ethno-regional party served to institutionalize potential conflict emanating from the ethno-region of Punjab. But the failure to seek an equitable solution to the moderate demands of the Akali Dal and the ruthless use of the repressive apparatus of the state against the minority were partly responsible for the beginnings of Sikh armed struggle.”*¹³⁸

By the mid-1970s preparation for a final move was on the way. The intellectual brain storming came in the form of what was to be called: Anandpur Sahib Resolution, 1973 (16-17 October).¹³⁹ This document represents a blue print of how the future Sikh homeland- Khalistan should be constructed. It begins by putting forward a list of demands (grievances) that the Central government should address as a precondition for Punjab to remain in the Indian Union. This was followed up by an extensive list of points on social and economic equality and even mention of minority rights in the new ensemble.

¹³⁷ Arora, 1990, 13.

¹³⁸ Deol, 2000, 124.

¹³⁹ Hannum, 1993, 310.

The document also included a strong warning to the Punjabi state-apparatus that it had to put its act together. For example: *"The Shiromani Akali Dal urges upon the Punjab Government to draw up such an economic plan for the state as would turn it into the leading province during the next ten years, by raising per capita income to Rs. 3000 and by generally an economic growth rate of 7% per annum as against 4% at National level."*¹⁴⁰ And this peculiar demand: "Special attention would be paid to science and technical field of education, with a particular emphasis on the study of Nuclear physics and space science..."¹⁴¹ Nuclear physics and space science might indicate this pool of knowledge was intended for military purposes. This also indicates the long-term planning the Sikh community was undertaking – rivaling both India and Pakistan.

The breaking point in the document was concerning the Punjab Reorganization Act (1966). The Akali Dal was not happy with Act because the denominator of the division of Punjab State was the "region". This meant that many Sikh villages were annexed to the neighboring states. The Akali Dal now proposed that the "village" should be taken as the basic unit; which would lead to a redressing of the situation.¹⁴² Along with this there was a reiteration on demands for deeper decentralization, giving the autonomy of legislation in all aspects of government except Defence, Foreign Relations, Currency and general communications. Without a positive outcome to these demands things would explode. And very soon things did explode.

Armed radicalism becomes generalized. A new situation gives way to new leaders and Sant Bhindranwale becomes the symbol of the cessionist movement. This period of recent history in the evolution of Sikhism is complicated and there are a numerous interpretations to make sense of this difficult period. The population was never homogenous; recruits to Sikhism came from many ethnic backgrounds. In the southern part of Punjab, the Sikh community was dominated by the 'Jat' community. Sant Bhindranwale came

¹⁴⁰ Aggarwal, & Agrawal, 1992, 94.

¹⁴¹ Aggarwal, & Agrawal, 1992, 107.

¹⁴² Aggarwal, & Agrawal, 1992, 93.

from this Jat community, which explains his radical approach to the problems impending upon the overall Sikh community. But historians like Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah claim that “Indira Gandhi and her circle of advisers saw in Bhindranwale an agent who could be used to challenges the Akali Dal leaders in Punjab. Their calculation was that Bhindranwale's aggressive promotion of exclusivist claims would help loosen the bonds with urban Hindus”¹⁴³ Whatever behind the scenes manipulation was, the essence of Congress policy was to flare-up violence and subsequently introduce “President's Rule” to control state-level executive and legislature.¹⁴⁴ Punjab was one of the main victim or unfortunate beneficiary of this policy. On February 27, 1984 this and similar manipulations forced the twice Chief Minister, Parkash Singh Badel, to publicly burn the Indian Constitution, and openly supported the hard line held by Bhindranwale.¹⁴⁵

Bhindranwale felt that he enjoyed enough support to retreat into the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar (one of the most sacred places for the Sikhs) and direct his armed campaign from thence. On the 6th of June 1984, Mrs. Gandhi decided to move troops onto the complex under the code name “Operation Blue Star”.¹⁴⁶ The immediate outcome was a human tragedy. The long-term outcome however was that the Sikh community transferred its dominant strategy to other spheres, namely that of the economy, tangent to a high penetration of the Congress Party. With the end of the armed struggle, the idea of an independent Punjab also came to an end. The strategy adopted hence forth was to dominate the arteries of Central power from inside.

Striding towards domination of India's political and economic institutions:

Economic liberalization, implemented in the 1990s by Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister, has benefited the Sikh community more than any other section of India's population. As the governor of the Central Bank of India,

¹⁴³ Tambiah, 1996, 106.

¹⁴⁴ For a in-depth analysis of the topic see: Arora, 1990, 71.

¹⁴⁵ Tambiah, 1996, 107.

¹⁴⁶ Tambiah, 1996, 108.

Manmohan Singh must have known of the high level of financial remittances from the Non-Resident Sikhs. This factor, in a country starved of rare capital would serve the purpose of Sikhs very well indeed. In Britain alone the Sikh community represents 336 000 and has the capacity to pool enormous amounts of financial resources.¹⁴⁷ The two main communities that are sources of emigration in India are the Punjabi (Sikh) and Bengali communities. Families left behind depend heavily upon financial support from those working abroad. In the words of Peter Jackson: *"The current rate of these transfers places India as the single largest remittance receiving country with close to US\$ 10 billion received in 1998."*¹⁴⁸ And since then the place of these remittances has been growing, now amounting to 3% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.¹⁴⁹

This has had a profound impact on the power structure in India. These financial resources coming from outside are not the only factors helping the Sikh community, managerial and technical help was also transmitted back home to help Sikh entrepreneurs who were taking advantages of liberalization masterminded by Dr. Manmohan Singh, now Prime Minister of India. It is not uncommon to find the names of Sikhs as chief executives of prominent corporations or prominent public organizations. It seems Sikhs finally succeeded to make their stamp on the Republic of India. It was worth the while to abandon armed struggle and embrace the more potent economic strategy.

In the following final part of this study I would like to assess some underlying theoretical percepts. I would like to highlight my assertion that nominal historical elements like perceived state constructs fail to give us in-depth insight into real historical dialectic; especially prolonged conflicts. When the legitimacy of a state, or more nominally the nation-state, is challenged scholars often search the reasons why the state is attacked. In my view we should instead focus on the nature of the legitimacy presented by states. We should ask ourselves how this legitimacy is realized, in terms of its strengths and

¹⁴⁷ Singh & Tatla, 2006, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Jackson, Craig & Dwyer, 2004, 81.

¹⁴⁹ The Economic Times, 2009. June 3.

weaknesses. The results produced by these different methodologies cannot be the same. Let us consider the following contexts:

1. Democracy - nominal and real

In my opinion Jürgen Habermas exemplifies the best of why democracy can become the key instrument to transcend communal and cultural divisions.¹⁵⁰ The main contribution of Habermas is that he argues that communal differences fade out if democracy is allowed to become a vehicle of argumentation, persuasion and consensus-building. If democracy becomes partial or nominal in its application then individuals will use communal lines of demarcation as shields of protection where conflict is more probable than consensus.

In 1966 the Sikh community represented more than 62 percent of the states population and had the opportunity to dominate the state democratically. Instead, they were embittered by the prospect and their anger increased. From outside it is difficult to understand their attitude but from inside they were well aware that India practices defunct decentralization and that real power resides in who ever controls New Delhi – the central organs of power. Whatever democratic consensus the Sikh community might gather will not be enough to give stability since the centre will always have an upper hand, especially in a strategic region like Punjab. In the words of Subhash Chander Arora: *“Not satisfied with the general powers of the Union to impart directions to the States, the Constitution goes a step further and calls upon every State under Article 257(A) not to impede or to prejudice in the manning of executive powers of the Union in the State. If any Union agency finds it difficult to function within a State, the Union Executive is empowered to issue appropriate directions to the State Government to remove all obstacles.”*¹⁵¹ As a result, democracy at State-level becomes a by-stander, meaning that popular sovereignty is impeded by those dominating the Federal structures. Democratic legitimacy at the State-level is overrun by central priorities.

¹⁵⁰ Shabani, 2003, 93.

¹⁵¹ Arora, 1990, 12.

The Punjab conflict is a good example why democracy, as a system, in India does not seem to produce results that are hoped for. It is a victim of entrenched communities who use it as an instrument to gain nominal legitimacy from its masses. And it has to be pointed out that the democratic game is a way of getting a soothing regard from the outside world. Democracy in India has failed to act as a ladder for able citizens to make their way up to take hold of the destiny of a people; whatever their communal background might be. Democracy it seems is undercut by "dominant" communities who refuse to share power. Thus democracy has been channeled into the realm of "nominal existence".

2. Dominating communities and subjugated communities:

What appears from the above study is that the Sikh community thought that it would get a square deal because it saw India's national construct in a fundamentally realistic way. Although India is composed with literally thousands of communities and sub-national units, the real beholders of power were indeed very few. In the eyes of the Sikh community power at the center was held by the Hindu Brahmins, (predominantly northern), the Bengalis and the Brahmin community from Madras. Historically, along with the Punjabis these were the communities which had "operated" the British Empire in India. After the Independence of India, the Punjabis felt that they had lost this privilege while the others continued to enjoy the fruits of the empire, in the name of a "surreal democracy". By being little more than two and half million (a minute percentage of India's population) in number they were all too aware that in a democratic system they could not put forward credible arguments for extra privileges. As they saw it was the dominating communities that were discriminating against the empowerment of the Sikh community. The saga of Sikh struggle for emancipation illustrates that well nurtured communities are the real movers in the Indian democratic configuration.

The Sikh conflict is generally considered as an act of separatism, to relinquish with central authority. But if we want to put this into a historical perspective,

one can easily assume that this was a conflict between dominant communities for a redistribution of power. The grievances of the Sikh community can be understood only in communal context. In the nationwide context, economically and politically there were hordes of communities much worse off than the Sikhs. These grievances transposed to the "dominant communities" context however make sense. The Bengalis and Kashmiri Brahmin's power was growing exponentially through the rapid growth of central and state bureaucracies, while that of the Sikhs was receding as army recruitment policies altered in order to give accesses to other sections of the population; leading to a weakening of their grasp over the military apparatus. The Sikh community felt cheated by the other "dominant" communities. The Congress leaders had promised the opposite during the years leading up to Independence.

3. Dominant communities, unconsolidated communities and national integration

One of the theoretical contention we can have with Benedict Anderson is that he presents national conscience as a spontaneous moment when the elites, after time passed with common culture and perception come together to give an institutional framework to their "common" national aspiration.¹⁵² Of the one hundred and ninety two member states of the United Nations there are very few who can said to have homogenous national populations. This goes to saying that a majority of today's nation-states are composed of a variety of communities, may they be cultural, religious or ethnic. My point is that not all the "sub-national" communities reach "maturity" at the same time. Some communities have an advance on national development. There are countries in which the more mature communities try to give positive impetus to those communities that are lagging behind. These countries have succeeded to a large extent by giving meaning to their democratic institutions. And in my view, in a majority of countries, the mature communities have adopted a strategy of trampling or at the best capping the development of unconsolidated

¹⁵² See Anderson, 1991.

communities. In such instances nations imagined or created by mature or dominant communities cannot be the ultimate nation, since the unconsolidated nations have yet to bring their contribution. The states structures are challenged by developing communities since it is not crafted to accommodate their national emancipation and expression, the best European example being that of Flanders inside Belgium.

The evolution of Punjab after independence does have traits of a community struggling to join the club of dominant communities. After the British precipitately decide to fold their tents, the Sikh community, apart from the communists, was probably the community best equipped to become a dominant community. Somehow the Sikh community slipped into a period of hesitation and uncertain. It was immersed by pressure coming from all directions. Their British backers were all sweet words without consistent promises. The Muslims of Punjab had decided to tie their fortunes with the Muslim League, while the Congress was blowing hot and cold over the hopes of an enhanced participation for the Sikhs. Not knowing which direction to take the Sikh community rapidly slips down and gets entangled in post-Partition adjustments without a clear-cut plan to move the community's interests. It has to be point out that, had the Sikh community fully participated in the constitutional debate the federal set-up would have tipped in favor of the states rather than New Delhi. The Sikh community's strong attachment to their territory might have pushed them towards deeper decentralization than that delivered by the Congress Party. The above illustrates well my point that communities, within a national set-up, do not mature, in the realm of expressing their national stakes, spontaneously as suggested by Benedict Anderson. The Andersonian legitimacy is very partial and hasty.

Conclusion:

The totally ineffective democratic consolidation; and the absence of political legitimacy have consequently led to a high degree of administrative centralization. Without a viable political and economic expression nations have reconstituted themselves into communities to gain maneuver space in

the central political instances. Punjab is a good illustration of how after repeated failure to recreate national self-expression, communities transform themselves into dominant communities to grab power over a wider country, as compared to their initial base. The political experience of Punjab shows that the democratic “muddle” is nothing more than what is waited from it. The real mover of power is the claim of a particular community on the administrative apparatus and institutional framework of India. By pursuing a non-democratic (never to be confused as being un-democratic) strategy the Sikh community has consistently and energetically pursued a tactic of placing its members in key positions. But of course, this development might not have positive impact on lesser, unconsolidated communities. In a sense, in the context of today's nation-states, the increasing strength of communities goes on to showing the ever-decreasing efficiency of the democratic system to integrate popular demands for policies aimed at bettering their everyday lives. It looks as if before speaking of the equality of individuals it will be better to shift focus unto the equality of communities, as a period of transition.

5-The Troubling Interval 1945-1950 (Part One)¹⁵³

The dark and dusty years of the 20th century Indian history

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.

¹⁵³ Byrappa, R. (2016). The Troubling Interval 1945-1950. *ÖT KONTINENS: AZ ÚJ- ÉS JELENKORI EGYETEMES TÖRTÉNETI TANSZÉK TUDOMÁNYOS KÖZLEMÉNYEI*, 2014(1), 141–159.

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."¹⁵⁴ 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

¹⁵⁴ Chakrabarty, 2008, 2.

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 Indian nation was defeated and brutally put down. As was expected, Brahmanism in the likes of Gandhi's and Nehru's 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.¹⁵⁵ 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 seaboards 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 today's 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.¹⁵⁶ This trend obliges us to re-evaluate, the contribution of the group led by M.K. 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"¹⁵⁷ Gandhi goes into

¹⁵⁵ Menon, 1957, 272.

¹⁵⁶ 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.

¹⁵⁷ Gandhi, 2017.

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."*¹⁵⁸ After cataloguing a long list of his very grave shortcomings, M.K. Gandhi solemnly declares, *"From a strictly ethical point of view, all these occasions must be regarded as moral lapses..."*¹⁵⁹ 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 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 indianity 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. Indianity equally applies to the India of previous conquerors, with its shifting shapes and frontiers. And although Gandhi admired the indianity of old and*

¹⁵⁸ Gandhi, 2017, Chapter 6, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Gandhi, 2017, Chapter 7, 12.

was bent of clearing from it the taint of untouchability, among other desirable elements, he politically adhered to India as shaped by British hands."¹⁶⁰ The Soviet Union had to reclassify Gandhi several times, as relations between the two countries evolved, and they had no difficulty in doing so.¹⁶¹ 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...'*¹⁶² 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 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.

¹⁶⁰ Panter-Brick, 2012.

¹⁶¹ Associated Press, 1972. January 26.

¹⁶² Zinkin, 1958.

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.¹⁶³ 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.¹⁶⁴ 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 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 nationalist, 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.

¹⁶³ The Milwaukee Sentinel, 1944, April 18.

¹⁶⁴ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1939. November 9.

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.”*¹⁶⁵ 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 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

¹⁶⁵ Kuracina, 2010, 160.

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.*"¹⁶⁶ 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 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.¹⁶⁷ 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, everyone thought the Committee to be a temporary structure. But once the Congress supremoes had

¹⁶⁶ Kuracina, 2010, 160.

¹⁶⁷ Kuracina, 2010, 160-161.

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 thirteen 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.'¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹ 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 Jayaprakash 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.*"¹⁷⁰ 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, we 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

¹⁶⁸ Kuracina, 2010, 161.

¹⁶⁹ Preston Grover, 1946. March 22, 9.

¹⁷⁰ Bourke-White, 1963, 283.

substantive reply to it. The legitimate question we have to ask ourselves concerning Jinnah is: Was Jinnah groomed for a specific 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.¹⁷¹ 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.¹⁷² 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."*¹⁷³ 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

¹⁷¹ The Milwaukee Journal, 1949. March 1, 6.

¹⁷² The Milwaukee Journal, 1949. March 1, 6.

¹⁷³ The Milwaukee Journal, 1949. March 1, 6.

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.¹⁷⁴ 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."*¹⁷⁵ 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

¹⁷⁴ The Milwaukee Journal, 1949. March 1, 6.

¹⁷⁵ Kuracina, 2010, 162.

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."*¹⁷⁶ It 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."*¹⁷⁷ 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."*¹⁷⁸ 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

¹⁷⁶ Macintyre, 2007. September 2.

¹⁷⁷ Tunzelmann, 2008, Prologue. (No page numbers given on the online version).

¹⁷⁸ Tunzelmann, 2008.

majority of them were proud to show that their principedom 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 livelihood 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 newfound 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."*¹⁷⁹ 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.'¹⁸⁰ 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

¹⁷⁹ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1947. September 13, 2.

¹⁸⁰ Talbot, 1947. June 7, 4.

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 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 be 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.”¹⁸¹ 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.*”¹⁸² 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.*”¹⁸³ 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.¹⁸⁴ 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

¹⁸¹ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1957. September 30, 29.

¹⁸² Onley, 2009, 44.

¹⁸³ Onley, 2007, section 4.

¹⁸⁴ Onley, 2009, 53.

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."*¹⁸⁵ 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."*¹⁸⁶ 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

¹⁸⁵ Corfield, 1975, 15-16.

¹⁸⁶ Mende (1950), 88. (The author of this current essay tried to make a fair retranslation from the French text to English)

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, 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.

6-The Troubling Interval 1945-1950 (Part Two)¹⁸⁷

Two states created and two nations destroyed

Abstract

As men dressed in impeccable white tweeds and equally impeccable white silks, topi and Shalwar Kamiz¹⁸⁸, paraded in the government palaces in New Delhi in 1947, little did one realise that they were planning one of the biggest butcheries in human history. Historians on all sides consciously or unconsciously become part of the blaming game and very interestingly none of them speak genocide. Most probably to maintain a false sense of respectability to their work or argument. The reality was that two nations were destroyed, Punjab and Bengal. Of the two, Punjab was structurally always kept separate from the 1840s onwards. What happened in 1946 and 1947 was that, the nation within a nation, the Sikh nation was temporarily neutralized at the cost of hundreds of thousands killed and millions scarred for life. The Punjab and Sikh conflict was bound to surface sooner or later because Sikhs, 5% of the population controlling a 95% Muslim population was bound to cause an upheaval, especially in a democratic structure. What was more, the Sikhs were ethnically different from the rest of the population. Here the problem was that a period of peaceful transition was denied, as millions were uprooted within a couple of months of notice. What was even more tragic and by all definition criminal was the systematic destruction of the Bengali nation. Although there were both Hindus and Muslims in this community, both in their big majority were ethnically Bengali. Religion was only a small fraction of their collective identity. Only a few decades earlier a plan by the Brits to divide this nation was crushed because all the Bengalis united behind the integrity of their nation. As historians, what is interesting for us to observe is that even after 1947 this policy continued under Pandit Nehru as Prime Minister. What had started as a plan in the 1840s was in large part completed in the 1940s and 1950s. Whether this was in the interest

¹⁸⁷ Byrappa, R. (2017). The Troubling Interval 1945-1950. *ÖT KONTINENS: AZ ÚJ- ÉS JELENKORI EGYETEMES TÖRTÉNETI TANSZÉK TUDOMÁNYOS KÖZLEMÉNYEI*, 2014(2), 65–86.

¹⁸⁸ Typical dress of Afghanistan, especially Pashtun areas. During the independence movement it was brought to prominence by leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru.

of the rest of India, it is difficult to say. But what historians can acknowledge is that part of Indian leaders, at the highest level, did participate in the systematic dismantling of the Bengali nation. They are therefore responsible for the bloodshed that resulted directly from their actions.

Keywords: *India, British-India, Pakistan, Bengal, Bangladesh, Hinduism, Congress, Gandhi, Bose, Nehru, Vallababhai, Brahmanism*

Methodology:

I realised from earlier research effort that, documents coming out of British India often possessed a coded language, use of phrases that could mean something and it's opposite. What is interesting is that the best of both Indian and British historians continue to avoid what to us might seem evident, always focusing on the officialised narrative instead. As much as it is possible I have tried to avoid the official and semi-official narrative from all sides. If possible I have deliberately tried to gather evidence from sources outside this perimeter. This sometimes has meant that I had to put my faith, as a historian, in the columns of newspapers far removed from the centre of gravity, those papers that more or less concentrated on putting forward simple facts to their readers, avoiding imposing opinions. Most of these journals brought home the essential mood of things as they unravelled. I have no doubt that for an attentive researcher, these journals are a boon, when one has access to them. Armed with these modest sources I will try to sketch the ABCs of India's history. I hope the reader will be able to make-up his or her own mind on the validity of my propositions.

In the previous number of the journal – *Öt kontinens / Five Continents*, in my essay: *The Troubling Interval 1945-1950 (Part One)*, I demonstrated that a small group of co-operators from north-western part of India, led by M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, consolidate their powerbase by systematically eliminating all opposition from other parts of British India and the independent states of India. What comes through is that the so called "independence struggle" was in reality a licenced violence, political-manoeuving, procedural trickery and

game of tactical elimination and having nothing to do with independence struggle as we know it in other contexts. I also suggested that certain leaders of the independence movement, namely Nehru and Gandhi, were probably “nurtured” by the British imperialists as a replacement for an unscheduled independence of the dominion. It was therefore natural and normal that “co-operation” was what took place between future leaders of India and the departing imperial authorities.

In this part, my main aim is to see how far Clement Attlee's responsibility was engaged in the tragedy. And to see if the above mentioned system of co-operation extended into the partitioning of the Indian Empire, into India and Pakistan and the structural adjustments beyond that. Given the haphazard manner in which it was conducted, decisions taken without necessary control on the ground and the urgency with which the whole process was conducted, completely ignoring the hitherto preached doctrines of non-violence, all point to complete amateurism on the part of the departing imperial authorities. But the British are adamant of their good faith that their part of the agreement was kept until the final hours of their responsibility. The “independencers” on the other hand are categorical that they were innocent in their dealings, but the imperial authorities left them in a helpless and hopeless situation. In this face-saving exercise it seems both sides have honourable explanations, with historians on both sides providing “substantiated” arguments. So as things are presented the dead have themselves to blame; and even here no one really knows how many, since at the time no one really cared. According to the much respected BBC and the mouth-piece of the British Empire: *“In a couple of months in the summer of 1947, a million people were slaughtered on both sides in the religious rioting.”*¹⁸⁹ The killing fields really began in 1946 and went well into 1948. Not so long ago, The New Yorker Magazine, in a review of the British historian William Dalrymple's ‘The Great Divide’, wrote the following: *“By 1948, as the great migration drew to a close, more than fifteen million people had been uprooted, and between one and two million were dead. The comparison with the (Nazi) death camps is not so far-fetched as it may*

¹⁸⁹ BBC, India's partition.

seem.”¹⁹⁰ Ironically speaking at a public event a few months after the partition Lord Mountbatten tried to paint a different picture, as one newspaper reported: *“Lord Mountbatten, unveiling a portrait of the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru, at India House today, said that 97 per cent of the people of India were living peacefully in their new-found freedom. The massacres had been bad enough, but he predicted that the final casualty figures would be a small fraction of the large figures which had been quoted.”*¹⁹¹ The official line of protective narrative in favour of Nehru was initiated, and since perpetrated.

The Indian and British historiographies are at odds with each on almost all accounts, and there will be no convergence of opinion on this matter in the distant horizon. One slight exception might be Bishwa Mohan Pandey who makes the following statement: *“The vivisection of the Indian subcontinent has been an issue of lively debate since 15 August 1947, when it was thrust upon ‘the people’ by the elites – alien and indigenous. What is noteworthy, is that this debate – academic and non-academic – is still inconclusive and seems to remain so in the near future.”*¹⁹² Pandey lands right in the vicinity of objectivity but very quickly jumps back into the classical structure of accusing “colonialism” for everything that is wrong with the way the country evolved under British Rule, when he continues: *“However, the colonial regime perceived immediately the inherent danger in the emerging secular nationalism. Therefore, it began to protect and promote the communalism among the Muslims and the Hindus. In this way, the nationalism had to struggle against the colonialism and communism as well.”*¹⁹³ What a pity that Pandey fails to detect real nationalism in a landscape of political banditry, political opportunism and outright ideological bigotry. According to Pandey the grand strategy of the colonials was to oppose secular nationalism with that of communalism.¹⁹⁴ But later he goes on to saying that the Brits did not create anything new, they were basing their strategy on the existing structures of division: *“They have exploited the complex Indian socio-cultural history to*

¹⁹⁰ Dalrymple, 2015. June, 29.

¹⁹¹ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1947. November 15, 3.

¹⁹² Pandey, 2003, 1.

¹⁹³ Pandey, 2003, 2.

¹⁹⁴ Pandey, 2003, 1-2.

reinforce the theory of a permanent and unbridgeable communal divide."¹⁹⁵ How bridgeable were the castes and communities over thousands of years? Colonialism and communal divisions were invented by the Mesopotamian Brahmins and used as a strategy of "divide and rule" in the Indian Subcontinent. This said Pandey comes close to giving us an accurate picture when he says that historians on the British side follow the same one sided approach to writing the history of British Rule in India: *"With few 'exceptions,' these committed ideologies support the colonial policies blindly and at times ahistorically and illogically. The entire intellectual effort has been sharply pointed at defending the rise and fulfilment of the British rule."*¹⁹⁶ What Pandey forgets to see and analyse is that the British perspective on Indian history is surely an exercise of denial but at the same time it legitimises the "protected" Indian elite of British India. What we have to agree upon is that the British historians were indeed adjusting their perspectives to the needs of the British Empire. But what is more important is that a positive portrayal of people like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah was part of that empire-biased narrative. The British historians, and foreign academics were the first to legitimise, epitomise and monopolise the agenda of history writing in favour of Gandhi and Nehru tandem.

Pandey puts a very interesting postulate to partial waste because he comes back to a conclusion on the issue that falls into the established, well-oiled manner of seeing the events that led to partition: *"Undoubtedly, the colonial regime played an important role in the partition of India. The imperial ideologies have been conscious of the blunders committed by the British-policy makers. Therefore, they have been busy in the 'face-saving and white washing' exercise."*¹⁹⁷ One thing that seems to come out of this valuable insight is that when it comes to Indian historians, most of them do not want to say certain things aloud. This is one of the reasons why even the most talented of them sometimes look like jugglers of a truth that they are unwilling foster. It is in a sense of self-censure, before they are officially rebuked or reprimanded. In the land of living gods this is very much understandable, but we have to make a slow

¹⁹⁵ Pandey, 2003, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Pandey, 2003, 3.

¹⁹⁷ Pandey, 2003, 3.

start on the right path. Let it be that Pandey is right that the British are partially or even two-thirds responsible for the partition. Let us concentrate on the one-third responsibility. Who were these local people that have blood on their hands, since no one is in doubt about the actual bloodbath, a bloodbath that mainly involved two age-old communities – the Bengalis and the Punjabis. We have to decide to move into a new paradigm, a new matrix of analysis, with a new set of parameters and assumptions. An impasse has surfaced and it has to be over-come.

In short, it is time we introduced appropriate terminology into the debate and cut out the slogan phraseology. If we do not want to see things as the British historians, as the insightful work demonstrates, then we have to stop using their terminology. Their “nationalists”, in the Pandey vision of things cannot be ours. The freedom fighters of their “choice” cannot be ours. Their preferential “elite” in no way can be that of an independent minded historian, the one that the likes of Pandey are waiting to see. Their heroes and saints for India cannot be ours. Their priorities in the narrative cannot be ours, the independent-minded historians. The empire-biased dialectic has to be replaced by something more appropriate, if not adequate. If the empire and its historiographic assets extol certain aspects of our past, then let us avoid the same by investigating the reasons why the British favoured, reinterpreted or outrighted created certain elements of what has become the accepted narrative. In the process we might find authentic historical supports, long distorted, disguised or destroyed by the British historiography. We have to make a tectonic shift towards a radically new configuration. How gigantic an effort this will prove to be, it is difficult to say. But in my thinking there is no doubt that we have to do this for the sake of our profession as historians, for the future generations, and we have to do this for the sake of those millions of Bengalis and Punjabis that perished in the name of someone else's freedom, through human-imposed famine and partition. My attempt here will be to put forward a perspective that demands more introspection on the part of the Indian community of historians as well as those abroad who are in one way or the other related to this effort of clarity. Most of the time, taking a different view is

a physical challenge in some environment. The task is even greater when one wants to question the status-quo and bring in some light into the misty assumptions that take us nowhere in the understanding of India's history. I do not for a moment pretend that the direction I am taking is the right one but it is my sincere conviction that we have to keep searching for answers.

As we dig deep into the logic of each of the parties involved, we will come to a temporary conclusion that the lives of the people, especially those living in Bengal was the last of the concerns of the "independencing" community. Attlee and Nehru had their own agendas, in which human catastrophe became a logical whole. If Churchill and Nehru have to bare the blame for the death of millions of Bengalis during the 1944 famine, then the estimated figure of two million deaths related to the "Partition of India" should logically be shared by Clement Attlee and Jawaharlal Nehru. The picture was often smudged and distorted concerning the contribution of Mohamed Ali Jinnah to the build-up towards the precipice. People often forget the fact that it was Gandhi's extremism that led to the creation of the Muslim League and treat its creation as a factor of division and the final partitioning of British India. The reality on the ground was that Jinnah was constantly forced to adapt his position to the whims and wishes of M.K. Gandhi. A calendar of catastrophe was imposed upon him and progressively he was transformed into a scapegoat. In whatever perspective one looks at and tries to understand the problem, Mohamed Ali Jinnah, with evidence available and the logical build-up of the circumstances, seems to be outside this perimeter of blame, as he and his supporters were opposed to the division of Punjab and Bengal and had little to gain from this eventuality; they knew well what would happen but had few means to stop it. There are many things that Jinnah and the Muslim League could be blamed for, but not the 1946-48 genocide. After the final meeting on the proposed partition of India, Mohamed Ali Jinnah made following declaration: "*We must concentrate all our energies to see that the transfer of power is effected in a peaceful and orderly manner.*"¹⁹⁸ He feared that the largely scattered population of Muslims, especially in small rural towns, would

¹⁹⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 1947. June 4, 5.

become a victim of attacks, where it would be difficult to protect them. The key actors are therefore Clement Attlee, the Labour Prime Minister of Britain, Jawaharlal Nehru, interim Prime Minister of the newly created Indian Dominion and M.K. Gandhi, the spiritual asset of all sides included. With the documental evidence available, one could easily say that the priorities at home and abroad dictated the colonial agenda of Clement Attlee, but this should not mean that Gandhi and Nehru were a passive participants to this deal.

Clement Attlee had a socialist agenda for Britain's post-war transformation, highly expected by his public after the general elections in 1945, but he had two acrobatic duties to accomplish before he could even dream of thinking of a state-funded social revolution. He had to redress a badly indebted and economically dysfunctional Britain. The war effort had over-stretched all its capacities to funding the armed forces, and this situation was not about to change with the end of the war. The promise of decolonisation, agreed under the Atlantic Charter and the eventual creation of the United Nations Organisation, had put into motion aspirations of freedom and independence across the British Empire which was dispersed across the globe. Another reality of Britain's role in Europe during and after the war was that massive land armies became the norm with the build-up of huge Red Army regiments at the door of Western Europe. And as the war came to an end, Britain was faced with a task much greater than that of the war against the Axis. This was a huge economic burden. Added to this, contrary to its expectations, Gandhis here and there were no longer a guarantee for peaceful departure of Britain from its colonial engagements. In the war against the Axis, Britain could count on the resources of its colonies, dominions and those of a benevolent United States, and now this was about to change; tacit or forced cooperation during the war had now turned into open rebellion in the colonies, an atmosphere of civil war reigned in whole swathes of the British Empire. As for the help from the United States it would be far-fetched to ask for aid to settle the matters of the British Empire, and as we will see Britain after the war was a deep pit, where financial resources disappeared very quickly.

Most of the historians dealing with the subcontinent of the 1940s fail to take fully into account the fact that British policy towards India went through radical changes. Churchill wanted to retain India's position in the British Empire but Attlee wanted set India free as soon as possible. In the previous government, in which Attlee was an accommodating member, Churchill's view was that Britain's colonies have to be maintained at all costs, because without its colonies Britain's position in the world would weaken too quickly. The war effort had demonstrated that the colonies had played a key role in winning the war. But the situation had evolved, as mentioned earlier the potential risks emanating from the colonies after the war was directly putting in danger the "home base" of Britain. This was exactly the base from which Clement Attlee had derived his legitimacy. Clement Attlee was a man in the shadows during the war, managing the home front, making tough decisions when needed. Now the dilemma was clear to him and his cabinet, especially Ernest Bevin, his foreign secretary: save British power overseas or rebuild British power at home, on new foundations. Never being an imperialist at heart or of ideological conviction, the Labour government made the decision to make a new start at home and abroad. Every effort had to go into giving Britain a competitive industrial capacity which can absorb the demographic surpluses resulting from demobilisation and decolonisation after the war. In the eyes of the British public and the trade unions it was increasingly difficult to justify the increasingly costly empire abroad. Empire had become a time-bomb in every sense, at its height it was the backbone of Britain's power, now as Attlee saw it, it could become a trap that would engulf Britain and put it at the same level as Portugal or Mongolia, after they lost their empire. The system of wartime rationing, for example, was maintained even after the war and extended to most of the basic consumer products. What was more depressing to the population was that even this was jeopardised because the United Kingdom was fast exhausting the \$3.750 billion loan given to it by the United States of America, at the end of the Second World War. The American senate having its own budgetary preoccupations in Eastern Asia and elsewhere, might not be so willing to extend further help. Let us not forget that the planned Marshall Plan

became effective only in late spring of 1948, in which Britain became one of the main beneficiaries.

On the very day that India was “accorded” independence Lord Brand presented an over-arching survey of the British Economic Crisis to the House of Lords. In the survey the noble Lord presented the government two economic steps to take (the speech was reproduced integrally in the Sydney Morning Herald): The overseas expenditure of 175 million sterling had to be drastically reduced. The other action being that of cutting imports and increasing Britain's exports. The noble lord concluded the presentation of his survey by this dire conclusion: *“I do not think that we can possibly be expected immediately to increase our exports by hundreds of millions of pounds on the wrong side caused by the extra prices in imports. The terms of trade have been very greatly against us in the last year.”*¹⁹⁹ In other words, the verdict from the world of industry and finance was evident: retreat from empire without delay. The noble lord painted a dire picture, if his advice was not heeded to in time, this is what will happen: *“We must recognise – and here I speak from knowledge of American conditions²⁰⁰ - that Congress probably may not be in time before the critical moment arrives for us. We ought, therefore, to prepare now, since the main burden in any case must fall on us. We cannot afford to run down either stocks of food or raw materials or our general reserves of dollars or gold below the danger point, so that the time may come when we are absolutely defenceless and simply rest on the succour of other nations without any means whatever of helping ourselves.”*²⁰¹ Lord Brand in his analysis goes on to hinting that Britain could face an inflationary pressure similar to that faced by some countries in continental Europe during the 1920s. The option was black and white: get out of all colonial quagmires, cut down on all non-essentials, and protect the only chance of survival - the home base. There was no time for endless parliamentary debates or committee hearings or any form of hesitation. No time equally for endless sequences of negotiations with colonial

¹⁹⁹ Lord Brand, 1947. August 15, 2.

²⁰⁰ Lord Brand, 1947. August 15, 2; Lord Brand, during the Second World War, was the chairman of the British Supply Council in Washington.

²⁰¹ Lord Brand, 1947. August 15, 2.

partners or co-operators. There was a sense of urgency and the time had come for quick action.

It is also very symptomatic that on the day of transfer of power to Nehru by imperial Britain, Winston Churchill, as leader of the opposition, took the BBC to transmit the following message to the British people in which he, *"warned the nation that a lower standard of living, hunger, and the dispersal or death of a large proportion of the population, faced the people if they submitted to 'totalitarian compulsion and regimentation.' "*²⁰² Winston Churchill was referring to the fact that Attlee's government had introduced industrial conscription and half a million Brits were preparing to emigrate to Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Churchill even urges his people to remain and fight, evoking the spirit of Dunkirk. This warning comes under the backdrop of bread rationing which began end of July, 1946.²⁰³ A measure that was avoided even in the difficult years of world war. Things were getting desperate in the British Isles. The danger of total disintegration of Britain was real.

Clement Attlee wasted no time in heeding to the warnings of Lord Brand, one prominent American newspaper wrote the following in its columns: *"The announcement that food purchases have been suspended completely followed a statement by Prime Minister Attlee that Britain was cutting food imports at the rate of \$48,000,000 a month".*²⁰⁴ In a lead article, Irvine Douglas, the London correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald, took the liberty to write the following on what was, not long ago, an empire on which the sun never set: *"Austerity is a slow poison. The British people have had seven years of it. Perhaps that is why they do not realise fully the gravity of the situation that will face them when the supply of dollars runs out in a few months' time."*²⁰⁵ The reader should be alerted to the fact that this article appeared on the 16th August 1947, meaning that it was probably drafted one day earlier, on the same day as India got its independence – handover to Nehru. The situation in Britain was only slightly better than the famine devastated and soon to be

²⁰² The Sydney Morning Herald, 1947. August 08, 3.

²⁰³ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1946. July 22, 2.

²⁰⁴ Pittsburgh Post Gazette, 1947. September 1, 4.

²⁰⁵ Douglas, 1947. August 16, 2.

dismembered Bengal. From Clement Attlee's point of view, the stakes were high and decisions had to be taken in haste without it being seen as such. This goes to show that from May 16, 1946 to the period of departure from its possessions in the Sub Continent, Britain was sliding towards its own precipice. With public discontent and industrial action from the unions, the atmosphere was one of impending catastrophe.

To be fair to the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, we have to take into account two important qualities to have a good appreciation of his intentions. First of all unlike Churchill, Attlee was a man of sincerity and possessed a sense of ethics, a quality which did not necessarily clash with his quality of being a man of action.²⁰⁶ The second quality was that he was a very practically man, he managed Britain during times of war, he possessed a sense of responsibility and foresight, always tilting towards fair solutions to problems, knowing well that this will spare him trouble in the future. These qualities have to be appreciated in their real value if we are to understand Britain's official stance towards India during the period 1945-1948. Sensing that things under the previous period had not yielded expected results, Attlee had changed the whole hierarchy in order to make a fresh start. The Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India were replaced along with new priorities of speed and swiftness on the agenda. When he took over as Prime Minister on August the 3rd 1945, Britain was in deep economic trouble but he was willing to give a space of time to solve the stalemate in the constitutional status of India, or the evolution of it. The earlier efforts had not showed a way out. In his final attempt Attlee proposes a solution which could have spared much bloodshed and communal agony.

In his White Paper on India, presented to the British Parliament on the 16th of May 1946 Clement Attlee makes the following historic statement that sometimes goes unmentioned: *"We ourselves are also convinced that any solution which involves a radical partition of the Punjab and Bengal, as this would do, would be contrary to the wishes and interests of a very large proportion of the inhabitants of these provinces. Bengal and Punjab each has its own common language and a long history and tradition. ... We have*

²⁰⁶ Hunt, 2016.

therefore been forced to the conclusion that neither a larger nor a smaller sovereign State of Pakistan would provide an acceptable solution for the communal problem."²⁰⁷ What is more interesting, and which shows the sheer honesty of the British Prime Minister, is that he brushes aside religion and takes a "linguistic" and civilisational approach, especially in consideration of the province of Bengal. He was against partition and as we go along we will realise that he was the only one, among the people involved, who was really opposed to this eventuality, because he knew what this in reality would mean, terrible bloodshed and sufferance.

To avoid the partition of the Subcontinent, Attlee puts forward a plan for a loose federation, to give a breathing space for rationality and the realistic aspirations of the people. His idea was to devise a system by which both Punjab and Bengal would become strong federal entities, allowing all parties to let the steam out, before starting a strong process of integration at a later period when things would have calmed down. In presenting his plan for a new constitutional arrangement in the House of Commons, Clement Attlee made the following statement: *"We are therefore unable to advise the British Government that the power which at present resides in British hands should be handed over to two entirely separate sovereign States."*²⁰⁸ Repeatedly, Attlee was warning the Indian leaders that they should choose a peaceful and constitutional solution and avoid fanatical orientations or solutions orientated by that.

The day after the Prime Minister of Britain, Clement Attlee, presented his White Paper on India, Lord Pethick-Lawrence (Secretary of State for India) gave a press conference where he gave an insight into how things would unfold on the ground. According to him the details were made clear to the Indian leaders. The correspondent of the Glasgow Herald wrote the following on that event: *"On the position of the British troops, Lord Petick-Lawrence said that if the constitution as framed by Indians was for complete independence outside the British Commonwealth one of the first things to happen would be the immediate withdrawal of British troops, except on the possible assumption that*

²⁰⁷ The Glasgow Herald, 1946. May 17, 6.

²⁰⁸ The Glasgow Herald, 1946. May 17, 6.

some arrangement would be made, which would be entirely in the hands of Indians. ... Someone, however, must be responsible for law and order in the country. They were anxious to hand over that responsibility, in so far as it remained with them, at the earliest possible opportunity to a fully constituted Indian Government."²⁰⁹ More than a year before the actual partition took place, the British authorities, at the highest level, made it very clear, the options that were available to the Indian leaders and what the consequences would be if they did not take the right steps. Britain would immediately withdraw all its armed forces from India, if the Indian leaders refused the multi-level federal arrangements in the freshly proposed constitution. No one in their right mind would want to be mixed up in a civil-war in a country with a population of 400 million and with literally hundreds of national communities. A few days later the governor-general, Lord Wavell at the occasion of talks on the form of interim government should take, repeated the same message and added that British paramountcy would not be transferred to anyone, it would be annulled. As the Australian Associated Press reports: *"The memorandum made clear that once a new and fully independent Government or Governments were created in British India, Britain would be unable to force the Administration to carry out the obligations of paramountcy. British troops would not be retained in India to force these obligations on any future Indian Government or Governments."*²¹⁰ Lord Wavell's warning was very clear, if you choose a violent and bloody option to settle your petty quarrels, do not count on British Armed forces to keep order. In the same statement he also advised his Indian partners to take the responsibilities without delay, no time should be lost. In other words, the British Government and its representation in India were openly telling the Indian leaders to "administratively" take over the country, while leaving enough time for political negotiations where the Indian community can continue in a more relaxed atmosphere. The Congress Party, in particular by using delaying tactics, wasted many valuable months of preparation.

²⁰⁹ The Glasgow Herald, 1946. May 18, 3.

²¹⁰ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1946. May 24, 3.

As the call for constitutional arrangement of May 16, 1946 came to nothing and partition became evident, the British Government was obliged to set strict deadlines for departure, but even this evolved as the situation became tight elsewhere. In early 1947 the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee was giving himself ample time to solve the Indian problem. In a declaration in the House of Commons he stated the following: *"His Majesty's Government wish to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect the transference of power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June, 1948."*²¹¹ Then the plans were revised down by eight months by October 1947. Then plan adjusted again, the calendar was adjusted bring forward the date of August 15, 1947, because, as explained earlier, the situation at home and abroad was deteriorating rapidly. The situation in Persia and the Middle-East was becoming extremely preoccupying for the British authorities over there. As explained earlier the catastrophic picture painted by Lord Brand in the middle of August 1947 was already on the rails much earlier, reports coming from all directions had created an extreme sense of panic in the British echelons.

The reason why the British authorities kept stressing the fact that the British troops will be out was that the resources for maintaining them were running out. The cuts in the armed forces were planned and the deadlines had to be kept. The Sydney Morning Herald reported the following on the 11th of August 1947: *"The reduction, owing to the economic crisis, of Britain's armed forces to 1,007,000 men was less than the War Office expected and it is significant that the cut of 80,000 men in the original estimate is accounted for largely by the evacuation of British battalions from Japan-Australians taking over their duties-the coming evacuation of 60,000 troops from India and the evacuation (expected to be completed in November) of a final batch of 3,000 men from Burma."*²¹² The priority of the British Government had turned to the Middle East because of two reasons: strategic concerns and Jewish terrorism. This had a direct impact on the security and order issues in India. Strategically, Britain still

²¹¹ The Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee): Change of Viceroy. 1947. February 10. 1395-1404.

²¹² The Sydney Morning Herald, 1947. August 11, 2.

needed to keep open the Suez Canal, Egypt had taken the issue to the United Nations and there were uncertainties looming over the issue. Another strategic issue was the Trans Jordanian oil pipelines. Persia was itself engaged in skirmishes with Azerbaijan putting in danger the pre-war Anglo-Russian order in that region. This would jeopardise vital oil supplies. But given the scale of the economic crisis at home, Britain was reassessing even this issue. As the Sydney Morning Herald reminds: *"The concentration of British Middle East forces possibly in Transjordan – strategically placed for the defence of the oil pipeline- is now under the urgent consideration of the Minister for Defence."*²¹³ The disintegration of British power between the year 1946 and 1948 was happening at an amazing pace. This strategic unravelling was coupled with the battle for Palestine. By the middle of 1946 coordinated Jewish armed activity was erupting in which along with the Palestinians the main victims were the British armed personnel, in a lot of cases officers and high ranking military hierarchy. Brits were regularly kidnaped and murdered without remorse.²¹⁴ There was intense criticism of Attlee Government because it deployed 80,000 soldiers in Palestine for policing.²¹⁵ But the sight of dead soldiers being brought back home would have had an even more devastating effect on the British public. Protesting against the wish of the World Jewish Congress and the US that more Jews be allowed to settle one newspaper had the following reaction: *"Everything serves to underline the truth of Mr. Bevin's words last week, when he declared that if a further 100,000 Jews were admitted to Palestine another division of British troops would be required to keep order there – a commitment which, he added, his Government was not prepared to accept."*²¹⁶ Starting from around 10,000 British troops stationed in Palestine, the number rose to 100,000 after the Second World War.²¹⁷ And there seemed no end to the problem. All the reorganisation effort made the Middle East a priority leaving India and Asia a distant concern. On 14th November 1947, the First Sea Lord,

²¹³ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1947. August 11, 2.

²¹⁴ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1946. June 19, 1.

²¹⁵ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1947. August 11, 2.

²¹⁶ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1946. June 22, 2.

²¹⁷ There is a lot of data collected at this website: British Forces in Palestine. It is rich in data and anecdote. The reader should be alerted to the fact that although true it might not be data certified by an official authority.

Lord Hall, told a press conference *"that the Royal Navy had been reduced from a peak of 850,000 men in 1945 to 180,000 on October 1, 1947. By March, 1948, it would probably be reduced to 147,000 ... After reorganisation, the strength of the Mediterranean Fleet would be as much as at present, and the Home Fleet would be almost as strong as before reorganisation."*²¹⁸ Navy is essential to the future of Britain as a European power and land armies were considered increasingly as non-essential. Wherever possible authority and responsibility was swiftly handed over to the locals: *"The Egyptian Army is to be increased by 55,000 to a total strength of 100,000 in the next six months, and will take over British depots, stores, and equipment to enable it to meet the greater responsibilities in which the withdrawal of British troops will involve it."*²¹⁹ In every corner of the British Empire and protectorates was, *"...the transfer to the Dominions of primary responsibility for the defence of their own areas"*²²⁰ From the early months of 1946 this was the name of the game, from the shores of occupied Japan to the coast of Egypt, everyone knew this and the British Government made the message loud and clear. It was reported in July 1946 that the only Indian Peer in the House of Lords, Baroon Aroon Kumar Sinha, had *"declared that the position in India was critical, but he knew that the people of India at last felt that Great Britain meant to carry out her pledged word."*²²¹ From this perspective it would be a historical error to blame the British Government of Clement Attlee for the Great Indian Genocide. They said that the British army would not be there to protect anyone. The immediate responsibility for the genocide therefore comes from other quarters.

The Indian "freedom fighting" community made huge blunders in not taking Attlee for his word, unlike Churchill he was not playing a game of poker with them. Their brinkmanship was going to be their trap, but not for all. As we will see later Gandhi and Nehru were engineering towards a precipitous withdrawal of Britain from India. They did not wish for a settled withdrawal, they wanted to avoid a situation where the "confederal" form of constitution is

²¹⁸ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1947. November 15, 3.

²¹⁹ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1946. May 25, 2.

²²⁰ The Sydney Morning Herald, 1946. June 22, 2.

²²¹ The Sydney Morning Herald. 1946, July 19, 6.

legitimised. And when the moment arrived everyone could pretend to be surprised. It is interesting that after the final phase of negotiations, Mohamed Ali Jinnah is the only person to react as if it was the first time he came across the latest plan for the division of both Punjab and Bengal. At least some of the details were new to him, which made him state the following after the June 3, 1947 meeting, one month before the Cyril Radcliffe started to put the final touches in the Border Commission: *"The plan has got to be carefully examined in its pros and cons before a final decision can be taken."*²²² Jinnah even says that the process of partition should be orderly carefully planned.

On the part of Jawaharlal Nehru the temperament is markedly different, showing a feeling that he was aware of it and more importantly he had made up his mind, even before consulting his Congress colleagues: "It is with no joy in my heart that I commend these proposals, but I am convinced that our decision is right." And goes on to concluding: *"It may be that in this way we shall reach a United India sooner than otherwise, and that she will have a stronger and more secure foundation."*²²³ This is a very enigmatic comment coming from a man who presided over the vivisection of the subcontinent. He implies that he somehow possessed a grand strategy, in which everything would be broken-up and put back together at a later date. Or he was contemplating the fact that almost 40% of new territory would be acquired by British India as the kings and princes were forced to abdicate. Interestingly, as early as June 1946 after being arrested at the border of the Kingdom of Kashmir he revealed his intentions to the reporters of Reuters: *"Pandit Nehru, commenting yesterday on his experiences in Kashmir, said that he did not consider himself an outsider in any Indian State. "The whole of India is my home, and I claim the right to go to any part," he added. (When he arrived in Kashmir last week he was detained for two days for defying a ban on his presence and for persisting in trying to reach Srinagar.)"*²²⁴ He knew already what he was going to do when power was transferred. Let us not forget that his arrest in Kashmir took place on the 23rd of 1946. One year before Radcliffe had arrived

²²² The Glasgow Herald, 1947. June 4, 5.

²²³ The Glasgow Herald, 1947. June 4, 5.

²²⁴ The Glasgow Herald, 1946. June 24, 3.

in India to draw the actual borders. His plans were prepared well before they actually took place.

Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, had some valuable advice for the Indian leaders: *"Union cannot be by force,"* said Lord Pethick-Lawrence. *"It must be by agreement, and it will be the task of the Constituent Assembly to obtain that agreement, which will be possible if majority and minority alike are tolerant and prepared to co-operate for the good of all India."*²²⁵ He in his clairvoyance had seen, heard and felt what was going on in the official parlours in New Delhi. It was not so easy to heed to this common sense. In 1942 Walter Lippmann, the American writer and reporter, in a syndicated article, wrote the following about the dilemmas waiting the Indian leaders: *"The problem of India is how the separate peoples of India can be both independent and united. This is a problem which the separate peoples of Europe have never been able to solve, though they are politically more experienced than the Indians. No one has ever found a way to give the peoples of Europe self-determination and independence and at the same time to unite them in one European commonwealth."*²²⁶ India was a land of many languages, communities and more importantly a country of many races. Many mistakenly think that the British were holding power by putting religious communities one against another. This was only superciliously true. There were other reasons which superseded religious identities, but the scope of this essay is limited and therefore it would not be appropriate to start a new debate here. However, it has to be reminded that the pull of identities was getting stronger by the day. Walter Lippmann adds: *"For once it was certain that Britain was going, and going fairly soon, a terrific struggle was bound to ensue as to whether the Congress party Hindus were to rule all of India. The stakes are tremendous. The stakes are an empire. And Gandhi's demand that his party be granted immediately the control of the war-time government of all of India is the one way in which a Hindu empire might be established and consolidated."*²²⁷ The academic debate on the freedom movement does not

²²⁵ The Sydney Morning Herald. 1946, July 19, 6.

²²⁶ Lippmann, 1942. October 15, 2.

²²⁷ Lippmann, 1942. October 15, 2.

contextualise the struggle. Walter Lipmann, who took a keen interest in India pointed out as early as 1930s and later in 1942 what was at stake. He got his analysis perfectly right.

The struggle was not to free India or the Indian people, the struggle was to know who would get the consolidated empire. Neither was it a struggle against the British, first it was about who would co-govern India with the British and later when the British decided to leave, the mighty quarrel was about in whose hands the falling apple should land. Those who are perceptive enough should see the minutes and declarations of the annual meetings of the Congress movement. It was always a wish list for more jobs for the North-West Indian elite. Nothing more. Gandhi and Nehru's biggest asset was the support they received from the British, it was not the support they received from the people. This was a fact that they had to live with and capitalise on. Both knew too well that as soon as the British leave, this support would more or less vanish overnight. Nehru and Gandhi had a common direction but their agendas varied in depth and in momentum.

In the final years of the partition the tension between Nehru and Gandhi was visible. Gandhi was a Gujarati, who believed in empires where his own people, mighty traders, could have unlimited access; all his life he supported the British Empire, because it was a guarantee of power and prosperity to his community. Hinduism was his weapon and instrument through which he consolidate this community's hold on the British Indian Empire, which in itself belonged to a much larger world empire – the British Empire. The trading communities which supported him all the way through knew what they wanted. In this sense, Gandhi was in the avant-garde of the "world-system" logic and thinking, he was neither an Indian patriot nor an Indian nationalist. Nehru was Persian-Afghan-Kashmiri descent, who from childhood was groomed to be a leader. He was more parochial in his ambitions, and had more pressing urge to govern than Gandhi. While Gandhi, coming from the peripherals of the Mesopotamian tradition was ever was fascinated by great empires, Nehru stayed true to his origin, he craved for something tangible. Power to him meant something totally different to what it meant to M.K. Gandhi. Nehru believed in a temporal vision

and exercise of power. In the final years of the Second World War, Churchill and most of the British establishment saw the dangers of Gandhi's vision to their own standing. Hence onwards, relations with Gandhi are managed tactfully because he is still needed for crowd controlling, but their focus shifts wholeheartedly towards Nehru.²²⁸ As Churchill repeatedly said, Nehru could be used beyond India as well, probably in the whole of Asia if not beyond, an instrument against the expansion of communism.²²⁹ One has to realise that Mohamed Ali Jinnah was a collateral beneficiary to this behind the scenes battle. In this too Churchill made an undeniable contribution, as a way of countering Gandhi's desires for total empire. Jinnah was introduced into the game but cannot be considered as the main actor. Churchill, Gandhi and Nehru had two things in common, their hatred of the Bengalis and the Great Indian Genocide. This genocide played on from 1942 to 1948 where the three were the main actors. The first part was the Bengal famine that was engineered to wipe-out millions of innocent Bengalis because of an alleged support to Japan. The second party of the genocide is bloodier, although it claimed fewer millions. In this part Churchill takes back stages, which means Nehru and Gandhi remain in the forefront. We have every reason to believe that the Great Indian Genocide of 1946-1948 can be attributed to the tug of war and silent war of attrition between Gandhi and Nehru.

In a historic analysis of the Indian partition and what ensued, we should not talk about countries, instead we should talk about people, of individual responsibility. People make decisions and not countries. Blaming the "British" or the "Indians" takes us nowhere. In this part I have tried to show the responsibility of Clement Attlee in the group of protagonists involved: Attlee, Gandhi and Nehru. I hope to have made an honest and factual demonstration that Clement Attlee's Government did everything in its means to leave India in an organised manner. It did not give up in its will to leave behind a peaceful and constitutionally harmonious India. Faced with total political annihilation at home, Clement Attlee put all diplomatic and material resources to produce a

²²⁸ Tondon, Mahatma Gandhi and Winston Churchill.

²²⁹ Langworth, 2017.

negotiated constitutional arrangement in India, to protect its people from unwarranted divisions and bloodshed as it often was. Clement Attlee felt that it was the final responsibility of the British Government to have consideration for people of India, he realised in the final hour of British rule in India that people were forgotten. The entire effort of Attlee was to keep a small door open to popular sovereignty, for people's legitimacy to have its place. For this reason, Clement Attlee failed, but the facts are there for all to witness of his good intentions towards the Indian people. There were secret deals done with Nehru on various issues in an exercise of damage limitation to the interests of his own country, in a moment of unseen magnitude of economic crisis. Attlee's efforts were countered by two individuals in a matrix of manipulations, hesitations and masquerading abnegations. Nehru and Gandhi knew exactly what was happening in Britain, the economic crisis that was pulverizing British power in the world, they knew the urgency that had engulfed the British government. For reasons of their own making they refused to take Clement Attlee's proposals seriously.

In the next part, third part in the series, I propose to examine Gandhi's and Nehru's direct implication and engagement in the Great Indian Genocide. Nehru might have been one the greatest Prime Ministers of India but this does not mean that his participation and handling of the partition can be brushed aside by blaming others. Wearing impeccable white robes does not mean that they were not stained with traces of blood. No amount of bleach powder and sponsored propaganda can remove these stains. It could be a promising day when historians can show the way forward, so that India can make peace with itself and its past.

7-The Roots of Environmental Degradation in South Asia²³⁰

A historical perspective on structural resilience

Abstract

For thousands of years, local patriotism has been the pillar of environmental protection and key to the sustainable natural habitat in South Asia. Neither periodic foreign conquest nor the brutal British imperialism could dismantle the system, but independence from the British and consequent nation-building has irreversibly defeated local patriotism and environmental conservation in South Asia, especially in India. Indeed, nation-building, dispossessing people of their property and environmental degradation are not necessarily concepts that are good bedfellows, but South Asia is different in everything. From environmental point of view of, the colonial system of resource extraction has remained and intensified. In essence what is packaged as state-building in South Asia is nothing more than the re-appropriation of vital resources by the Fringe Mesopotamians who have replaced the British as the ruling elite in the post-independence India. Environmental destruction is a consequence of the Fringe Mesopotamian position-building and consolidation in the Subcontinent. One of main strategies mobilised to this extent has been urbanisation. Urbanisation has become the centrifugal method used against local people. Environmental destruction is the direct consequence of this camouflaged system of nation-building that Jawaharlal Nehru initiated. And thus a common Indian dream and aspiration for unity as one nation is fast becoming an uncontrollable nightmare.

Keywords: Environmental Resilience, Nation-building, Jawaharlal Nehru, environmental destruction, Fringe Mesopotamia, Urban fragmentation

Concepts:

²³⁰ Byrappa, R. (2020). Államépítés, „népfosztás” és környezetpusztítás párhuzamos folyamatai Dél-Ázsiában. In *Mesterséges természetesség* (pp. 87–105). (This article was published in Hungarian. I am using the English version of the text here. Although the translation might differ slightly, the original English text is loyal to the translation in Hungarian. I have decided to include it here because it constitutes an important element in the whole historic matrix.)

Fringe Mesopotamia: is a concept that I have talked before in other contexts, and am trying to research its various aspects, in the ambition of giving a well-defined identity to certain group of people. An identity of a 'floating' people who slowly achieved a geographic identity in South Asia. For me Fringe Mesopotamia has its core value system deeply anchored in the Mesopotamian region although it transplanted itself into the South Asian context. Religion has nothing to do with this core value system or ethical hierarchy. Geographically, the core of Fringe Mesopotamia could be said to what is today's Pakistan, and in today's Indian side – Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat and north-western parts of Maharashtra. To this has to be added the diasporic elements pertain to these regions.

South Asia: is intermittently used with India not because I want to add confusion but it is an attempt to show that what is true in India's case is also true in the case of other South Asian components, constituting a unique South Asian system.

Introduction:

The natural environmental cycle is fragile and always had a fine balance in South Asia. What is alarming however, is that the human factor in the degradation of the environment is increasingly the dominant factor. If it is degraded any further, the livelihood of more than a billion people could be in danger, dwarfing the problems faced by Eastern Africa in the early 1980s. Outside the natural ecological cycle, the environmental issues confronting South Asia are multi-facet and multi-dimensional. A lot has been said and argued of the specific anachronisms of the Indian situation. My contribution will focus instead on specific aspects of the 'state-society' relations of the South Asian context, and see how their colonial heritage and neo-colonial expansion is a mirror image of the destruction of nature in the Subcontinent. Discrepant notions of the nation-state have pushed the stark realities of South Asian state and society into the darkness, away from the public eye. These hidden realities are the key to our understanding of the environmental precipice that South

Asia is confronted with. The most important and glaring reality is that urbanisation is the biggest factor contributing to ecological imbalances. I would like to stress the fact that urbanisation in India is fundamentally foreign in nature. Urbanisation in India is sometimes treated in the specific context of British colonial policies but even before this period urbanisation was foreign and my argument is that the British heritage only reinforce the pre-existing structures. The ills of India's ecology can be found in every aspect of socio-political and economic system supporting urbanisation. The compounding impact of all these factors at work is that local patriotism, which has a fundamental affinity to environmental conservation, is being depleted of all its substance.

In terms of methodology, this study is divided into three coherent parts. In the first part the nature of state society relations will be shown to show the reader the specific aspects that blocking a rational approach to slowing the environmental problems. In this part it will be shown that urbanization as the key issue. The reasons why urbanisation is a problem can be found in its origins in South Asia. Consequently, the second part will be dealing with the origins of urbanization and its direct impact on the environment because of its specific foreign roots. Finally in the third part will be dealing with Nehru's disguised mission of nation-building, which in reality was aimed at destroying the fundamental fabric of India in order to make Fringe Mesopotamia the sole master of South Asia. Naturally, environmental preservation became the biggest casualty to this hijacking of the South Asian system.

Part I: State and Society relations and environmental protection in South Asia

Across the world, wherever environmental degradation is prevented or reversed, one witnesses a strong symbiosis between state and society interaction and cooperation. One of the main reason for the successful management of state-society relations in countries like Germany is that both the state and the society feel that they have a real stake in improve the environment and make it as sustainable as possible. In South Asia somehow this calculus is missing. There could be many reasons for this, the lack of education,

the proper application of the laws and the provisions made in the constitution concerning environmental protection. The level of poverty or lack of revenue could also be a factor in the low degree of environmental engagement, since poor people cannot afford the level of costs imposed by sustainable environment in today's world. But this is also questionable. It could be hundred other reasons, but how could there be so much disregard for the environment, in a country where the life and well-being of cows and monkeys is considered relatively more important than that of human-beings? One answer to this question is that environmental protection, the physical act of environmental preservation is "outlawed", mildly put, the social concern for the environment is degraded and dislocated.

To put into context the above statement, let me explain why things are so skewed in South Asia, especially in India. Like all countries, India has enough educated people to make environmental protection a successful issue. None can pretend that everyone who has a university degree has deeper understanding of the environment or will become more concerned for the environment because of their educational background. A certain level of education can be useful, but it cannot be considered as a prerequisite for a better environmental protection in South Asia or anywhere else for that matter. Same thing could be said about the level of income, put into a global perspective South Asia is still the poorest in terms of the number of people living below the poverty line. But in a region where more than two-thirds of the population, mainly the poorest section of the population, works and gets its income from agriculture, environment should be a daily concern. It looks as if environment is not a rich person's concern in South Asia. In a recent study the World Bank gave this warning: *"Eight hundred million South Asians to be exact – or half the region's population—are at risk to see their standards of living and incomes decline as rising temperatures and more erratic rainfalls will cut down crop yields, make water more scarce, and push more people away from their homes to seek safer places."* And the study continues, *"... with many residents subsisting on farming, higher incidences of droughts or floods combined with extreme heat could further drive down their fragile wellbeing and force more*

people into poverty.”²³¹ In a later section dealing with the village and rurality we will see how this very population is disenfranchised and cannot oversee its basic environmental function.

Even from a religious point of view, South Asian is one of the most environmental-friendly in the whole planet. But here too, things are skewed. Religion does not play its part because the religious construction is not what it deems to be. Under the carefully crafted colonial edification Hinduism seems a monolith of a religion, especially when we consider today's Fringe Mesopotamian religious fanaticism, but in reality it is the thin oil that spreads over thousands of shamanistic religions and philosophical existence. The sole objective of these naturist and shamanistic religions was the up-keeping of nature's primacy, nature as the highest ethic. Defending the shamanistic way of life, the primacy of nature meant that environmental preservation was internalised into the shamanistic system of belief and way of life, in a holistic manner. Hierarchy did not mean man's dominance over nature, nor did it mean domination by one another. But as with many things, the oily surface gets all the shine, religious beliefs peppered with social and ethnic hierarchies dictate people's attitudes towards environment and the cohabitation with it. Although 'Hinduism' (here I mean the non-coordinated ocean of beliefs) originally put enormous emphasis upon rational relation with nature, progressively the Fringe Mesopotamian sect has incrustated its own value-system into the bigger philosophical existential frame. According to this relatively new incrustation, rational approach to people's lives and their environment does not exist. This ethic's first priority was to move those who believed in the shamanistic principle to the lowest level of new social pyramid. And where as before they had no or only a minimal "religious" expenditure, now with the incrustation of Fringe Mesopotamian *Brah-amin* (religious attendant/ clerk from the Brahmi region, now between Pakistan and Iran) religion became an economic cost, putting an extra burden on nature. The Fringe Mesopotamian version of Hinduism not only has an irrational approach and relation to the

²³¹ The World Bank, 2018. April 20.

environment, but it also directly imposes an unbearable economic cost upon man and nature alike.

In the Fringe Mesopotamian version of Hinduism, caste and ethnic differences take precedence over religious equanimity; constant friction is partly avoided by socially imposed segregation of the caste system. This breeds neither common concern nor a common cause for nature. Apathy becomes the name of the game. People become bystanders as things go from bad to worse. Everyone is busy with his or her own 'ethnic group', Fringe Mesopotamian attitude is thus multiplied and amplified. As one noted observer puts it: *"Indian cities are multi-ethnic places of tension. For example, Kolkata's (Calcutta) cultural communities have retained their distinct socio-cultural identities through festivals, educational institutions, clubs, recreational centres, libraries, and newspapers in order to re-establish the communities' distinct socio-cultural identities," and this critical mass not only promotes in-group interaction, but also arouses "intense conflict".*"²³² Rapid and uncontrolled urban expansion requires intense cooperation at different levels of state and society but this is not coming about in India: *"Affluent urbanites exposure to and competition with members of out-groups in social and work settings may also promote feelings of unsettling. Such urban meritocracy can contract traditional gender and generational social roles, leaving affluent Hindu urbanites socially disoriented."*²³³ Fringe Mesopotamian colonial design, skewed nationalism and the politicisation of socio-ethnic differences means that division is deeply entrenched in India, as elsewhere in South Asia. Environmental concern thus becomes a causality to entrenched divisions that run deep into the system.

All this shows that when society cannot grapple with a particular issue or problem, the state should intervene to strengthen the 'civic sphere', moving the issue away from the socio-religious sphere. It seems that in India the state is everywhere and nowhere. But there are those that argue that state reach is intact: *"There is particularly no section of society that has remained untouched*

²³² Stroope, 2012, 501.

²³³ Stroope, 2012, 507.

by the developmental democracy of the Indian State and its foibles."²³⁴ Put in an international perspective India has all the institutional framework that is needed to fix environmental norms and objectives and see that necessary compliance is brought about.²³⁵ But nothing seems to be happening, there is a sense of paralysis compared to China and how it goes about solving problems. Maybe all this is not coming together because the origins of the Indian state and tradition of statecraft is reinforcing social imbalances and not eliminating them. According to one commentator the English philosopher John Stuart Mill came close to identifying it: *"Why was India in such a "debased state?" Mill concluded that the poverty of India had been caused by despotic government. People were not secure in their individual rights; they had been exploited by their rulers. Such poverty had created moral vice and defective character, taking the forms of widespread crime, cruelty, licentiousness, apathy, listlessness, servility, superstition, loss of independence and self-reliance."*²³⁶ To get a detailed picture of how this tradition got established one has to go back in history and see how urbanisation was developed and maintained.

Part II: Foreign and colonial origins of South Asian urbanisation and its impact on the environment

When we are investigating the impact of urbanisation on the environment it is always import to see what the origins of urbanisation were and how these specificities influenced the relations between the urban centres and the hinterlands. One wants to understand how these urban centres impacted the self-sustained and self-regulated hinterlands (the galaxy of hamlets and villages). In short we would like to understand how the sovereignty of the village over the use of its resources domain was shattered. This will indicate how the environmental balance was progressively dismantled. For a long time, and the trend still continues, this aspect of ecology was ignored, considered

²³⁴ Mohanty, 2007, 721.

²³⁵ For detailed explanation see – Sivaramakrishnan, 2011, 905-928.

²³⁶ Price, 1976, 402.

unimportant. As R. Champakalakshmi points out in her excellent study on the origins of urbanisation in South India: *"Historians have often succumbed, it would seem, to the tendency of studying the 'form' at the expense of the 'substance' of the urban characteristics of a place."*²³⁷

Going back in history can sometimes be a hazardous venture but based on the general historical consensus, one can safely say that the traditional polity in South Asia was a bottom up system. What this meant in reality is that the main body of sovereignty remained at the productive level, at the level of the village (the agricultural tract): *"Located in the rice producing marudam tracts, the early chiefdoms or potential monarchies with their janapada like polities' evolved out of earlier tribal organisations."*²³⁸ The *janapada* was 'community of people' alliance system, whereby villages of a locality formed an alliance to achieve a pre-determined objective. And as time went by, these alliances took a permanent character. After a period of socialization these *janapada* later went on to create supra (greater) regional organisations called *mahajanpada*. But in no way did this evolution of national and supra national character mean that village sovereignty was weakened or displaced to the non-productive or administrative centres. As R. Champakalakshmi has pointed out with substantive evidence: *"However, no direct and organised control appears to have been acquired by any of the 'crowned kings' over the agricultural tracts, no regular tax structure having been evolved. The institutional forces, which defined the 'excess' requirements, provided for its appropriation and defined its utilisation" are not known to have existed under the Colas, Ceras and Pandyas."*²³⁹ The Colas, Ceras and Pandyas continued to wage wars between themselves but this did not alter the structure of the polity as far as the village and the hinterland was concerned. One of the reason being that these kingdoms, enclaved in their urban centres, were engaged in long and medium distance trade directly or through patronage.²⁴⁰ The real economic power was gained through the control of stations of long distance trade and vital items

²³⁷ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 67.

²³⁸ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 69.

²³⁹ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 70.

²⁴⁰ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 71.

necessary to support this trading pattern: "*The more commercially active and organised towns were the pattinams located on the coast.*"²⁴¹ Urbanisation was thus insulated to the coastal areas.

Trade was mostly rendered unimportant for South Indian villages because of two very important reasons, and these could be an extrapolation for the rest of South Asia. The first and foremost is the fact that their sovereignty and economic independence was achieved by maintaining a simple living-standard, more plausibly by consuming locally produced goods. Their idea of living standards did not belong to the core Mesopotamian ethic, where the level of living standards was disconnected from what the immediate natural environment could provide. Secondly, there was insignificant taxation involved, which did not lead to over exploitation of the natural resources. R. Champakalakshmi explains: "*The market principle did not govern its exchange and the hinterland people were not dependent for daily requirements on long distance commerce, which in itself was oriented towards trade in luxury goods. The luxury goods that entered the interiors circulated through networks of kinship, patronage and clientele, through redistribution and presentation.*"²⁴² For a very long time then, the burdens of urbanisation fed by commercial exploitation did not involve rural participation: "*The early historical phase of urbanism has thus been shown to be the result of external trade, an 'urban revolution' in a restricted locus within which the process was concentrated, leading to the emergence of urban or, more correctly, trade enclaves.*"²⁴³ These enclaves were foreign and semi-foreign as far as their economic and ethnic existence was concerned.

There was no resource colonisation of the hinterlands as such. But around the 9th and 10th century the incursion of Mesopotamian Brahmins (Brah –Amin ... meaning *clerks* from the Brahmi region, now between today's Pakistan and Iran) changed the dual and semi-isolated existence of the hinterlands and the urban centres. The tectonic change came as competition in trade pattern did not advantage everyone, especially the Fringe Mesopotamians as their

²⁴¹ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 71.

²⁴² Champakalakshmi, 1987, 77.

²⁴³ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 72.

traditional core-Mesopotamia and probably East Africa experienced a prolonged period of disturbance from turmoil in the eastern Roman Empire²⁴⁴ and the increasingly violent incursions from the Tatars in the north. This led the Fringe Mesopotamian *Brah-amins* turn to charlatanism, statecraft and witchcraft, all of the three segments interlinked, thus giving birth to the first "service industry". These *Brah-amins* started to sell their miraculous services to two category of the populations. First, to the elite, who were itching to convert the loose *janapada* system into lucrative tax cropping systems, most probably to maintain their luxurious lifestyles. The *Brah-amin*, being a master in conjure and control became useful to impose a new state-society system over South Asia. Secondly, and as a consequence, the Mesopotamian *Brah-amin* started selling "*Bhakti*" – worship as relief or escape route from the newly imposed burdens by the state. Progressively therefore, the *Brah-amin* started controlling the economic resources from two fronts – namely that of the state and the hinterland. And it was time for the 'floating' and diasporic *Brah-amin* to acquire a territorial base, upon which he can nail his terrestrial power, a fortress from where he could entrench his power.

The temple was the ideal solution. It was untouchable because it was god's sanctuary and thus inviolable, the physical safety of the foreign *Brah-amin* was assured. It was also an ideal place for storing the booty in the form of religious taxes, forced donations and official grants. None would attack the temples, at least no attack would be perpetrated by the local population; it was composed of peaceful communities. As R. Champakalakshmi explains the foundations of future model for South Asian urbanism were laid: "*The circulation of resources was effected through the temple as the disseminator of the bhakti ideal, i.e., through non-economic or extra-economic coercion. However at the local level the chief beneficiaries of the redistribution process were the locally powerful elite, temples and brahmanas apart from temple functionaries and tenants.*"²⁴⁵ First there was a single temple around which urbanisation could begin, as other traders start to build on the same foundations. But as time went

²⁴⁴ See: Fitzpatrick, 2011, 27-54.

²⁴⁵ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 80.

by and the *Brah-amin* population increased, through family reunion or increase of own breed, there was need to increase the scope of temple building into mega complexes catering for customary pilgrims. This trend was probably enhanced by other Mesopotamian merchants who decided to build their own worship places.²⁴⁶ *"Thus the nagaram and the itinerant merchant organisations were also accommodated in the expanding but effective space created by the temple centres."*²⁴⁷ This is exactly what happened when Jewish merchants settled in Southern India. In exchange for help provided by the *Brah-amins*, the famous guild of 500 Mesopotamian merchants returned favour by helping in many ventures. Similar cooperation ran across the country and across centuries: *"Another body of merchants known as the Anjuvannam represented an organisation of foreign merchants, who began their commercial activities on the west coast (Kerala) in the-8th-9th centuries and spread out to the other coastal areas of South India by the 11th century A.D., interacting both with the local merchants and the Five Hundred, a symbiotic relationship being fostered by trade interests. The earliest known record of the Anjuvannam refer to a group of Jewish traders who acquired settlements on the west coast from the Venad (South Travancore) rulers."*²⁴⁸ Teamed together these efforts led to urbanisation that the subcontinent had rarely seen before. The combined efforts of these foreign urbanites were geared to one and the same thing: the subjugation of the hinterland and its people who had lived in harmony with nature. The structural relationship between the Fringe Mesopotamian domination, the destruction of the loose federative nature of the Indian civilisation and the consequent destruction of the finely balanced natural environment were determined. Vijaynagar tried to assert political influence over the temple in order to save the Indian Civilisation and its ecological ethics for several centuries but that came to an end when Fringe Mesopotamians collided with warlords and military adventurers from East Africa to Central Asia.²⁴⁹ The religion or military designs of the invader were not the concern of

²⁴⁶ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 99.

²⁴⁷ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 100.

²⁴⁸ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 86.

²⁴⁹ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 103.

Fringe Mesopotamia nor the Mesopotamian controlled temples, their only concern was that local political control over the resource base and its sustainability should be destroyed. Structurally this attitude has dominated South Asian history over last few centuries.

For every foreign invader the Fringe Mesopotamian *Brah-amins* and the temples controlled by them would act as Trojan Horses, as centres of information, trade links and socio-political influence. In effect the temples monitored every movement of everyone and every segment of society that was considered important or lucrative. The East India Company exposed the system by detailed documentation. One has only to see the British Parliament archives to see where the *Brah-amins* went to complain. It is a long debate which is not in the scope of this study, I propose to take up this topic in a separate study, in the near future. However, the tactics of the East-India Company were similar to that of Fringe Mesopotamia but the stress was administration and not outright charlatanism: *"The entry of the European trading companies with their joint stock formation introduced a further element of change in the 17th century A.D. followed by colonialism, when the factory replaced the temple as the nucleus of a different type of urban centre in the coastal areas."*²⁵⁰ The reason why the Company develops the coastal zones is because it is one of the biggest sea powers, the idea was to start on the seaboard and progressively move inland. The consequence of this is that the biggest urban centres are also the biggest military bases, ready for conquest. From here onwards a tradition is established. For more than two centuries urbanisation goes hand-in-hand with growth of military strength of the British. From this position, wealth and power is supposed to have been evacuated in favour of Britain. As Abanti Kundu explains: *"The unhindered dominance of maritime nodal points, subservient to the metropolitan economy, in the urban growth process in colonial India typified a process of lop-sided urbanisation."*²⁵¹ The British were forced to transfer wealth because they did not have a resident population similar to that of Australia or Canada to support their colonial

²⁵⁰ Champakalakshmi, 1987, 103.

²⁵¹ Kundu, 1983, 40.

venture. This meant that 99% of the people working the system were theoretically selected among the inhabitants of South Asia. In the case of the East India Company this was the case but this changed when the Crown took over and filled its ranks with Fringe Mesopotamians. Consequently, most of the administrative and military officialdom came from Fringe Mesopotamia. What follows is that most of the urbanisation was initiated to host a tiny British population and a vast majority coming from Fringe Mesopotamia. So when some academics make comments like the following: "*The colonial cities were 'nerve centres' of colonial exploitation...*"²⁵² one has to put things into perspective, especially phrases like: "*... it was basically for serving the demands of the foreign economy rather than generating a nation-wide growth impulse.*"²⁵³ Sure the economy and polity was geared to serving the needs of an alien power, but my point is that this system would not have worked without the assistance of someone that knew the intricacies of the local conditions. This bedrock of 'local assistance' were lodged and nurtured and most importantly, it was remunerated handsomely, which made its urban existence viable. So when we speak of urbanisation under the British rule, we have to accept that it was the result of a double tutelage and built upon an existing multi-layered urbanisation from previous Fringe Mesopotamian impulses.

The consequence of this double tutelage on the hinterlands was devastating; as urbanisation boomed there was a diametrical collapse of everything rural. As one scholar put it: "*The towns that arose on the project sites did indeed witness comparatively rapid growth of population ... But the surrounding countryside continued to experience poverty and stagnation; what was created therefore was only a string of islands of industrial-urban agglomerations.*"²⁵⁴ Here again one is forced to nuance and put things into perspective. In any other country or context, a lively and dynamic growth in urbanisation would mean an equally developing rural economy because the need for agricultural produce would increase, making the rural population better-off. But this is not what happened in British India, here there was sure and

²⁵² Kundu, 1983, 40.

²⁵³ Kundu, 1983, 41.

²⁵⁴ Kundu, 1983, 46.

certain collapse of the rural economy except for the home regions of Fringe Mesopotamia, where for military reasons the colonial administration initiated a program of agricultural development, for those who were loyal supporters of its rule. In the majority of the cases the hinterland collapsed. There are many reasons for this but the main reason was that its sovereignty was wiped out by the reforms introduced by the Crown rule. The British administrative attitude was simple: every time the local elite or Fringe Mesopotamia made demands for better treatment, the response of the Crown was to dish out favours at the expense of the hinterland and the village. It was a cheap method of reconciliation for the authorities of British India but it was creating havoc in the hinterland and the village. In essence, the largesse of the colonial was nothing more than the progressive dismantling of sovereignty in the hinterlands in favour of the urban 'assistants'. It was a simple transfer of rural sovereignty to the urban centres controlled mainly by Fringe Mesopotamians. The massacre of wildlife had begun under the British as the hinterland lost sovereignty over its wildlife reserves, now the same logic had created a dangerous and potentially a catastrophe in the making as village commons were transferred to absentee landlords who resided in the cities. In effect, those who were at the centre of environmental preservation and ecological sustainability were robbed of their sovereignty. It was forbidden for the local people to enter areas that previously belonged to them. Thus the preservation of nature was made impossible by colonial decrees. *"The confiscation of estates by British government for non-payment of revenue added to the disruption of the rural sector. As a result of all these, by the middle of the 19th century the whole agrarian sector was in a decaying condition. Rural inhabitants dependent on agriculture were emigrating. The villages deteriorated and their revenues declined."*²⁵⁵ There was a decoupling of nature and preservation leading to dispossession and abandonment. From the 1880s right up to 1980s this phenomenon was causing disruption in the food supplies, war and famine further deteriorated the situation, leading to the deaths of tens of millions of poor people in South Asia. There is a lot of proof that there was a salient attempt to eliminate part of the

²⁵⁵ Bandyopadhyay, 1993, A151.

rural population.²⁵⁶ Apart from being a human catastrophe it was also an environmental one as well since whole regions were literally abandoned.

Part III: Nehru and Nation-Building and the consequent destruction of patriotism, leading to an environmental precipice

Structurally, attitudes did not change that much after independence. As Abanti Kundu explains: *"Post-independence India saw not much of an alteration in the pattern of urbanisation. What followed in continuation of the urban growth in colonial days was the unparalleled primacy of the colonial maritime nodes which still dominate the Indian economic and urban scene at the cost of the crippled existence of smaller urban centres."*²⁵⁷ As the historic overview showed, the come and go of conquerors from here and there did not stop Fringe Mesopotamia from continuing its urban consolidation.

As independence flooded the plains of South Asia, the hinterlands were faced with unprecedented dangers. For the first time in the history of South Asia, Fringe Mesopotamia had all the levers of power concentrated in its hands. The systematic conquest and subjugation of the hinterland could begin in earnest. For this, it was impossible to think that anything would be changed or altered. The British colonial authorities had perfected a system of exploitation and it was tried and tested for a few hundred years. Those who had similar designs, understandably, were unwilling to change the structure of the system that was inherited. K. Sivaramakrishnan has summed up the colonial approach as follows: *"Colonial legal institutions for what are now considered as natural resources, or nature, or the environment, in India developed in two realms through the last decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. One, which I would refer to as rural government, was where such laws and their administration came most directly into contact with livelihoods and the rights in land, water, forests, animals, and other aspects of the terrestrial environment in India. The other, which might be contrastingly named urban*

²⁵⁶ Ambirajan, 1976, 8.

²⁵⁷ Kundu, 1983, 42.

government, was the realm where law and its implementation more often expressed ideas about public nuisances, health, and sanitation.”²⁵⁸ Incidentally, this sums up much of Nehru's approach to the hinterlands and urbanisation. Both had the same high-handedness towards the plight of the poor and for the concern of the environment.

Nehru's policies were half-hearted and did not go far enough to support a strong rural development to face the consequences of an invasive urban expansion. The situation became worse than previous one since absentee land lords and urban merchant classes started purchasing land on a massive scale on the cheap. The method and means of Nehru's land reforms became the factors that were to lead to rural poverty, environmental degradation and uncontrolled urban congestion. Nehru might have had the intention of a grand land-reform to bring about the economic transformation of Independent India but his reforms were superficial, he knew exactly well what would happen. As Rekha Bandyopadhyay explains: *“The listing of results of first round of land reforms (1948-54) in different states shows that the main achievement was the abolition of intermediaries and direct contact of the states with 20 million cultivators. But the reform was not complete. The rural structure was like an onion with many layers. The British peeled off one layer by their effort through legalistic approach; abolition of zamindari system in the post-independence era peeled off another. But the core remained unaffected.”*²⁵⁹

If he want to save the peasantry, establish food safety and protect the environment Nehru would have done everything to re-establish the independence of the village, give back the lost sovereignty to the hinterlands. But he did nothing of the sort. As Surinder S. Jodhka argues: *“Unlike Gandhi, Nehru perhaps never identified himself with the village. He was also quite self-conscious about his urban and upper middle class upbringing.”*²⁶⁰ Nehru, like many of his brethren in the Congress Movement, thought that urban unification of India would create a cohesive national unity. But the problem was that out of some 400 million South Asians under British rule only a tiny percentage lived

²⁵⁸ Sivaramakrishnan, 2011, 905-906.

²⁵⁹ Bandyopadhyay, 1993, A153.

²⁶⁰ Jodhka, 2002, 3348.

in the Urban, and as discussed earlier, the origins of the urban population was colonial in outlook.²⁶¹ The masses lived in the hinterlands and they had to be mobilised, if the nationalist movement had to gain popular legitimacy. So it was that Gandhi was introduced into the arena. After his rural experimentations in South Africa it was deemed appropriate to introduce him into the Subcontinent. But it could also have been a panic move by the British to counter the Indian Communist Party and the Forward Block since they were making rapid inroads into the hinterlands, From South India to right up to Bengal. Before the damage could be done Gandhi was rushed in, with a rural-urban dialectic against the Marxist material dialectic: *"He did this by counter-posing the Indian village with the modern cities that were set up by the British in India. While the village-life represented the essence of India, the development of modern cities in India symbolised western domination and colonial rule."*²⁶² According to Surinder S. Jodhka, for the Gandhi: *"The Indian village had a design, a way life, which had the potential of becoming an alternative to the city based and technology driven capitalist west."*²⁶³ Whatever his personal beliefs might have been Gandhi wanted to win India's independence in the name of the Indian village. The villagers rose up in fervour of a Gandhi and the Congress caste that had promised them the return of the much cherished sovereignty. What they were hoping for was that the feudal process that was initiated by the British would be dismantled. Indeed, Indian feudalism under the British crown had reduced the average farmer into a status of mere slave. As one expert explains: *"Substantial land transfers and subinfeudation occurred as creditors supported by the westernised legal system attempted to secure peasant debtors' land by foreclosing mortgages. It led to the creation of a large agrarian proletariat. The beneficiaries of this change were the moneylenders and traders. They had a parasitical attitude to agriculture."*²⁶⁴ It was a double process of extraction, one official and the other official-sponsored.

²⁶¹ Jodhka, 2002, 3346.

²⁶² Jodhka, 2002, 3346.

²⁶³ Jodhka, 2002, 3346.

²⁶⁴ Bandyopadhyay, 1993, A151.

Apart from the improvised population there were ecological reasons why absentee landlord feudal system was endangering the environmental sustainability. In most of the time these landlords residing in the cities got the land for free and did not possess enough capital to develop the estate. Whatever revenue that was derived from his newly acquired properties was spent on keeping up a life-style similar to that of the British, in order to socialise with them. On the other side of the spectrum, the 'owner turned into tenant' was crushed by the exorbitant rents demanded by the absentee landlord, and sometimes was even forced to contract debt to pay the rents when crops failed. The total effect of this trend was that there was fertility depletion of the soil, leading often to desertification: *"Land alienation in a predominantly agrarian economy characterised by highly skewed distribution of land, adverse land man ratio and vast landlessness has an important bearing on the dynamics of rural transformation."*²⁶⁵ After independence, expectations were high, literally hundreds of millions waiting to see a wind of change. Given the proximity of these Fringe Mesopotamian landlords to the British, it was hoped that the interests of the village would put ahead in the list of priorities, especially as independence was fought in their name.

After the British colonialists handed him the keys to India, Nehru went back to his initial stance of supporting urbanisation at the expense of the hinterlands. The Nehru system consisted of giving the appearance of doing something and yet use administrative discretion and economic non-engagement to doing the opposite of what he publicly or legislatively engaged himself to do. For him the nominal image of 'young' democracy had to be neat for international purposes but the execution of policy was not so meticulous. As Tim Hanstad and el. demonstrated: *"The legislative foundations of land law and policy reform in India (tenancy reform, land ceilings, land allocations) were designed to increase the poor's access to rural land. To date, the effectiveness of the legislation has been mixed and progress over the last few years has slowed. But the link between rural poverty and landlessness remains, and a well-considered plan for rethinking and reforming policies and laws in a manner that advances*

²⁶⁵ Shankar, 1988, 1514.

the interests of the poor should lead India's agenda."²⁶⁶ Laws were passed and reforms crafted with what looks like to be a high degree of naivety but it was not since those involved were highly experienced statesmen and bureaucrats. So the consequent poverty and environmental degradation cannot be attributed to their inexperience as a 'young' democracy. The average tenant at the time of Nehru's first land reforms was riddled with debt, he and his advisors knew well what would happen if land was distributed under such circumstances. They also knew that with 'land ceiling'²⁶⁷ directives that they would be taking land away from middle farmers and not from absentee landlords who were sitting in the national parliament or in the legislative bodies in the various levels in the federal structure. The result was devastating as Kripa Shankar explains: *"It is also significant to note that land sold by landless constituted 57 per cent of all the land sold during the pre-green revolution but declined to 26 per cent during the second period in the state."*²⁶⁸ What this means is that two thirds of the land distributed was immediately sold off to rich merchants with whom the initial debt was contracted or sold to the absentee landlord. The combined effect was firstly that productive farmers were dispossessed of land and therefore food production went through a phase of uncertainty. Secondly the landless in their big majority remained landless. The environmental consequence was that smaller land allotments were exploited intensively while more land went into mismanagement under the absentee landlords.

Another tactic of Nehru was to distribute 'common' grazing lands to the landless (which would ultimately end-up in the portfolio of the absentee landlord). This policy, as we will see, had catastrophic consequences across the Subcontinent. This is how N.S. Jodha after extensive research sees the situation: *"In Rajasthan, the introduction of land reforms in the 1950s disrupted traditional arrangements that protected and regulated the use of common property resources. Commercialization, population pressure, and large-scale adoption of tractors have played important roles in the resource depletion*

²⁶⁶ Hanstad, Haque & Nielsen, 2008, 55.

²⁶⁷ Bandyopadhyay, 2008, 42.

²⁶⁸ Shankar, 1988, 1514.

process; but their impact has been greatly magnified by the circumstances created by various provisions of the land reforms program.”²⁶⁹ Nehru probably had a systematic plan for demolishing traditional rural India because he had no legitimacy in this constituency. His plan was, it seems, to transfer property rights to a feudal democratic system by which the absentee landlords for the lands received will loyally support the Nehru, so that he can look popular and charismatic at home and abroad. The traditional resource base of rural India was: “Village forests, permanent pastures, uncultivable and cultivable wastelands, and croplands fallowed for longer periods broadly constitute the total grazing area in the villages. This area is supplemented by cropland that acquires the character of a common property resource in the post-crop season when anyone can graze his animals there.”²⁷⁰ This was the backbone of the rural system and its sovereignty and at the same time the balancing element between a good and a bad environmental evolution. Nehru could not have one and save the other. The choice was between keeping the whole thing as it was or breaking it up. Nehru was bent on breaking up the whole rural system of economic and environmental sovereignty. As N. S. Jodha explains: “One consequence of the decline in grazing space is the increase in density of animals per unit of common grazing land. In the arid zone as a whole, the density of livestock expressed in terms of animal units increased from 39 animal units per 100 hectares of grazing land in 1951-52 to 105 during 1977-78.”²⁷¹ Even before urbanization could become the threat it has become to the South Asian eco-system, the ratio of man and animal to nature was shrinking to unsustainable levels. One academic despaired: “After more than four decades of planned efforts the basic nature of land system has at best undergone only a marginal change.”²⁷² The rural settlements had been disenfranchised, cut-off from their natural economic domain, reducing them to nothing more than ‘scattered urban units’ ready to join the city urban system, in one way or the other.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Jodha, 1985, 247.

²⁷⁰ Jodha, 1985, 249.

²⁷¹ Jodha, 1985, 250.

²⁷² Bandyopadhyay, 1993, A155.

²⁷³ Bandyopadhyay, 2008, 41.

Nehru, the great Socialist and Fabian planner²⁷⁴ must have considered what will happen when the rural system gets deconstructed. It was assumed that concentrating on industrialisation and more specifically urban economy would give way to the absorption of excess labour from the rural areas. That did not happen. Thanks to the Indian education system, which can produce the best, focus went to training highly qualified engineers and unlike China very little into the technical training of the masses. Anyone who wanted to invest in industry in India was faced with the fact that there was not enough qualified labour. D. Bandyopadhyay laments: *"The early planners had high hopes that with rapid industrialisation of the country, the surplus labour force in agriculture would be drawn away and absorbed in the secondary and tertiary sectors. But this was not realised. At the end of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, almost 60 per cent of the labour force in India is still engaged in the primary sector contributing around 21 per cent to the country's gross domestic product (gdp)."*²⁷⁵ In a few years India will be the biggest country in the world, overtaking China. It was thought that part of the surplus population will be absorbed by the already overcrowded and ill-managed cities. The rest will have to remain in the rural hinterlands, exacerbating even further a situation which is hopeless to the citizens and most definitely hopeless for the environment. Unfortunately the trends are negative: *"The Indian economy has been having nearly double digit growth rate for the last several years. In spite of this high growth rate, the secondary sector instead of drawing surplus labour force from the primary sector, is itself experiencing a downward trend in labour absorption."*²⁷⁶ But Nehru and his policies succeeded in giving total control to Fringe Mesopotamia through urbanisation and deconstruction of rural sovereignty. One would think that it was time to turn away from destruction, make a pause to contemplate unto what went wrong and what could have done differently. The latest developmental response from the Fringe Mesopotamia is the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC): *"... envisages the establishment of several new cities, 24 industrial nodes, three ports, six airports and a 1,500 km high-speed rail and*

²⁷⁴ Price, 1976, 413.

²⁷⁵ Bandyopadhyay, 2008, 39.

²⁷⁶ Bandyopadhyay, 2008, 39.

road line. The project footprint stretches across six states. The population in the region is expected to grow from 231 million in 2009 to 320 million in 2019 and 514 million in 2039."²⁷⁷ What is important to understand is that this urbanisation project will for the first time unify the core Fringe Mesopotamian territories. What is more important to notice is that a specific hinterland for this urban concentration has been designated – The Golden Quadrilateral, a huge territorial expanse covering much of central and Southern India. So instead of a balancing between rural and urban, between man and nature, we will be getting more of the same but in gigantic proportions: *"Enormous migrations are being planned in this new India; enormous opportunities for prospering are going to be offered to communities who comply. It is proposed by the Population figures of DMIC that a third of India's population will live in Industrial corridors of DMIC."*²⁷⁸ Nehru's heritage has gone from being an art of democratic deception into a nightmare of global proportions.

8-Is India a Democracy without Human Rights?²⁷⁹

Perspectives on India's structural resilience

"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get somewhere else – if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to go somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

- Lewis Carroll – *Through the Looking Glass*- And what Alice found there ²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Khosla & Soni, 2012, 15.

²⁷⁸ Khosla, 2015, 30.

²⁷⁹ Byrappa, R. (2020). Is India a Democracy without Human Rights? *ÖT KONTINENS: AZ ÚJ- ÉS JELENKORI EGYETEMES TÖRTÉNETI TANSZÉK TUDOMÁNYOS KÖZLEMÉNYEI*, 2017(1), 35–57.

²⁸⁰ Carroll, 1917, 39.

Abstract

India is increasingly a society without citizens, as is the case with major parts of Asia, instead they have silent masses, suffering in anonymity devoid of all rights. When we talk about rights, in general we think of something concrete that is both tangible and attainable. We assume that these rights can be enforced and guaranteed. This perception is a costly illusion for all parties involved, especially those that are economically, politically and socially disenabled. It is often true that the middle-classes everywhere are better equipped to materialize their rights, although they might not always be in need of these rights. This means that a big majority of the people are unable to transform their theoretical rights into a workable reality in their everyday life. One of the reasons for this is that human rights are often perceived as a top-down issue, where rights are created at the top and imposed at the lower level. Crafted by the few and imposed upon the many. Human rights are therefore treated as a product of pedantic thinking, bestowed as a gift by a higher authority on a passively and obediently accepting masses. I have a difficulty in accepting or accommodating to such a perception, I see a fundamental need to remain at the empirical level when it comes to Human Rights.

Keywords: Zero-Rights Environment, Micro Communities, Fundamental Needs, Individual Autonomy of Action, Good Government, Multi-polarity

A few remarks on the Human Rights Conference of June 21st, 2019, Vienna

The definition of Human Rights (HR) assumes: that the nature of these rights is anchored in humanness and (therefore) accessible to everyone, meaning universality. I felt that the participants of the conference made a very rich contribution, each trying to understand HR from a unique perspective. There was no contradiction, we were all trying to contribute a piece to the whole puzzle and matrix. I very much appreciated the fact that many of

Chinese colleagues present were genuinely trying to understand the issues and were seeking practical solutions to the challenges posed to HR in the 21st century. My personal approach was to show that there is a limit to how much of the HR regime can be implemented and legally enforced. I argued that individuals around the world are often confronted with what I described as "Zero Rights Environment (ZRE)". I wanted to remind the participants that individual initiative at the micro and local level should be given more importance, both in academic research and policy design at national and international levels.

Introduction

Contrary to the *absorptionist* vision of rights and human rights I am obliged to take a *creationist* approach to demonstrate my point; that by the very nature and scale of Human Rights proposed the implementation and defence of these rights does not immediately serve the purpose of those aimed at. This is one of the main reason why the issue of HR is seen as meeting the political purposes of the West. To put the whole argument into perspective I will use the notion of HR in India. How rights and human rights as such are unknown to the Indian civilisation, where local communities take the centre stage. Here one can notice a difference between a nation-state approach and a civilisational approach. Nation-States believe in a preponderant central entity that provides authority. Civilization on the contrary believes in diffused authority where there is much more autonomy in the creation of order and its implementation. This means that the definition, elaboration and outlay of HR is non-hierarchical and endogenous to the individual needs and his or her local environment. However, this is not automatic, there is a precondition to this autonomy. Human dignity (HD) is a pre-conditional environment in and under which the individual can mitigate, negotiate and create his or her own human rights that are practical and practicable in everyday life; without the need for the protection of these rights by an outside (higher) authority. There existed a certain universality before the arrival of the nation-state that distinguished

traditions of dignity in the West and the rest of the world-systems. It is my view that more has to be done to reinstall HD at the centre of the HR debate. The HD approach presumes that the state should intervene to protect the physical integrity of a person.

Most of the HR currently defined and listed have been integrated into constitutions around the world in one form or the other, so they are not only defended by the particular constitution but also by the prescription of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). But this does not stop the abuse of the same rights on a massive scale. On an individual level, very few have the resources to defend their citizen's rights let alone their human rights. In some contexts, there could be several complaints per day. As it is in certain countries like India, the average time needed to open the process of litigation takes seven or more years. In 2017 the Financial Express journal reported that India had 34 million cases pending: "*A Law Commission report in 2009 had quoted a Delhi High Court observation that 464 years would be required to clear the arrears with the present strength of judges.*"²⁸¹ If everyone was encouraged to take their human rights abuse cases to the court, then the number of years waiting for the trail to begin could be multiplied many times over. At an individual level there is no enforceability of HR so there is no tangible existence of these rights. And by the time the illusion of rights and entitlements dissipates a lot of time, energy and resources are lost to no avail.

From the above what dawns upon people who are really looking for remedies is: how are these rights to be attained, or redefined, reformulated, in such a way as to make them accessible. Firstly, a clear and concrete redefinition of the notions of HR and HD have to be arrived at before anything else. I believe that we should not bundle-up everything under one heading of HR and make it the sole responsibility of the state. Secondly, we have to see if the HR and HD approaches are the right directions in which we have to move in order to protect human beings from a wide variety of abuses. The HD approach presumes that the physical integrity of the individual should be guaranteed by the state. And the problem everywhere today is that states are

²⁸¹ The Financial Express, 2017.

not fulfilling this function, on the contrary, they are the main culprits. Thirdly, it has to be accepted that by concentrating too much on the notion of rights that are protected by the 'rule of law', social institutions and traditions have been neglected. In modern state systems, the state is the ultimate protector of HD. When the same state is the biggest abuser there are no alternatives. And this is a real tragedy befalling humanity, this is the only universality in existence today. One has to tackle the problem by going to the root causes. Abuse means that there is no restraint of it; towards other members of a community or outside a community. Here, the culture of restraint and acceptance seems to be the best guarantor of both HD and HR. It was thought that one solution to this problem is democracy, where rights can become realistically achieved through a democratic process. But assuming that democracy is unbiased and un-construed. In this sense India, and South Asia in general, is a broken bridge between the West and the East. Mending this bridge could be as important a defending HR, since soon 1.5 billion people will experience abuse, deprivation and discrimination on a daily basis, just in India.

Current debate on Human Rights and the contextualisation of India's place in it

Current HR regime and its universality will increasingly come under tension for at least three specific reasons. Firstly, as bigger Asian countries become economically empowered they would demand a revision or enlargement of the HR regime. Secondly, as two of the world's oldest civilisations sort to regenerate themselves, after having suffered cataclysmic setbacks in the 19th and early 20th centuries, they will undoubtedly re-evaluate the existing world HR regime. This will necessarily push the issue into a conflict zone. Thirdly, Asia being the most populous region, dominated by two huge countries like China and India, numerically the debate of HR will be at the forefront in this region. When it was defeated and dominated by the West, Asia was forced to borrow Western ideals to confront their own problems. Today

there is no need for this, Asia can pretend to revive its own thousand year old method of addressing and organizing HR for its communities.

By concentrating on the improvements of infrastructures, an unprecedented creation of employment and the systematic organization of its civilisational community, China has done a great deal to undercut the need to resort to the issue of HR. Before starvation and malnutrition was an issue but it is no longer for hundreds of millions of Chinese. But at the same time because of this success, the middleclass might see new needs that have to be addressed putting the issue of HR back on the agenda in an emphatic manner. Today, belonging to the middle classes increasingly means belonging to the global middle class, where a wide range of needs and behaviour is normalized or standardized. Looking behind their backs and wishing things to be the same at home could be the new tendency. And as far as its policy approach is concerned, given its overarching economic position across the globe, China is in a delicate situation. On the one side it sees the need to impose its own vision but at the same time it cannot reject the “Western” aspect of the HR regime and at the same time trumpet the desire that it can understand, sympathise and establish compatibility with Western culture. If the Chinese value and ethical system is so diametrically different why should the West sell itself to China? Especially when it comes to vital infrastructures. Technology, partly thanks to China's gigantic effort, has transformed humanity by imposing a high degree of uniformity. There is a systemic gap created between the technologically empowered individual and culturally distinguished political systems that are backward looking. To tackle this, China is in the process of elaborating a vast intellectual effort at the global level, especially in Europe. For the moment at least, rather than confront the Western model of HR, China is seeking to alter the intellectual approach to HR, in order to insert certain Chinese characteristics in a mild manner. Namely, its enormous wealth of experience of “practically” addressing the basic needs of its people. This mammoth Chinese effort of bridging the gap with the West in particular, has direct and indirect implications to India and its own method of addressing HR

issues; especially on the way in which it goes about fulfilling the basic needs of its people.

By nominally implementing (liberal) parliamentary democracy, India for a long time had shielded itself from the unforgiving and relentless glare of the world HR scrutiny. During the cold war period, HR abuse mainly meant the communist block and third world dictators.²⁸² But thanks to Nehru's charisma and soft tone, India was off radar. After the fall of the Berlin wall the communist block is no more. Even the most rigid HR activist does acknowledge that China has made great strides in improving the material standards, in some measures equalling to those of Portugal and Spain. And this relentless effort has not slowed. This dealt a great blow to the Indian elite's complacency on HR. The argument that a combination of a nascent democracy and a huge population is bound to slow development down, can no longer be put forward. The per capita GDP of an average Indian is less than a fifth of that of an average Chinese. Technically, Indian democracy works: people go to vote and a government is elected, but it does not produce the results aspired by the voters. And what is interesting to notice is that as the world's biggest democracy India has now become the biggest abuser of HR. Furthermore it has become the biggest abuser of all forms of rights, and the picture could worsen several fold if people are allowed to report abuse.

When in 1950 India chose a new constitution and firmly affirmed the rule of law in a democratic set-up, the hope was that this would reduce communal strife and conflict. By giving everyone a voice a consensus would be arrived at, reflecting the true nature of the priorities of the country. And that this would lead to a peaceful transition towards modernization. But this has not worked and things are fast becoming worse than before. India is trapped between the flaws of liberal democracy and the demonic depths of communitarian conflicts. Rather than liberal democracy defeating communitarianism it has become a victim of it.

In recent times the academic who has expounded this most is Jürgen Habermas. In an address to the students of Stanford University he said the

²⁸² Nanda, 1995, 300.

following: *"The liberal and communitarian side interpret differently the principles of equal respect for and equal protection of everybody. Liberalism is supposed to advocate a state which is blind to skin color and other differences. It grants everybody equal rights for the free pursuit of equal chances to everybody for the development of personal identities independently of the kind of persons they are and their relation to collective identities. Communitarianism, of course, defends human rights too, but it concedes to the state, even requires of it, the commitment to intervene in processes of identity formation and maintenance, if necessary."*²⁸³ According to this kind of dialectic or juxtaposition, rights or human rights for that matter will not have the same purpose or fate. With the advent of a democratic India everyone was hoping that it would brush aside communitarianism and a public culture of inequalities and wholeheartedly embrace the notion of equality before law across the board. Unfortunately the reality is quite different.

Democracy in India is increasingly assigned to a communal function, as this function becomes full pledged, violence and abuse will become more and more evident. There are different periods since 1947 where HR meant different things. First we had the Nehru period where a semblance of HR regime was created by concentrating on the needs of urban middle classes, all the while maintaining a colonial status quo. In the second period Indira Gandhi tried to create a HR regime by a comprehensive, and historically unprecedented, effort to address the needs of the average Indian, especially in the rural areas. In the third period her son, Rajiv Gandhi, increased the potency of HR by increasing autonomy, local sovereignty and liberty through devolution of the democratic apparatus. And like his mother he could not see through the entrenchment of these policies because he was assassinated by an extremist, in a communalist turmoil.

Prelude to the three periods

²⁸³ Habermas, 1995, 849-850.

The American philosopher James Patrick Griffin provides us with an ideal conceptual framework to analyse the chronicle of Human Rights in India. Griffin concludes that ultimately the essence of HR boils down to three basic elements, three integrative components: *"All human rights will then come under one or other of these three overarching headings: autonomy, welfare, and liberty. And those three can be seen as constituting a trio of highest-level human rights."*²⁸⁴ Perversely these three elements correspond to the three periods of HR development in post-independence India. The sequence of *autonomy-welfare-Liberty* enounced by Griffin could well be the sequence of the demise of the HR effort in today's India. Each of the three periods had the opportunity to reset the priorities and enhance the HR issue but miscalculations, unexpected fatalities and sheer disregard means that India has become a Zero Rights Zone (ZRZ), for the majority of its citizens. Now follows a detailed assessment of each period in regards to HR in India. The objective here is not to catalogue abuses or specific events but to show the general trends and how HR evolved during a specific period, highlighting the missed opportunities and detrimental policies that were adapted.

Period One: The Nehru years (1947-1964) - perception and reality

When one contemplates Nehru's rule, one is overcome with dismay and disbelief. A man who had possessed a high degree of natural authority and acquired such a sharp intellect was not able to elaborate a workable plan for India's future. To the extent that today it is difficult to imagine that India was ruled by such a personality. On the one side it is impossible not to kneel before such a giant but on the other one is filled with utter contempt for someone who naively believed that things will improve without a minimum of foresight and guidance. We will never know if India was made for Nehru to rule or the other way round. Whatever the configuration it was not ideal for the creation of a comprehensive HR regime in India. In my opinion, he got his priorities wrong as far as his domestic policies were concerned. André Malraux the emblematic

²⁸⁴ Griffin, 2008, 149.

French minister for culture under General De Gaulle's rule paid a visit to Pandit Nehru in 1958. He recorded the following in his memoirs, published in 1967: *"What has been your greatest difficulty since independence?" I asked him. His reply was instantaneous, although up to this point he had often spoken of India as if he were groping in the dark: "Creating a just state by just means, I think."*²⁸⁵

After the British handed him the keys, Nehru announced that India would be a constitutional democracy within a federal framework but at the same time he was doing everything to strengthen the power of the centre and his own unchallenged power within it. Although he supposedly loathed the negative side of religions, he himself acquired god like powers of arbitrary decision-making. He formally asked Dr. Ambedkar to elaborate India's new constitution and pack it full with wishful thinking. He then either tinkers with it or decides to brush it aside altogether. As a keen observer remarks: *"But even in this "rights-giving" constitution, provisions have been included to take away all the fundamental rights on one or other excuses."*²⁸⁶ Nehru was the product of the British Empire with corresponding instincts. Jaffrelot insists that: *"Despite his modern outlook, Nehru never wanted to cut himself off from India's past."*²⁸⁷ Jaffrelot might be thinking of the mythical and distant India but I personally believe that first and foremost, Nehru was a man of empire, British or otherwise. After independence of 1947, India was in the process of being created, a creation of a new empire of sorts. After the British, Nehru was probably one of the biggest empire builder (nation-building). So the constitution could not apply to war zones or conquered and still to be pacified territories. I agree that there had to be some kind of unification but no one expected Nehru to resort to violence in this manner. He was setting a precedence, initiating a tradition. As Chakrabarti reminds us: *"Recurrent use of the draconian and colonial Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, etc, in some areas of the country has turned the promise of non-prevalence of black laws into sheer mockery. Innumerable instances can be cited in this respect."*²⁸⁸ Very

²⁸⁵ Malraux & Kilmartin, 1968, 143.

²⁸⁶ Chakrabarti, 2011, 35.

²⁸⁷ Jaffrelot, 2007, 328.

²⁸⁸ Chakrabarti, 2011, 35.

little is written about Nehru and comrades' use of the armed forces in certain parts of India in the 1950s and 1960s; there was no mention of Human Rights or Constitutional Rights in these contexts, instead there was a *de facto* suspension of all rights.

In the wake of the Congress government in 2004, Christophe Jaffrelot, a self-proclaimed specialist on South Asia, penned an article in an Indian newspaper praising Nehru as creator and defender of rights in the following manner: *"The 1950 Constitution strongly influenced by Nehru, did not recognize religious communities but only individuals, to whom it guaranteed in Article 25 'freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.' This ideal concept of religion as a private matter implied a reduction in its sphere of influence through the impact of state in its capacity as the agent of 'modernisation'. Nehru's principal achievement in this voluntarist perspective was undoubtedly the Hindu Code Bill."*²⁸⁹

There are many that would utterly disagree with Christophe Jaffrelot. He has got his analysis utterly wrong on several levels. Firstly, as B.R. Nanda argues: *"It is significant that though he regarded the enactment of these laws as his greatest service to his country, he excluded the Muslim community from them on the grounds that it was not yet ready for the reform."*²⁹⁰ By crafting or catering laws (civil codes of rights) to a specific community, with one stroke he nullified the role of the Constitution and the universal and impartial aspect of human rights within the borders of India. More importantly by treating one religious community, the Hindus, as backward and in need of state intervention Nehru was butting the Indian State against a community on the basis of its religion. Contrary to what Mr. Jaffrelot argues, like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru was putting religion at the centre of state action. It would be unimaginable to enact a Catholic Code Bill in France, it is difficult to understand why this would be a heroic deed in the Indian context. The inevitable consequences was that Hindus decided that the state was against them, therefore they should see the State as their main enemy. And by shielding the Muslim and Christian

²⁸⁹ Jaffrelot, 2003.

²⁹⁰ Nanda, 1995, 309.

communities from similar laws, Nehru had paved the way for religious and communal tensions. For HR, this was a catastrophe in the making.

According to one specialist, HR under independent India's first prime minister can be summed up as follows: "*Nehru's concept of rights was based on his philosophy of life wherein individual enjoyed the key position. He laid great emphasis on the individuality of man, his dignity and his role in shaping the society. According to him civilizations may rise and disappear, nations maybe swept away by tornado of time and sink into oblivion, but man survives in all his glory and greatness down the ages. Therefore, he argued that no individual is to be thrown on the rubbish heap. He must be regarded as significant as purposeful; and nobody no state or organisation should try to suppress the individual. The state, society and all institutions exist for the individual, not the individual for them. That was his cardinal principle.*"²⁹¹ In part I agree with this, Nehru had very little to offer for the starving millions of India, so he made it his practice, in exchange he curtailed state action. Non-interference in the daily goings of the people became the preferred policy of his tenure. It was like saying: unfortunately I cannot offer much materially but I can promise not to abuse your basic liberties. There are many divisions and discriminations in society but the Indian state will not make this worse by lending support to the perpetrators of these abuses, was the message. There was a tacit contract between the masses and Nehru that he would dent or limit the power of predator communities and *Fringe Mesopotamians* that traditionally saw HR abuse as a privilege.

Apart from this nothing was done to improve the basic material condition of the masses. Dipankar Chakrabarti advances a very simple, straightforward and to my thinking credible explanation to why nothing was done. He says that firstly, India's recent history on human rights or rights of any kind has to be divided into two phases – colonial and postcolonial. Secondly, it has to be emphasised that: "*India's freedom was achieved basically through a compromise with the imperialists, thereby handing over power to the bourgeoisie, dependant on the imperialists in alliance with the feudal elements.*

²⁹¹ Goraya, 2008, 871.

As a consequence, human rights of the common labouring people were not at all guaranteed, nor were such rights expected to be ensured."²⁹² This is far removed from what happened in China, where the peasantry was the driving force behind the rooting out of the feudal system and the repelling of both the Western and Japanese occupiers. And naturally when they took over, the material well-being of the masses became the central pillar to state action. Nehru did not have a taste for this kind of state, although branding himself as a socialist or Fabian. The urban educated bourgeoisie was his main constituency. A comprehensive Welfare State, even if lacking in resources, would have laid the foundations for a better protection of fundamental rights and HR in general.

In the absence of a welfare state the Nehruvian state did not bother to create jobs and economic empowerment for the masses, instead it concentrated its efforts on the tiny middleclass, which had replaced the British as the new privileged suckers of India's resources. Nehru had soothing words and often scolded the masses for not being civil enough towards each other but apart from that nothing concrete was done to address the issue of HR. And nor was there any effort made to lay the foundations for the future. As one reporter of a US journal summed up Nehru's situation as the following: *"On each occasion in New Delhi, when he talked with the charm and the fluency that go with his great gift of personality, you came away with a sense of the enormity of his task and the odds against his being able to succeed in it. He was struggling to impose on the vast confusion of India – a confusion of languages, castes, customs – the parliamentary democracy which he had come to know in his education at Harrow and Cambridge in England."*²⁹³ It was undeniable, as argued earlier, that Nehru had limited resources and was constrained in the scope of his desired objectives by a chaotic situation domestically and an explosive situation internationally, which had direct implications for India. Policy options were limited and it is difficult to persist at this level. This said, there were other options that would have costed little but would have strengthened the

²⁹² Chakrabarti, 2011, 35.

²⁹³ Childs, 1962. December 4.

foundations. Human rights, seen from an institutional perspective, cannot exist without rule of law and a strong civil society.

Nehru maintained the predator communities, the serial abusers of HR, at bay but strengthened another monster – the *bureaucratic state*. This would have a devastating effect on HR and continues to do so to this day. Nehru had to integrate the new territorial acquisitions and the loose colonial structure into a water-tight super-structure so that it does not fall apart from both inner and outer tensions. He could not depend directly upon the prominent communities that had collaborated with British Empire because there was a possibility that they would out-manoeuvre him. He could not openly use the army because he would be deemed a military dictator. So what Nehru did was to use a range of means to acquire integration that suited his personal power: “*The main ingredients of Nehru's strategy of nation building were: (a) The making of a constitution based on consensus and accommodation, (b) secularism, (c) parliamentary democracy, (d) federalism, (e) linguistic re-organisation of states, (f) democratic decentralization for Panchayati Raj (g) party building and (h) penetration of centre into periphery through the administrative process.*”²⁹⁴ It was hoped that this would work out with time, it did not. Of all the measures it was thought that the federal process would decentralise and delegate enough power to the local bodies, which would then give appropriate attention to issues like HR. As one expert confirms: “*But the federal system created by Nehru proved dysfunctional for national integration...*”²⁹⁵ Nehru failed miserably in the long term.

What Nehru succeed in creating was a bureaucratic monster of unprecedented proportions. This is one of the reason why the Indian State is proportionally the biggest abuser of HR. After one of the most brutal colonial system, it was deemed necessary by many to abolish the colonial bureaucracy and make a fresh start: “*The development environment requires an administrative system which performs a 'change' function instead of a 'maintenance' function.*”²⁹⁶ As it was widely known, the colonials were few,

²⁹⁴ Singh & Arya, 2006, 920.

²⁹⁵ Singh & Arya, 2006, 922.

²⁹⁶ Perumal, 1993, 327.

meaning that they depended upon local collaborators to impart their brutality and abuse. And since these local strongmen were badly paid and not supervised, corruption was rampant, leading to excessive material and physical abuse of the population. Maintaining the colonial administration also meant retaining structural, racial and caste prejudices of the British. There was a dangerous over-representation of Brah-amins, increasing the scope of predation to unbearable levels and letting loose a caste and class of serial abusers. Nehru knew this very well, yet decided to make it the backbone of today's India: *"He did not agree with those who wanted to abolish the colonial system of administration. He regarded its maintenance essential not only for much needed stability, tension management and conflict resolution but also for social transformation. This explains the vertical and horizontal expansion of administration during the Nehru – era. This, somehow, proved dysfunctional for national integration as the bureaucracy was not only power hungry and corrupt but also inefficient."*²⁹⁷ By creating a corrupt bureaucratic and oppressive police state, Nehru, knowingly or not, created a super structure of HR abuse and intolerance in general. Under Nehru, the people could maintain nominal autonomy, which worked to his advantage but they lost all economic autonomy. Indeed, Nehru nationalized communal properties of the villages and strengthened feudal structures by aligning the new democratic structures with the old feudal and administrative rent-seeking structures. This was detrimental to the long term development of a culture supporting HR.

André Malraux, the one-time minister for culture in France, having met Nehru in 1958 came to this conclusion: *"He pitied India. He knew its misery. But he wanted to see it committed to a unique destiny, dedicated to becoming the conscience of the world."*²⁹⁸ In retrospective, it is time for the Indian people to pity Nehru and his massive failures as a leader and as an intellectual. For the moment India's unique destiny seems to be that of an almost one and half billion people abused on a regular basis, in a million and one ways. Nehru surely has to bear the full responsibility for this.

²⁹⁷ Singh & Arya, 2006, 924.

²⁹⁸ Malraux & Kilmartin, 1968, 141.

Period Two: Indira Gandhi - Foundation of a comprehensive system of rights and duties

Nehru should have initiated and consolidated human rights in India. He had a historic opportunity and political power to do so. He was equipped with the necessary intellect and persuasive power. He could push things through by gaining both political and bureaucratic backing. He could build a national consensus. But he failed miserably to realise this fact by deciding to postpone the advent of a comprehensive approach to HR in a critical and propitious moment of India's history. This job was left to future leaders who were bound to be less equipped with all these qualities. At least there would be less goodwill from Indians and foreigners. This somebody must be someone who knew the weaknesses of the "Nehru System" of governance and priority setting. It was a lonely woman who had been in the shadows for a long time, who had patience and steel-strengthened stamina, a woman who truly cared and loved her people, the masses of poor Indians. And above everything else, a woman who wanted to give material meaning to the word "democracy". Long forgotten and at the point of implosion. She was Indira Gandhi, daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, and no relative of Mahatma Gandhi - neither in spirit nor in political action. But Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, despite their robust cooperation with the British colonial oppressors and their total disregard, sometimes even contempt for the average Indian, are lifted up to the status of near sainthood. On the other side of the scale Indira Gandhi, as myself witnessed and benefitted from her policies, did more to India and Indians than any other Prime Minister, and probably any Prime Minister will do in the future. But she is regularly portrayed as a dictator who trampled on HR, because of the fateful events of Emergency. A policy which tried to deal with an urbanite and corrupt elite, for the betterment of the masses.

For Indira Gandhi, creating and protecting a comprehensive Human Rights regime had to come through two concepts: social transformation and empowerment of the poor. Both could only be achieved by a strong

commitment from fast-track responsive state. From Nehru she not only inherited the national shame of a lost war in 1962 but also hundreds of millions of starving Indians. All the while vigorously defending his nonalignment, Nehru was begging the reluctant Americans to sell, or give as aid, tens of millions of tons of wheat each year. As The Times of India journalist reminded us: "*Jawaharlal Nehru talked big about self-sufficiency. Yet he led India into deep dependence on foreign charity.*"²⁹⁹ It is hardly appropriate to speak of human rights while millions could not have at least one meal a day. Speaking of Indira Gandhi and her time as Prime Minister one commentator had this to say: "*Indira Gandhi was neither a moral giant like Gandhi nor an intellectual giant like Nehru.*"³⁰⁰ Both Nehru and Gandhi, to please their Western constituency, were proud of their worldly philosophies while millions starved and were humiliated nationally and internationally on a daily basis. My reply to this commentator would be: with her motherly instinct, Indira Gandhi needed neither. She just wanted to feed her people, send the children to school, give seeds to farmers and protect the fragile environment in India, upon which so many depended for their livelihood, and lay the future for a technologically developed India. Unlike Nehru or Gandhi, she had achieved all these in a very limited time.

Indira Gandhi saw the problem of human rights in a very simple and straight forward logic. To protect the rights of the people we need two things. On the one side a country should have a fair and pro-active institutional outlay, to which citizen in need can turn to for help as victims of abuse. And on the other side a country should empower its citizens sufficiently, give them sufficient strength, in order for them to fight for their rights. She wanted to make progress in both directions but her experience and observation had showed her that with a nepotistic political elite and unresponsive and corrupt bureaucracy her success with the institutional outlay would be very limited. So empowerment naturally became her preferred option. And it would have been the preferred option of any reasonable and sensible person. But of course Bengali intellectuals and journalists regularly lambast Indira Gandhi at home and

²⁹⁹ Aiyar, 2012. July, 29.

³⁰⁰ Puri, 1985, 148.

abroad as being authoritarian and abusing human rights: *"The fundamental objective of both Jawaharlal and Indira was the modernisation of the country- the first sought to achieve this by a quasi-liberal path and the second by an increasingly authoritarian one."*³⁰¹ As we will see one of the reasons why Bengali's keep attacking Indira Gandhi is because Bengal was the region where discrimination and abuse was the highest by the upper classes. Bengalis had the strange tendency of preaching communism for the rich and powerful, while exploiting the poor and needy. Let us not forget that Bengalis and Madrasis constituted the backbone of the British colonial and administrative exploitation of the Indian people. They hate Indira Gandhi for shattering the illusion that they are fighting for the poor. For this reason, they keep writing about the authoritarianism of Indira Gandhi, which at the most touched only few in the elite circles. The reality of Indira Gandhi's policies was quite different on the ground.

The abuse of HR in India was mainly directed against women and the poorer classes in India. It was therefore Indira Gandhi's firm belief that woman's rights in India have to be secured, in order to create a fairer and equal society. This meant creating a sustainable, long term, empowerment as a precondition to HR. As Ashok Bhargava points out, throughout her tenure, Indira Gandhi was very consistent in her policy formulation, empowering people on the lower end: *"Growth with equality has been paid lip service by planners and policy makers since Independence. Mrs. Gandhi made it a separate and different issue by her slogan "garibi hatao" (remove poverty / war on poverty). There was now to be a frontal attack on absolute poverty by the government. This reflected both the presence of a large proportion of the population in absolute poverty and the change in thinking on development. The seventies saw a push for direct services for the poor. These programs included: small farmers' development agency; marginal farmers' and agricultural laborers' program; drought-prone areas program; crash scheme for rural employment;*

³⁰¹ Roy, 1984, 1896.

employment guarantee scheme; food for work; and operation barga (land reform – 1978)."³⁰²

Indira Gandhi was not ideological, she was pragmatic and systematic in her approach to HR. Six months after taking power she started elaborating policies to reduce inequalities. When she took power in 1966, India was in the middle of an unprecedented economic crisis due to a severe drought and burdened with the costs of the second war with Pakistan in 1965. She had the political disregard of her male colleagues and empty hands as far economic means were concerned. Her father, Nehru, was socialist only in a comfortable sofa, while big businesses dominated the Indian economy. There was an urgent need to change things. She hurriedly came up with a "Ten-point Programme": *"It sought social control of banking institutions; nationalisation of general insurance; nationalisation of export and import trade; public distribution of foodgrain; curbs on monopolies and concentration of economic power; limits on urban incomes and property; better implementation of land reform; and an end to princely privileges and privy purses."*³⁰³ She introduced legislation to take back real power to solve urgent and pressing needs. She introduced laws like Urban Land Ceilings Act in the proceeding years to solve the problem of slums by freeing up land for cheap housing. The condition of the urban poor, similar to that of the rural poor, was intolerable and a disgrace for democracy. With her 10-point program Indira Gandhi managed to stop the bleeding of the country, and it was one way to reduce the structural abuse of HR.

This phase was followed up by the launching of the issue of women's position in India. At the time they constituted half of the population but suffered in every aspect of their life. So it was deemed necessary to get a clear picture of women conditions before crafting policies to protect HR in all areas of social life. Indira Gandhi set-up the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1974-75) with the aim of producing an objective survey and make practical recommendations to improve the situation.³⁰⁴ As one commentator summed it up: *"... this report was a major eye-opener and galvanized many groups into*

³⁰² Malik & Vajpeyi, 1988, 75.

³⁰³ Panagariya, 2011. August 24.

³⁰⁴ Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974.

action. For example, it highlighted the stark inequalities of gender evident in chilling statistics of imbalanced sex ratios, indicating major differentials in male and female mortality; constraints experienced by women as a result of socio-cultural institutions such as dowry, polygamy and child marriage. It also identified discriminatory legal frameworks and practices; economic practices that did not recognize the contribution of women; an educational system that was not equally accessible to girls and women, ghettoizing them in certain fields and transmitting values inimical to gender equality; and a political system that did not promote women's participation adequately."³⁰⁵ As was expected this created a big bang effect in state initiatives as well as initiation of civil society movements mushrooming across the country. But Indira Gandhi went beyond this by integrating the issue of women empowerment and emancipation into mainstream government policy.

Parallel to the publishing of the CSWI report, Indira Gandhi formulated a 20-point program to tackle the problems indicated by the report, integrating the recommendations of its authors. Some think that this was a program hurriedly put together to fulfil electoral purposes.³⁰⁶ The main purpose of the program was to liberate the individual and align his or her loyalty to the state. Indira Gandhi believed that the individual was under layers of discrimination or tutelage and only economic empowerment could liberate the individual from this. Lee Schlesinger, now at the University of Michigan, was in an Indian village at the time and had this to say: *"The dialectics of democracy or dictatorship and their ideologies were quite irrelevant to the realities of the local political system, best described as a kind of participatory oligarchy."*³⁰⁷ Indira Gandhi was desperate to produce results but the patterns of instinctive behaviour could not be changed so quickly. As one HR lawyer reflected: *"Unfortunately women from the middle classes, whether in tribal society or non-tribal, have used the women's movement for either solving their individual problems without any commitment to a larger movement or to get into the same*

³⁰⁵ Khullar, 2005, 11.

³⁰⁶ Malik & Vajpeyi, 1988, 72.

³⁰⁷ Schlesinger, 1977, 630.

patriarchal structures which are the cause of oppression."³⁰⁸ When the sun dawned on the socio-political system, Indira Gandhi realised that India's elite were corrupt, heritage from her father, and the key element of liberal democracy, the middle-classes cannot be trusted. Desperation is followed by impatience and Indira Gandhi declares Emergency when she temporarily suspends the democratic process.

Although Mrs. Gandhi's move to secure the 20-point program by imposing Emergency is understandable but at same time it has to be said that it has a devastating effect on human rights in the long run.³⁰⁹ She suspends the political system that is corrupt and obstructive. She moves away from an untreatable middleclass that is self-absorbed and selfish. The logical consequence is that she is left with the civil security forces and the bureaucracy. Both were still in the colonial footing, brutal and alien to local populations. Faced with this we have a population that was, root and leaf, mobilized after the promise of Indira Gandhi's practical empowerment policies. If she had time, there was a chance that she would have entrenched the good results and weeded out malpractice. Her resignation at the end of Emergency and her triumphant re-election at the end of 1979 are a witness to the fact that she had enormous trust in her people and theirs in her. This trust and their common belief in democracy would have helped normalise and modernise India. And more importantly build a culture of respect for HR. But unfortunately she was assassinated by two extremists on the 31st of October 1984. When after receiving some 30 bullets her humble body fell to the earth, and so did the promise of a respectable Human Rights regime in India, along with many other good things.

High profile and well-connected Bengali academics, intellectuals and journalists continue to pour their venom on her so it is difficult to have an objective assessment of her deeds or misdeeds. According to one of them: *"Indira Gandhi's failure is even greater. Instead of a united and modernised nation that she strove to build, she leaves the country seriously threatened with*

³⁰⁸ Khullar, 2005, 146-147.

³⁰⁹ Malik & Vajpeyi, 1988, 72-81

fragmentation."³¹⁰ But some of them were slightly more balanced: "Though a democratic atmosphere prevailed after the withdrawal of the Emergency and the installation of a new government in New Delhi, it was apprehended by the civil rights workers that state terrorism, police atrocities as well as attacks on mass movements and human rights would continue in some form or the other. The experience of the next four decades confirmed these apprehensions. All the anti-people acts of the State continued, although on a smaller scale."³¹¹ In general one can say that the loss of her leadership was the key factor in the beginning of the chaotic decomposition that ensued.

Period Three: The Hope of an Elaborate System Neutralised

The assassination of Mrs. Gandhi unlocked the flood gates to interminable sequence of disasters. Her son Rajiv Gandhi possessed even more charisma than his mother and was cherished as an honest person by his people, the poor people of India. Like his mother he too wanted to liberate the masses from the clutches of feudal structures, structures that abused HR without the slightest interruption, as if the rule of law did not exist, as if the British Empire still ruled India. He came to the conclusion that maybe his mother had made a mistake by handing extra powers and resources to the police and the bureaucracy. The judiciary was not in a better condition either. And of course he could not rely upon the dissentious and deceitful middle classes, for reasons explained earlier, so strengthening civil society had to wait. So the problem for Rajiv Gandhi was how to create sustainable rights for his people, without creating monsters, like a brutal police force and a corrupt bureaucracy, which would make things worse. After touring around the country and literally consulting thousands of people, he came to the conclusion that he should undercut the feudal structures by giving power to the lowest level, in the form of local government. Giving empowerment on an unprecedented scale by literally creating millions of local leaders fighting for local issues, sweeping aside the

³¹⁰ Roy, 1984, 1897.

³¹¹ Chakrabarti, 2011, 36.

clutches of the police force and the bureaucracy. The idea was brilliant by its scale and by the theoretical impact it was supposed to have on the Human Rights regime in India. But he was not to see the results of his fabulous effort, he was blown to pieces by a member of an extremist group on 21st May 1991.

P. V. Narasimha Rao, who led the Congress party to victory in the aftermath made it a priority to translate Rajiv Gandhi's dream into a reality. *"In 1993, Parliament agreed to the introduction of local government throughout the country, through the 73rd and Constitutional Amendments. With these changes, India's two-tier system of a union government and (now) 28 states was transformed three-tier system."*³¹² It was probably one of the biggest reform of its kind in human history. A three-tier system at the local level meant the creation of 227698 village councils, 5906 block councils and 474 district councils. Overnight there were almost 3 000 000 local representatives of which 1 000 000 had to be women by law. Furthermore 700 000 of the representatives must come from the Dalit community.³¹³ The long awaited empowerment of the people had come true. And with it, the capacity to seek redress against abuse increased proportionally. A group of researchers conducted a detailed survey and found that *"... the introduction of mandated political representation for women leads to a large and statistically significant increase in the number of documented crimes against women. Across all categories, documented crimes against women rose 46 percent, while rapes increased by 23 percent, and kidnapping of women showed 13 percent increase."*³¹⁴ By way of representation women felt that they could report crimes and abuse without retortion from an official body. This was a huge boost to the human rights capacity. According to this research, what was more important was that, *"... women express greater willingness to report crimes to the police in villages where the village council head position is reserved for women."*³¹⁵ This showed that democratic empowerment of oppressed sections of the population could transform their ability to fight for their rights. This also shows that the belated

³¹² deSouza, 2003, 99.

³¹³ deSouza, 2003, 99-100.

³¹⁴ Iyer, Mani, Mishra & Topalova, 2012, 167.

³¹⁵ Iyer, Mani, Mishra & Topalova, 2012, 167.

decision to introduce local government and the reservation of seats was a good decision that brought about a structural improvement to the delivery of rights; within the framework of the Human Rights regime in India.

P. V. Narasimha Rao, was a thoughtful and mild mannered South Indian Brah-amin, who took every opportunity to initiate and complement the institutional framework for human rights and their defence. Rare and surreal happenings. With all this intensive effort, nominally India became a model paradise as far as HR and the protection of the citizen rights were concerned. But in reality it is like playing a game of poker where the citizen holds no cards and has to pretend that all is fine. N. S. Gehlot describes the nominal set-up as follows: *"The laws providing safeguards against excesses are substantial. The Constitution protects the right to life and personal liberty (Article 21) and other fundamental rights. Although the prohibition of torture in specific terms lacks constitutional authority, the courts have held that Article 21 implies protection against torture and that sections 330 and 331 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as well as section 29 of the Indian Police Act specifically forbid the practice. Stringent punishment is prescribed under section 376 of the IPC for rape in police custody or by the armed forces."*³¹⁶ And since 1993 the Indian citizen is armed with an extra outlay of protection, which is sometimes rare in other countries: *"The Lok Sabha has adopted, in December 1993, the Protection of Human Rights Bill, making possible the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)."*³¹⁷

The drawback to this tremendous maze of human rights laws and institutions is that the Indian state-system neutralises it by creating a myriad of counter-measures, what one can call the authoritarian coded abbreviations. The digital initiative of the Economic and Political Weekly – Engage describes the situation as follows: *"As the second branch of government, the purpose of the legislature is to make laws that uphold the fundamental rights of all citizens. However, when met with extraordinary circumstances, the Indian legislature has made laws that have not only neglected fundamental rights, but also contradicted*

³¹⁶ Gehlot, 1994, 382.

³¹⁷ Gehlot, 1994, 381.

them. Often the use of these draconian laws has continued well after the circumstances in which they were created have passed. But they have endowed the state with excess powers to violate constitutionally guaranteed rights at both the individual and community level.”³¹⁸ The Economic and Political Weekly – Engage lists the following, not all, legislative initiatives taken by the Indian State to totally disarm the Human Rights engagements, both national and international:

1. National Safety Act (NSA)
2. Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)
3. Public Safety Act (PSA)
4. Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA)
5. Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA)

Derision of purpose and overcrowding is another method by which institutions dedicated to HR are deactivated in their scope: “For instance, the NHRC has accepted petitions ranging from malaria deaths in Orissa about compensation from the State Government to cases of transfer and retirement benefits of employees. The Commission's initial failure lies in not having any guidelines for its own functioning. By poking its nose into every problem, from environment to employee benefits, citing a remote connection to human rights, the Commission has placed itself in a complicated terrain.”³¹⁹ Discretion and non-application of laws or delay in the implementation of court orders was another method to deactivate HR legislation or conformity. As one commentator explains: “Impunity remains a serious challenge, as does the implementation of existing guidelines and directives issued by the courts and national human rights institution.”³²⁰ Demonization is a routine and increasingly popular tactic to disarm people of their HR capacities. These arguments will surely continue to weigh in one way or the other but one thing is for sure, the

³¹⁸ Economic and Political Weekly initiative, 2018. September 20.

³¹⁹ Gehlot, 1994, 388.

³²⁰ Heyns, 2015, Summary.

main perpetrator of HR abuses is the Indian State and its law enforcements organs. Anyone opposing this particular form of state induced violence is seen with suspicion and in turn becomes target of state brutality.

Derogation is another method to deflect the concern for HR: *"Not once in all these years has any government of India permitted a Rapporteur appointed by the UN Human Rights Commission to visit India in order to study issues of human rights that fall within his remit."*³²¹ Respectable international bodies like the UN are not even given access to make on sight inspections: *"The Committee is deeply concerned about the reported high level of violence, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, enforced disappearance, killings and acts of torture and ill treatment, against women in conflict affected regions."*³²² Since globalisation this derogatory attitude is the most common thing when confronted with the most pressing demands for action: *"As we have already noted, though many of the existing civil rights organisations have begun to take note of the evil consequences of globalisation running amok in our country since the beginning of the 1990s, it must, no doubt, be admitted that a significant and comprehensive programme which can fully and properly address its onslaught and consequences has not yet been formulate."*³²³ As it should be pointed out that treatment of workers and labour relations are very different between formal and informal sectors in India. The onslaught of globalisation has had a devastating effect on work and pay conditions, in general the treatment of workers: *"In India, only 8% of the labour force is in the formal economy while 92% work in the informal economy with no legal protection or security, and are subject to ruthless exploitation."*³²⁴ And of course, within this context, things worsen for women, especially those women who come from a tribal or Dalit background: *"This everyday violence is the product of a culture that bestows all power on men, and that does not even want women to exist."*³²⁵ There seems to be no end to the dark tunnel of abuse and disregard in the issue of HR passing through in India. Even in abuse,

³²¹ Noorani, 1997, 2986.

³²² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UNO), 2014. July 4-5, 4/15.

³²³ Chakrabarti, 2011, 37.

³²⁴ Chakrabarti, 2011, 39.

³²⁵ Narayan, 2018. April 27.

especially in abuse and disdain, the current avatar of Indian official attitude towards Human Rights is ingenious, make it look like something inevitable. As one author puts it: *"The real genius of this system lies in the fact that oppression has been recast as a virtue. So erasure of self – the most treacherous human rights violation – hides in plain sight, sanctified by loving families, perfumed by our definitions of goodness. And the private sphere, the family, remains impenetrable and untouchable."*³²⁶ As for the more recent developments in the field of HR in India, I would ask the reader to consider the following captions of news items:

News headlines as a clue to what is happening in India today:

- "42% of Indian girls are sexually abused before 19: Unicef"³²⁷
- "In extremely distressful news, NCRB data shows that instances of child rape increased by 82% in 2016 compared to the previous year."³²⁸
- "India is at war with its girls and women."³²⁹
- "Frameworks of human rights – cast largely in terms of the individual's relationship with the state – are facing an unprecedented challenge today."³³⁰

The United Nations Report:

- "Stark increase in violent crimes against women, especially rape and abduction, and the high number of cases of rape reported by the National Crime Records Bureau in 2012, indicating an increase by 902.1 per cent since 1971, and continuing impunity for such acts;..."³³¹

³²⁶ Narayan, 2018. April 27.

³²⁷ Ray, 2014. September 12.

³²⁸ The Times of India, 2017. December 2.

³²⁹ Narayan, 2018. April 27.

³³⁰ Chakrabarti, 2011, 33.

³³¹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UNO), 2014. July 4-5, 3/15.

Not a day goes by without such distressing and alarming news headlines in the Indian press, a tip of the iceberg.

9-Lack of collective-bargaining in India-Part 1³³²

A historic and institutional perspective on India's structural resilience

³³² Byrappa, R. (2020). Lack of collective-bargaining in India-Part 1. *NEMZETKÖZI MUNKÁSMOZGALOM TÖRTÉNETÉBŐL (ÉVKÖNYV)*, 46, 285–297.

Abstract:

The lack of collective-bargaining is one of the root causes of misery in India. The cause of persistent poverty in worker population. The continued exploitation and abuse of children. The appalling treatment of women at workplace. The absence of a structured welfare state. The underfunding of social infrastructures and allied services. And the scandalous nature of the Indian democracy and the consequent political circus, are all partly the result of a terrible state of collective-bargaining in India. This weakness in collective-bargaining is not exclusively due to institutional underdevelopment or lack of education. There are historic, structural and social reasons for the lack of an efficient and workable form of collective-bargaining. But globalization has also pushed the Indian economy into a morbid logical of seeking flexibility by giving a free hand to the existing system of exploitation.

Keywords: Informal sector, child labour, bonded labour, forced marriages, human trafficking, domestic workers, and institutional underdevelopment, predatorism, Fringe Mesopotamian frontierism

Methodology:

One of the main drawbacks to studies on unionization and labour relations in South Asia, and in particular India, is that little is done in terms of defining what labour is. Nothing related to India is simple and understandable because nothing is strictly defined, everything is a moving target. In these brief pages an attempt will be made to get an understanding of what labour means in the local context; what the perceptions are in South Asia's cultural and traditional environment. This means exploring concepts like marriage, bondage, forms of slavery and salaried labour without contracts and social security. So in this first part an attempt is made to defining labour; getting an understanding of what labour is and get a grasp of the condition in which labour finds itself today.

Introduction:

There is a very dark side to the lack of unionisation in India. The Indian economy is characterised by its high dependency upon the informal sector,

which is 93% of all employment generated in India. Unionisation in this sector is calculated to be anything between 3% and 5% at the most. The picture becomes dimmer when we realize that much of the abuse, malpractice and inequality happens in the informal sector. Who is to be blamed for this shambolic condition in which Indian workers find themselves? The answer to this question is not easy to establish. It seems that the main difficulty comes from the confusing nature in which labour, wage, work contract and work environment are defined. Before going further we have to get an overview of the situation.

1. Statistical snapshot of labour in India

If we look at the overall picture, according to the data collected by the New York Times: *"India is experiencing a youth bulge. Nearly two-thirds of Indians are under 35; half are under 25. By 2020, India will be the youngest country in the world, with a median age of 29 years, compared with a median age of 37 years in China at that point. India's large youth population, often called a "demographic dividend," could potentially make India the biggest consumer market and the biggest labour force in the world."*³³³ As a counter-trend, in the same article the journal points out to the fact that there will be more people engaged in agriculture in 2019 than 2012. Across the globe, the quantity of labour used in Agriculture, is going down. This excess supply of labour could lead to a deflation in wages and a deterioration of work conditions which are already deplorable.

The report by the United Nations confirms the trend, seen from a demographic perspective: *"... India will surpass China as the world's most populous country around 2027."*³³⁴ From this, what we can deduce is that the structural reality of India, as far as labour relations are concerned, has not altered over the centuries. There is an underutilisation of the workforce. This acts to keep wages low and cap any demands by the trade unions. From a historic perspective, one can therefore say that there is a fundamental structural issue

³³³ New York Times, 2014. April 17.

³³⁴ UN, 2019, 12.

that limits the proper development of labour relations in India. Regular studies conducted by the International Labour Organisation on the labour utilisation rates in India affirm the same. The first thing that one will notice from the ILO³³⁵ charts is that the Indian authorities do not give many statistics to this international organisation. The ILO statistics for 2018 show us the following: "the overall labour force participation is 48%, of which is 74.6% for men and 20.8% for women. Once again, we have to see what will happen if India were to increase the overall labour participation to 65% or 70%."³³⁶ One way for this to happen could be to reduce the discrimination against the use of women labour. But without the proportionate increase in the creation of jobs the effect would be to further depress wages.

If we look at the same sector-wise, agriculture dominates with 43.3%, followed by service sector with 31.7% and the industrial sector with 25%. The official unemployment rate is calculated at 5.3% with youth unemployment reaching 22.5%. The share of youth not in employment, education or training stands at 48.3%. The 2010 statistics for public social protection expenditure, excluding healthcare, was 1.5% of the GDP. And finally people actively contributing to an old age pension scheme was 7.4% of the total working population.³³⁷ For lack of information the ILO is unable to provide us with statistics on the level of unionisation or its sectorial reach. However it does provide details on the number of days lost due to industrial action, the number is 2196 per 1000 worker in a year. To this we can add some other statistics provided by the United Nations which shed light onto worker poverty and the state-capacity to redress the situation.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) puts the poverty rate at 28% in India.³³⁸ And a study by McKinsey Global Institute puts India's Empowerment

³³⁵ International Labour Organization. Country profiles.

³³⁶ The Planning Commission: Report of the Expert Group to Review the Methodology for Measurement of Poverty, Government of India, New Delhi, 2014, p. 4. URL: http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/genrep/pov_rep0707.pdf (Accessed: 28-10-2019)

³³⁷ The Planning Commission: Report of the Expert Group to Review the Methodology for Measurement of Poverty, Government of India, New Delhi, 2014, p. 4. URL: http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/genrep/pov_rep0707.pdf (Accessed: 28-10-2019)

³³⁸ The Indian Express, 2019. March 27.

Gap at 56% of the population,³³⁹ meaning that more than half of Indians do not have the minimum resources to maintain the semblance of an individual who can defend his or her citizen rights, in other words – have a decent life through his or her labour. And in terms of social distribution and the fiscal capacity of the state, the total tax in-take of the Government of India in the fiscal year 2018 was 11% of the Gross Domestic Product.³⁴⁰ This is one of the reasons why the state cannot supplement revenues for poor segments of society. Average revenues in this segment therefore remain very depressed and can be considered below the poverty line. But the government does not see it in this manner when it comes to the calculation of the poverty line: “Based on the analysis presented in the Report, monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 972 (appr. 4000 HUF /month) in rural areas and Rs. 1407 (appr. 5800 HUF/ month) in urban areas is treated as the poverty line at the all India level.”³⁴¹ This means, in dollar terms, having a monthly income above 14 USD in the rural areas and 20 USD in the urban areas is considered as not being poor. Even according to this surreal and creative method of computation, the Government of India acknowledges that: “*Totally, 363 million were below poverty in 2011-12.*”³⁴² It is no wonder therefore that the Human Development Index (HDI) calculated by the United Nations puts India at 0.640, ranking it at the 130 place, among 189 countries.³⁴³ If the trends in globalisation, modernization, artificial intelligence and food price inflation are to be believed, then we can expect close to one billion people submerging under the poverty line.

Briefly, what we can read from these statistics and reports is that there are substantial grounds to believe that precarity is widespread in India and consequently in the Indian labour market. The Indian economy is not a risk-taking hire and fire system, it is risk-averse. This is one of the main reasons why not enough jobs are created to absorb the 10-12 million³⁴⁴ young people that

³³⁹ Gupta et al., 2014.

³⁴⁰ KPMG, 2019. July 04.

³⁴¹ The Planning Commission, 2014, 4.

³⁴² The Planning Commission, 2014, 5.

³⁴³ UNDP, 2018, 24.

³⁴⁴ Nageswaran & Natarajan, 2019.

enter the labour market each year. But some think that: *“Low labour participation rates (LPR) and workforce participation rates (WPR) have been persistent characteristics of India's labour market”*. However, coming under pressure for not fulfilling its electoral promises the government was forced recently to increase the public sector job creation. Recently the Press Trust of India reported: *“The strength of government establishments was 32,38,397 as on March 1, 2017, which increased to 36,19,596 by the same date in 2019 —an increase of 3,81,199, according to the Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday.”*³⁴⁵ In the long run this cannot be a solution. Due to high levels of corruption and inefficiency, public sector job creation makes things even worse for the future. And combined with the “hire-fire” brand of entrepreneurial culture, introduced by the globalization process, and pressing needs of creating ever more jobs means that the future for stronger regulation against discrimination looks secondary.

The main reason for these short-comings of the Indian economy, in creating jobs in a consistent manner, are complex and very difficult to pin-point. This said, experts think that the lack big corporations is one of biggest cause. A government survey makes this clear: *“India has a plethora of labour laws, regulations and rules, both at the centre and the state levels that govern the employer-employee relationship. Each of these legislations exempts smaller firms from complying with these legislations.”*³⁴⁶ The underlying argument for this is that after reaching a certain limit these small firms try to outsource excess work in the informal sector. In the words of Shariq Khan: *“While smaller firms, employing less than 100 workers dominate the Indian economy, these never grow beyond their small size, and hold back job creation and productivity. While smaller firms (dwarfs) account for half of all the firms in organised manufacturing by number, their share in employment is only 14.1%...”*³⁴⁷ Recent economic surveys produced by the Indian government tend to agree with such arguments: *“An average firm in Mexico doubles its employment when it is forty years of age when compared to the workers it employed when it was less*

³⁴⁵ Press Trust of India, 2019. July 8.

³⁴⁶ Government of India, 2019, 63.

³⁴⁷ Khan, 2019. July 04.

than five years of age. In contrast, an average firm in India only employs 40% more workers when it is forty years of age when compared to the workers it employed when it was less than five years of age. Thus, firms in India do not grow enough to create the necessary jobs and productivity in the economy."³⁴⁸

Another problem according to this analysis is that the country, as well as the workers of these small companies, is that they produce less surplus value, with which they could have financed social welfare and pay higher wages. Although these dwarf firms constitute 50% of the total number, their total Net Value Added (NVA) is only 7%.³⁴⁹ Given the drive for efficiency and short-term profitability, one would have thought the opposite, that big firms destroy employment while the smaller ones not only create employment but also tend to maintain higher rates of employment in times of economic slow-down.

The simple fact that small firms dominate the manufacturing sector reduces the chances of better work conditions. The same government report mentioned above states that: *"When examined purely according to size, we note that the proportion of small firms in organized manufacturing is around 85 per cent."*³⁵⁰ Meaning that the big corporations represent a largely reduced 15%. And it seems that the subsequent governments have done nothing to improve the situation.³⁵¹ Although one can understand the logic of the current government, one cannot accept it as a universal truth because of international examples like that of China and more notably that of Germany. A European Union Commission publication had these very positive words for small companies: *"In Germany, SMEs account for 54.0 % of total value added and 63.2 % of employment. These figures are lower than the respective average EU shares of 56.8 % and 66.4 %. SMEs have generated healthy growth in recent years, with SME value added and employment increasing by 20.0 % and 11.2 % respectively in 2013-2017."*³⁵² If the small firms could get similar 'administrative

³⁴⁸ Government of India, 2019, 21.

³⁴⁹ Government of India, 2019, 21.

³⁵⁰ Government of India, 2019, 21.

³⁵¹ Government of India, 2019, 21.

³⁵² The European Commission: 2018 SBA Fact Sheet – Germany. Available at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/32581/attachments/12/translations/en/renditions/native>
(Downloaded: 02-07-2023)

and governmental' environment in India there is no doubt they could perform the same way.

The real question that authorities and analysts should be asking is: why the employment rates are so low for a country of almost 1.4 billion? And then, within that: why does the informal sector, which escapes all control, represent more than 90% of total employment in India³⁵³, with 390 million workers? And finally: why do unionization rates in the formal sector are less than 15% and in the informal sector only 3% and 5%?³⁵⁴ In gathering and assessing different kinds of arguments and gathering statistical evidence in India, one comes to the obvious conclusion that a lot of things are said but there is always something essential missing in all this. There is no proper definition of labour or concepts that can delimit the area that we are analysing.

2. Trying to understand the concept of labour in the Indian context:

From Adam Smith to Karl Marx and beyond not much has been done in defining labour as such, most of the theoreticians instead concentrate on surplus value achieved by the "labour process", although Marx does make an effort. The debate then moves onto how the surplus values have to be divided up or who should control these surpluses. Adam Smith says that what characterises labour is that it has zero surplus that is stocked: *"Many workmen could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year without employment. In the long-run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him, but the necessity is not so immediate."*³⁵⁵ Karl Marx does define labour: *"The use of labour power, is labour. The buyer of labour power consumes it by setting the seller of labour power to work. Thereby the latter becomes what he was before potentially, labour power in action, a worker."*³⁵⁶ In both cases what characterises labour is the absence of control over the surplus value, this is a structurally defining factor. What is clear therefore, is that the employer is able to impose his conditions because he

³⁵³ Avirgan, Gammage & Bivens, 2005.

³⁵⁴ Avirgan, Gammage & Bivens, 2005.

³⁵⁵ Smith, 1937. 66.

³⁵⁶ Marx, 1930, 169.

controls some form of surplus value. This is where things differ in the Indian Subcontinent, conditions are generally imposed without the existence of surpluses. In India caste, creed, race, religion, tradition, Fringe Mesopotamian frontierism, predatorism and inner colonialism play a big role in how labour is acquired and used. And labour is neither limited to age categories nor is it specified or detached from social existence. The ILO is struggling to accommodate to this complexity when it tries to gather statistics in India.³⁵⁷

The caste system imposes a permanent shadow on labour relations in India. People often mistake it for a social system of hierarchies, but the core function of the caste system is economic extraction through a carefully constructed division of labour. It assigns a caste to a particular level or category of work. In other words, to a particular category of revenue. Since it is bestowed with a strong socio-religious sanctity, the question of industrial relations never arises. This said, traditional crafts and trades did have their 'guild' like structures which provided them a minimum of protection and coordination. But the vast majority that were exploited were the untouchables and the tribal populations, and here the principles of caste discrimination are the determining factor. And because of its permanent or semi-permanent character the caste system can be considered as a graded form of slavery.

On top of the caste induced gradation of slavery we have to count with tradition induced forms of slavery like child labour and forced marriage. Although one cannot generalise the phenomenon, in this context the individual person is considered as an 'object for exploitation' used as a transaction under the shadow of tradition. Like the caste system, marriage is also institutionalized with traditional and religious legitimation. In this manner it is beyond the reach of any form of industrial relations.

Similar traditions, religious and structural entrapments lead to the accumulation of debt which has similar effects as bondage. Although religion everywhere is about god and one should not question the right of people to have their beliefs, the practice of it is what constantly begs for critical analysis, especially in India. If one wants to go further in one's analysis, religion in India

³⁵⁷ Papola, 2014, 2.

creates two categories of people: the believers as debtors and Brah-amins as creditors. As soon as an Indian family falls into a pattern established by tradition or religion, it automatically becomes a sort of a debtor. Because it has to fulfil a long list of rites that are very costly. In India, by definition, the poorer sections of the population are those living on a very restricted revenue base. Whatever extra cost can immediately induce indebtedness. This study has selected three main areas which need to be elevated as grey areas where industrial relations do not apply because they come under social convention and not a legally accepted form of labour: bonded labour, child labour and gender/woman depreciated labour. All these categories are much larger than the formal sector which makes it all the more important to apprehend the depth and scope of the phenomena.

2.1. Bonded labour / Debt bondage / Debt slavery

In 1997, witnessing the high persistence of bonded labour, in spite of legislation against it in 1976, the Supreme Court of India ordered the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to conduct a detailed survey of the phenomenon. While the Constitution does not define labour, the apex court and the commission have tried to provide us with a definition: *"Bonded labour, also known as debt bondage or debt slavery is a person's pledge of labour or services as security for the repayment for a debt or other obligation. The services required to repay the debt may be undefined, and the services' duration may be undefined. Debt bondage can be passed on from generation to generation."*³⁵⁸ Given the hidden nature of this type of exploitation it is very difficult to quantify it. Using population metrics and cross-sectional studies some Non-Governmental Organizations are trying to grapple with the enormity of this task. In the words of Radheshyam Yadav: *"The Global Slavery Index estimates that on any given day in 2016, there were nearly 8 million people living in modern slavery in India. In terms of prevalence of modern slavery in India, there were 6.1 victims for every thousand people."*³⁵⁹ But the index itself explains that

³⁵⁸ Murugesan, 2018, Forward.

³⁵⁹ Jadhav, 2019. March 06.

the overall number of people in slavery could be as high as 18.3 million in India.³⁶⁰

In a study conducted in the early 1980s into bondage and migrant labour it becomes clear that caste is a factor for selective exploitation: *"Caste wise, 14 percent were scheduled castes, 84 per cent from backward castes, and only 2 per cent belonged to upper castes."*³⁶¹ The same study also reveals the extent to which tribal segments of the population are exploited: *"The second stream hailed from the tribal belt of Chhotanagpur, what Nirmal Sengupta calls 'Fourth World'."*³⁶² *"Once the labourers were disposed of in competitive bid, the responsibility of the recruiting agent got over. The farmers, fearing that the labourer might flee away at night, kept a close vigil on them. Some of them, true to their traits of slave driving, would lock them at night along with the cattle in their cattle shed. They were physically assaulted by the employer to make them submit to the inhuman conditions."*³⁶³ Middlemen have even adopted methods of how to get poor families indebted and then ask for their children as repayment.

2.2. Child labour and slavery

Child labour, whether voluntary or involuntary, is highly prevalent in India. It is very difficult to define child labour because of the vague perimeters and context of the work done. According to the ILO child labour can be defined as: *"The term 'child labour' is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development."*³⁶⁴ This definition could engulf a sizeable majority of children in India. According to the ILO: *"As per Census 2011, the total child population in India in the age group (5-14) years is 259.6 million. Of these, 10.1 million (3.9% of total child population) are working, either as 'main worker' or as 'marginal worker'. In addition, more than 42.7 million children in India are out*

³⁶⁰ Global Slavery Index. Country Studies. India.

³⁶¹ Singh, 1997, 518.

³⁶² Singh, 1997, 518.

³⁶³ Singh, 1997, 518.

³⁶⁴ International Labour Office, 2004, 16.

of school.”³⁶⁵ This out of school category is the most troubling, because out of school does not mean that they are playing in the shade of a Banyan tree. It simply means that they are doing chores at home or have become domestic servants for middleclass city dwellers. So potentially we have 53 million children, 20% of the child population in work. And given the fact that these children are in the informal sector, their status is akin to that of a slave, where they receive no social or legal protection and have no representation of any form.

According to the Government of India census in 2001 there were 12 666 377 child labours. It also indicates that this number was radically reduced to 4 353 247 according to the 2011 census.³⁶⁶ This reduction is not due to any miracle, it is the result of a fast urbanization in which child labour moves from factories to middleclass families, where they are used as bonded slaves. As usual, the government figures do not match those given by UNICEF, which says: *“Although in rural settings the number of child workers was reduced from 11 million to 8 million between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, over the same period, the number of children working in urban settings rose from 1.3 million to 2 million...”*³⁶⁷ The UN organization also indicates that child labour constitutes 13% of all workforce in India.

The causes of child labour are many and there is a lot of complexity involved. However, UNICEF-India has identified three main causes: low family income, family indebtedness and child trafficking.³⁶⁸ The Government of India has continued to take a legal approach by passing an increasing number of legislative acts. Apart from the provisions of the constitution, it has enacted three major acts: Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986), Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 (the JJ Act) and amendment of the JJ Act in 2006 and The Right to Education Act 2009. On top of this it has adopted a “National Policy on Child Labour (1987)” to rehabilitate children liberated from slavery.³⁶⁹ But none of these actions can be considered as being proactive. This means that this particular tragic segment of labour in

³⁶⁵ International Labour Office, 2017, Fact Sheet.

³⁶⁶ Government of India. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Census Data.

³⁶⁷ UNICEF-India, Child labour in India.

³⁶⁸ UNICEF-India, Child labour in India.

³⁶⁹ UNICEF-India, Child labour in India.

India depends upon NGOs and charity organizations to get help. The trade unions in India do not see it as their job to try to eradicate child labour or rush to alleviate the sufferance caused by it, they see themselves as being there to protect their members rights.

2.3. Woman labour/ depreciated labour / tacit slave labour

The topic of gender bias and depreciated labour is an extremely sensitive and controversial one. There was a lot of effort made during the years Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister to eradicate abuse and discrimination. By tradition, Indian society has pushed women into the guilty corner. Women are blamed and made responsible for things they do not control or have a say in. The Sword of Damocles, the social sin, is permanently hovering over their heads. Literally anything that goes wrong becomes their misdeed. This leaves them very vulnerable from an early age and forces them to make compromises, with the loss of empowerment. Based on their gender, social status, caste, class and colour shade, a woman in India is confronted with layers of potential discrimination. She is transformed into an accessory, an object for transaction. Slavery and discrimination are intricately woven into the socio-economic tissue of the country. In such circumstances any attempt of definition would be futile. But at the same time, this non-definition is a calamity itself. This has an enormous impact on a woman's prospect in a labour market and her capacity to participate in any process of industrial relations. Non-recognition, low wages and abuse in work environment are structural: *"With informalisation, feminisation of work is on the rise. The new opportunities for the female workers are generated in the 'informal segments' of the organised sector. These new opportunities are embedded in perpetual job insecurity, de-unionised, low wage, low skilled jobs."*³⁷⁰ The authors of the study came to the inevitable conclusion that a large majority of women in India are paid, not according to the work they do or the degree of their qualification but according to their perceived social status.³⁷¹ In one of the factories they investigated the authors

³⁷⁰ Vanamala, 2001, 2378.

³⁷¹ Vanamala, 2001, 2379.

found that: *"There were altogether 174 operators (workers) on the production side. Among them 117 were trainees and 57 casual workers. Among 57 casual workers, seven were male and 50 female, of the 117 trainee workers, 27 were male and 90 were female trainee workers."*³⁷² The place the researchers chose was operating in the formal sector but was organizing "flexibility" and financial "efficiency" by using female recruits in an informal manner. Worker misery has become India's competitive advantage.

Modern India seems to have deprived itself of an opportunity to evolve when it recreated an elite formal sector and the pit of informal India, where traditional discrimination can blossom with a renewed vitality, no government scrutiny, no laws and a place where "Make India" rhythms with hell on earth for those on the lower end. Welcome to India's Informal Sector. *"In south Asia a large proportion of the women workers are unpaid family workers, as we observed earlier for a city in India. They receive virtually no incomes and generally undertake all the arduous work. The overall quality of their employment is poor and there is the most extreme degree of informality in their work relations."*³⁷³ And this situation is not about to change in the near future.

³⁷² Vanamala, 2001, 2379.

³⁷³ Unni, 2001, 2370.

10-Lack of collective-bargaining in India-Part 2³⁷⁴

A historic and institutional perspective on India's structural resilience

Abstract:

The Fringe Mesopotamians³⁷⁵ most probably created the caste system, a graduated slave system. They were slave traders in the Western Indian Ocean rim for thousands of years. During the British rule, they helped create and operate the 'indentured labour' system of debt-induced slavery. As India's response to globalisation, they conjured outsourcing, another moderate form of bonded (contractual) slavery and alienation. None of these ventures required the setting up of trade unions. Today, paradoxically, the West initiated global containment of China might push India to embrace Trade Unionism which until now remained an aristocratic activity for the politically disgruntled Bengalis. The Formal and Organized sector (unionized) in India, the subject of this study, is only around 8%.³⁷⁶ Up to now trade unionism occurred in highly protected sectors, where they were not really needed. The new legislation voted in autumn 2020 has the possibility to change this, making India the biggest pool of unionised labour force. It is very promising for workers at the lower end. But does this mean the end of slavery as an age old Fringe Mesopotamian preoccupation? Probably not. Since their origins Trade Unions were never meant to serve the interest of the workers in India.

Keywords: India, formal sector, trade unions, predator nations, Fringe Mesopotamians

Methodology:

The main approach to the second part of the study would be to show the main structure of how industrial relations are conducted in India. To see if there is in-built resilience to these structures, if not, point to their weaknesses. For this

³⁷⁴ Ramachandra, B. (2021). Lack of collective-bargaining in India - Part 2. *NEMZETKÖZI MUNKÁSMOZGALOM TÖRTÉNETÉBŐL (ÉVKÖNYV)*, 47, 346–360.

³⁷⁵ Byrappa, 2016, 66.

³⁷⁶ Salapaka, 2019. November 14-15.

purpose, legislation, directives and common practice will be examined, along with related theoretical concepts.

Introduction:

I finished the 1st part of this two-part study with the following words: *“Modern India seems to have deprived itself of an opportunity to evolve when it recreated an elite formal sector and the pit of informal India, where traditional discrimination can blossom with a renewed vitality, no government scrutiny, no laws and a place where “Make India” rhythms with hell on earth for those on the lower end. Welcome to India's Informal Sector.”*³⁷⁷ It was not my words that were harsh but the reality on the ground. Since last year there seems to be a mini revolution in India as far as industrial relations are concerned, the Indian government has wiped the slate clean and introduced new legislation to rationalise labour relations. The move should come as no surprise since preparations for it started two decades ago. But at the same time, the timing of it is interesting and could reveal in what direction industrial relations will move.

China has arrived at a critical juncture in its development. It is moving up the scale, similar to Japan in the 1980s. There is also a genuine search by China to give its citizens a better quality of life, clean air and so forth. And it is also true that similar to Japan it is facing a demographic decline. It tried to evacuate its low grade and polluting industries to Africa but success is muted, so increasingly it is incline to take low grade production to India and at the same time expand its market capacity there. Combined with this, we can witness on the horizon, a “China containment” policy, which will mean production will be switched to India to attain global balance in favour of the West. To enhance this process India's attractiveness has to be improved. Rather than improve infrastructures the Indian government has turned to reforming industrial relations. For example, from 2021 Indian workers will be expected work 12 hours per day rather than the customary 10.5 hours, but regulation limits the weekly burden to 48 hours.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Byrappa, 2020, 297.

³⁷⁸ ENS Economic Bureau, 2020. November 21.

What is interesting is that in China the same limit is 44 hours per week.³⁷⁹ India will be setting a new record, given the distances travelled, to get to work and time lost in transportation. But at the same time this new legislation can revolutionise the labour conditions in India on three accounts. Firstly, by extending the legislation to the entire labour market, the 92% informal sector would theoretically be phased out, a much needed relief. Secondly, these laws will permit better legal framework for unionization, increasing worker negotiating power. Thirdly, the combined effect would be to push wages up, further empowering the lower echelons. But it is true that although India has one of best legal frameworks, application of laws is one of the poorest.

For good or worse, what is being replaced is the colonial heritage of convenience and consensus. Jawaharlal Nehru did not change much, indeed he entrenched it further giving rise to an in-built complacency of treating everything as being alright, while nothing outside the central bureaucratic aristocracy was right. Nehru was interested only in keeping order in the central services, trade unionism beyond this perimeter did not matter for him. Indira Gandhi had too many things that had to be reformed, to give the poor hope. She tried to rationalize the union activity but opposition was high. So globalization was the first instance when the established complacency in labour relations was put to test. As one expert put it: *"India witnessed the incipient stage of globalisation by the 1980s, which was intensified by the 1990s with the adoption of the structural adjustment programme. Paradoxically, globalisation of the Indian economy led to the parochialisation of labour activism leading to the gradual demise of any all-India prospects of mobilisation of industrial labour."*³⁸⁰ The Modi government tried alteration but only with limited success: *"The share of formal employment has seen a rise of nearly 5 percentage points over the last six years, indicating an increasing formalisation of the Indian economy, the 2020 Economic Survey said."*³⁸¹ But the pace was considered insufficient, it was deemed necessary to pull down the old structure to build a fairer and a more resilient system of industrial

³⁷⁹ Xueqiao & Hancock, 2019. January 17.

³⁸⁰ Oommen, 2009, 88.

³⁸¹ India Today, 2020. January 31.

relations. The laws repealed by the Modi government served only around 8% of the total workforce of India. According to the 1961 census, out of a population of 438 million, the work force was 188 million and of these 15 million (7.9%) were industrial work force (organized).³⁸² So nothing has changed over the last 60 years. Pravin Sinha states: *"It is discouraging, however, to note that despite the structural development of the trade union movement in India, there have been negligible increases in the size of membership."*³⁸³ Rather than expand unionism, in the interest of larger number of workers, a small group of unions transformed the framework into an exclusive club.³⁸⁴ This position was possible because the public sector was the backbone of the organized sector. But under the pressures of modernization and globalization, the public sector, and its weight in the Indian economy, is reduced and waning.³⁸⁵ Unlike other countries, in India even trade unionism was transformed into an aristocratic pastime for ideologues, without the slightest consideration for 92% of the worker population. In this study the structure of this elitist model of trade unionism will be analysed. An attempt will be made to show structural weaknesses in the resilience of the earlier model.

Understanding the place of Trade Unionism in the Indian context

Like everything else, Trade Unionism, transplanted to the Indian context, means something else. It simply does not have the same function and place in the political or socio-economic system. Harold J. Laski, in his exhaustive study on the place of trade unions in modern society, said that they play a crucial function in peace and prosperity because society has become a productive system.³⁸⁶ Society is organized for a greater good, making trade unions a crucial of the whole structure. But India has failed to become a peaceful and productive society, the economy of misery and violence dominates all spheres of the country. The economic factor is the key to progress. It is easy for

³⁸² Crouch, 1966, 15.

³⁸³ Sinha, 2004, 132.

³⁸⁴ Mody, 2020. November 16.

³⁸⁵ Prashant K. Nanda: 100 years on, India's trade unions face a tough road ahead, LiveMint online, 01 Nov 2020. URL: <https://bit.ly/38RZb5T> (Accessed: 31-12-2020)

³⁸⁶ Harold J. Laski: Trade Unions In The New Society, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1949, p. 3-4.

feudalistic governments to dictate the prosperity of the few but when it comes to the well-being of the many, the whole society has to lurch forward into organizing itself productively, every segment has to be involved in the effort, in both wealth creation and distribution. In India, an average citizen's income and organisational place in society is predetermined by the 'Fringe Mesopotamian' caste system. Personal ability and productive capacity are marginalised or totally ignored. Democracy is supposed to act as a catalyser for a better organisation, to a more consensual productive system. It is true that a fast developing economy creates tensions in labour relations, and if these are not handled properly the whole edifice can come down.³⁸⁷ Industry, in a larger sense, has its vital sectors where Unions are important for a smooth function, without which economic growth will be hindered.³⁸⁸

The idea is to take Indian democracy the full mile and not limit to the political sphere. Like political parties, trade unions are intermediary bodies in the economic sphere of a democracy.³⁸⁹ Democracy is not about individualism or political divisions, it is a forum where the individual opinion converges with like-minded to create collective action.³⁹⁰ But when all other notions of unity fail, then there is the unity of the shop floor that is supposed to dominate, as a last lynch-pin that can hold things together. The problem is that neither Indian democracy nor the Indian unionism seems to produce consensus and unity. It is evident that it is not the democratic framework nor trade union interests that dictate, rather it is the caste system that imposes it will. In a survey conducted in 1958 (Maharashtra), "... biological data was collected on 45 leaders. Of these 29 were Brahmins, 3 Baniyas, 3 Marathas, 3 Chandrasena, 2 Christians, 1 Muslim etc."³⁹¹ In the same area 75% of Congress leaders came from the Brahmin caste.³⁹² The caste hierarchy does not allow for change and improvement. Harold Crouch says: "The 'iron law of oligarchy' is quite unbreakable in Indian unions. ... Elections are rarely contested."³⁹³ And he

³⁸⁷ Crouch, 1966, 3.

³⁸⁸ Crouch, 1966, 7.

³⁸⁹ Harold J. Laski, op. cit., p. 149.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 150-151.

³⁹¹ Crouch, 1966, 30.

³⁹² Crouch, 1966, 31.

³⁹³ Crouch, 1966, 10-11.

continues: *"The working class had been conditioned to obey their superiors."*³⁹⁴ And concludes: *"Thus the typical trade union leader is well-educated, comes from a relatively high-status family, and belongs to a political party. In all of this he is very different from the workers he leads."*³⁹⁵ In India, Trade Unionism up to now was about upholding aristocratic/feudal/caste privileges and not fighting for worker rights.

The British Colonial Heritage, the Indian State tradition and Trade Unionism

The Indian state's attitudes towards trade unions and industrial relations were conditioned by three factors. First is the colonial heritage and the power struggle within the Indian collaborators that were associated with the colonial enterprise. Secondly, Nehru and his method of governance, where emphasis was placed upon paternalistic consensus achieved through financial inducements to union leaders.³⁹⁶ Thirdly, the ideological factor that the state tried to encourage and implement with Gandhian principles of autonomous existence and self-sufficiency. And of course, these three were accompanied by hesitations of a newly created country, in the process of building and re-building itself.

In the declining days of British Empire in India, it was deemed that encouraging unionisation and formalising labour relations would be *sine qua non* to progressive introduction of communism through the back door; and giving a free highway to infiltration by Soviet sponsored elements. But at the same time doing nothing would lead to the loss of control, so it was deemed better to formalize industrial relations: *"Militant nationalism had pitted organized labour against the power of the British Indian government, while the latter was disposed to regard labour disputes as threats to the order and security of the State."*³⁹⁷ The British tried to use Gandhi to dampen industrial strife and protestation. He tried to remove "strike action" as an instrument of

³⁹⁴ Crouch, 1966, 29.

³⁹⁵ Crouch, 1966, 32.

³⁹⁶ Crouch, 1966, 52.

³⁹⁷ Subbiah Kannappan: The Gandhian Model of Unionism in a Developing Economy: The TLA in India, *ILR Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Oct., 1962), pp. 86-110, Published by: Sage Publications, Inc., p. 89.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2521239> (Accessed: 13-09-2019)

protestation and replace it with an ongoing process of cooperation.³⁹⁸ What Gandhi wanted was to see non-violence and collective responsibility of all sides in building the nation.³⁹⁹ This in itself was not a bad idea but what the workers needed was urgent solutions. The British colonial authorities could no longer treat these protests as insurgency or sedition.

In 1926, the Trade Union Act (TUA) was adopted by British India.⁴⁰⁰ Basically this act introduced official recognition of Trade Unions as representative bodies of workers, distinct from political protest groups: *"The law provided a mechanism for the registration of trade unions, from which they derived their rights, and a framework governing their functioning. The TUA also bound workers' actions within a legal framework by providing for deregistration if a trade union "contravened any provisions of the Act".*⁴⁰¹ As long as the trade unions stayed away from the Congress system and their demands were legitimate, British India tried to provide the legal background and enforcement of regulation dictated by the Act.⁴⁰² It also makes the principle of democracy fundamental to trade union action (Article 25).⁴⁰³ The 1926 Act was sound and could form a good base for trade unions to evolve and expand into a strong and healthy system of defence of worker rights. But it was subverted, as one study of trade union activity in Gujarat showed: *"Evidently, the power was concentrated in the hands of those outside leaders."*⁴⁰⁴ Slowly but surely, by the time of Independence, most of the trade unions had become instruments of political parties: *"In India the unions are dependent because they are weak. They are unable to attain their ends by purely trade union methods. Therefore*

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴⁰⁰ THE TRADE UNIONS ACT, 1926 / ACT NO. 16 OF 1926*1/[25th March, 1926.] Available at: <https://labour.delhi.gov.in/content/trade-unions-act-1926> (Accessed: 02-01-2021)

⁴⁰¹ Gautam Mody: A recipe to tear down trade unions, The Hindu online, NOVEMBER 16, 2020. URL: <https://bit.ly/3aWYvUe> (Accessed: 02-01-2021)

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ THE TRADE UNIONS ACT, 1926 / ACT NO. 16 OF 1926*1/[25th March, 1926.] Available at: <https://labour.delhi.gov.in/content/trade-unions-act-1926> (Accessed: 02-01-2021)

⁴⁰⁴ Pravin J. Patel: Full-time Trade Union Leaders & the Societal Context: The Bosses & Deputies, Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, October 2016, Vol. 52, No. 2 (October 2016), pp. 175-191, Published by: Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, p. 180. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44840807> (Accessed: 2-01-2021)

they require political assistance and the political parties are only too ready to provide that assistance."⁴⁰⁵ Welfare of workers was no longer the central issue.

The 1926 Act and its integrity were further sapped and diluted by new legislation: the Industrial Disputes Act (1947) and the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act (1946), formed the Industrial Relations Code (IRC). It is important to mention that Nehru was in command since 1946, when this legislation was enacted. According to one commentator these measures had *"...a very sinister outcome for workers' right to association. The code enormously widens the grounds under which a trade union may be deregistered. Under the TUA, deregistration was limited to the internal functioning of a union — in case a union violated the financial rules set down under the law or its own constitution. The Standing Orders Act and the Industrial Disputes Act were concerned with conditions of employment and settlement of disputes respectively. They had nothing to do with the internal functioning, and, therefore, with the existence of a trade union."*⁴⁰⁶ What these Acts did do was to establish the Nehru consensus, of stifling legitimate demands for reform and also in keeping a cap on expansion of unionism.

There were other reforms that had similar fate under Nehru. British India also initiated another practice which put consultation into the heart of industrial relations. During WWII the colonial administration came up with the idea of a tripartite conference between labour, capital and the government – *the Indian Labour Conference (ILC)*. The first conference was held in 1942⁴⁰⁷ as *Tripartite National Labour Conference*. The idea was to encourage peaceful consultations in order to avoid industrial strife in the middle of a war effort. The government of Independent India retained this practice of an annual gathering to iron out differences, make amendments and plan for the future. The mood at the beginning, with the drop-back of a Cold War and expanding Maoism, was proactive. There was a lot of initiative to introduce a regime of industrial relations on similar lines as the one adapted by Western Europe, the

⁴⁰⁵ Crouch, 1966, 9.

⁴⁰⁶ Gautam Mody, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁷ Ministry of Labour and Employment: List of Indian Labour conferences, Government of India. URL: <https://bit.ly/2X0TKfs> (accessed: 2019-10-20)

social democratic model. During the annual conference in Bombay in 1954 even the issue of child labour was on the agenda.⁴⁰⁸ Over the years this body became an integral part of the Ministry of Labour, as an advisory body. It consists of three committees: Government, Employers Group and Workers Group. The impact of this body was mitigated by the fact that state governments do not want the centre to decide on this.⁴⁰⁹ On top of that, not all the trade unions were represented in the conference. Amateurism and "talk-shop" seems to be the characteristic of the ILC. After a lapse of 13 years when the conference was revived in 1985, one notable journalist made this comment: *"The deplorably poor enforcement of protective labour legislation, which is perhaps the most important cause of hardships of and unrest among workers, was naturally glossed over in the official documentation."*⁴¹⁰ Like many official forums and bodies in India, the ILC seems to miss a great opportunity to give direction to the reform of industrial relations in India.

In the 1970s the tripartite system of negotiation was in essence totally abandoned, in favour of open confrontation, unfortunately this resulted in a perverse tendency of blaming the workers for the structural weakness of the Indian economy. In part Indira Gandhi was right, her father's main concern was the well-being of the urban working class of India. This class was protected, while the rural poor were starving, and trade unionists had openly sided with the Bengalis during the political crisis of 1974-1977. She saw them as a class of privileged brats.⁴¹¹ Talking of Mrs. Gandhi's attitude towards industrial relations one journalist wrote: *"The basic assumption in the present government's perception of industrial relations is that labour discipline is the key element in*

⁴⁰⁸ The Economic Weekly, Indian Labour Conference, May 21, 1955, p. 611

⁴⁰⁹ Economic and Political Weekly: Talking about Labour, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 6, No. 36 (Sep. 4, 1971), pp. 1902-1903, Economic and Political Weekly, p. 1902. URL: <https://bit.ly/3ob2Zpb> (Accessed: 20-10-2019)

⁴¹⁰ Bagaram Tulpule: A Fruitless Revival, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 20, No. 51/52 (Dec. 21-28, 1985), pp. 2238-2239, Economic and Political Weekly, p. 2238
Stable URL: <https://bit.ly/2KUx3Hk> (Accessed: 20-10-2019)

⁴¹¹ B. M. (pseudonym): Groping for an Industrial Relations Policy, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 10, No. 15 (Apr. 12, 1975), p. 611, Economic and Political Weekly. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4537022> (Accessed: 20-10-2019)

*bringing about an improvement in the economy.”*⁴¹² And he continued: *“It would appear that the government has convinced itself that there is nothing for it to do but use the big stick against organised workers.”*⁴¹³ Governments since, coming under increasing pressure to create jobs and wealth, have abandoned the tripartite system by increasingly siding with the business world. Only time will tell if the 2020 legislation will navigate the Indian state back to the role of a responsible arbiter.

It is too early to say what impact the 2020 legislation⁴¹⁴ will have but the main principles seem to give more flexibility to the employers and give a legal status to the hundreds of millions of workers in the informal sector. It could have done better but it is a not a bad starting point. Since everyone earning above 18000 rupees will be considered a worker and will have all the rights of a worker and a written contract (average monthly wage is Rs 32800). Fixed term workers will get the same rights as those having a permanent contract. Furthermore, an establishment with more than 300 workers should have job description regime: *“...hours of work, holidays, pay days etc, shifts, attendance, conditions for leave, termination of employment, or suspension, besides the means available for redress of grievances.”*⁴¹⁵ Any union or grouping that represents 51% of the workers will be considered as a legal representative (before this requirement was 75%). And where no union qualifies, a negotiating council will be established, with unions representing 20% or more workers taking a seat at the table. Any company wishing to lay off workers has to notify the state authorities 90 days prior to date of closure. As far as strike action is concerned a 60 day notice has to be given, so that enough time is provided for negotiations to take place. The depth and scope of this legislation can be complemented as reform takes hold. As far as Trade Unions are concerned this new legal framework looks

⁴¹² B. M. (pseudonym): Big Stick for Labour, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 15, No. 28 (Jul. 12, 1980), pp. 1165-1167, Economic and Political Weekly, p. 1165

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4368842> (Accessed: 20-10-2019)

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ K. Venkataramanan: What does the new Industrial Relations Code say, and how does it affect the right to strike?, The Hindu online, SEPTEMBER 27, 2020. URL: <https://bit.ly/2KY28tJ> (Accessed: 02-01-2021)

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

more resilient and promising for an unprecedented expansion of trade unionism in India.

Grassroot initiatives: NGOs and Trade Unions

As explained earlier Trade Unions in India represented a protected and privileged minority (7-8% of the working population). There was no real incentive to break the mould. The job of protecting workers in the informal sector (92%) was left to others: *"Trade unions in India work mainly with workers in formal employment, particularly in the public sector. However, most people in India work in the informal economy, and their needs are attended mainly by voluntary agencies or NGOs."*⁴¹⁶ The same priorities dictated the non-cooperation between trade unions and NGOs. The trade unions were taking care of the privileged while, in most cases, the NGOs were taking care of the deprived, the neglected and the abused. It was two different worlds, especially given the fact that the prime facie existence of NGOs is apolitical, while the trade unions are political instruments. And as Sinha argues: *"Cooperation between them is non-existent, mainly because of distrust and fear of losing control of their respective constituencies."*⁴¹⁷ Another reason could be that Brahmins in the NGO sector generally seem to be involved in exclusive interest groups. While the majority of the NGOs are run by other castes, a non-negligible number by Christians.⁴¹⁸ It is also true that hesitation to cooperate could come from the fact that one really does not know who is behind an NGO initiative and for what motives. The informal sector is an Eldorado and a Far West to a plenitude of initiatives. There are a lot of Christian missionary initiatives, financed by international organizations. And there are an increasing number of private and individual initiatives. Many are worthy causes but at the same time there are many that simply want to create a constituency for their personal enrichment, rather than the members of their association.⁴¹⁹ Compared to this the trade union allegiances are clear cut and traceable.

⁴¹⁶ Sinha, 2004, 127.

⁴¹⁷ Sinha, 2004, 132.

⁴¹⁸ Harris, 2005, 13.

⁴¹⁹ Sundar, 2017. May 10.

However, there are some success stories like the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), where an NGO initiative helped create a trade union.⁴²⁰ Starting from 1972 SEWA has become a major trade union, growing even internationally.⁴²¹ This prospering example could induce others to replicate the same pattern.

A Brief Overview of Trade Unions in India⁴²²

Unfortunately, official figures on the exact situation of trade unions in India are not available yearly, at least I could not find them after a long search. What I could find dates back to 2010 but it is sufficient to give us a general idea. The total number of registered trade unions in India, in the year 2010 was 18602.⁴²³ Among these those unions sending annual reports to the Ministry of Labour amounted to 2937, 15.8% of the total. What is more important is that out of 56 employer unions, only one sent annual reports to the ministry. The average number of members per union was 1735 only. For the employers the average number of members was only 15. Out of the 18602, 18546 unions belonged to workers and only 56 belonged to employers. Geographically, the largest state which hosted most trade unions (12030) was the state of Kerala in South India. Out of 18546 labour unions, 92.16% were State unions and remaining 7.84% were Central Unions (All-India). Manufacturing accounted for 34%, followed by transportation and storage at 16.6%. In 2010 there were 29 trade union federations. And out of these only 2 federations returned annual reports to the Ministry of Labour. In a study conducted in 2002 the Labour Bureau of India gives us an estimation of the size of unionisation in the Public Sector: *"It may be seen from the statement that public Sector accounted for 33.3 percent of unions and 32.9 percent of the membership in total workers unions submitting returns. Out of 2576 unions submitting returns in the Public sector 717 (27.8 percent) unions were in the Central Sphere. Membership of Trade Unions in the State Sphere and Central Sphere was 1 340 340 persons and 934 359 persons*

⁴²⁰ Sinha, 2004, 132.

⁴²¹ SEWA, Self Employed Women's Association.

⁴²² All the statistics given are provided at the following: Labour Bureau, 2010, 1-2.

⁴²³ Labour Bureau of India, Trade Unions in India 2002.

respectively.”⁴²⁴ The Centre for Indian Trade Unions, a coordination body for the major trade unions, has a Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions. And this committee says that there are around 2 million public sector workers.⁴²⁵ In India 12 major trade unions are recognized as central trade union organizations and operate in many states⁴²⁶:

1. Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS);
2. Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC);
3. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC);
4. Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS);
5. Centre of India Trade Unions (CITU);
6. All India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC);
7. Trade Union Co-ordination Centre (TUCC);
8. Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA);
9. All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU);
10. Labour Progressive Federation (LPF);
11. United Trade Union Congress (UTUC);
12. National Front of Indian Trade Unions – Dhanbad (NFITU-DHN).

Of the 12 main trade unions HMS, INTUC and SEWA are members of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). AITUC is a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).⁴²⁷ AITUC got this position because it was the first trade union to be set-up in India in 1920, with the amalgamation of 64 trade unions.⁴²⁸

Conclusion

According to Pravin Sinha: *“The union movement in India could be described as having a narrow membership base divided along political lines*

⁴²⁴ Labour Bureau of India, Trade Unions in India 2002.

⁴²⁵ Centre of Indian Trade Unions. Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions – description of the committee's achievements.

⁴²⁶ International Labour Organization, Workers' and Employers' Organizations in South Asia.

⁴²⁷ International Labour Organization, Workers' and Employers' Organizations in South Asia.

⁴²⁸ Srivatsa, 2020. October 30.

and characterised by an ageing leadership, centralised decision making, ad hoc management, an unprofessional approach, obsolete strategies, confrontational attitudes, and no second-tier leadership. In part as a consequence of all this, the movement is experiencing declining membership and a loss of power, and is no longer able to influence government policies as it once did. Unions are increasingly ignored by the government, marginalised by employers, distrusted by their members, and disliked by the community at large."⁴²⁹ Another commentator confirms the same feeling: "It is 'politics' that gave birth to the Indian trade union movement and 'politics' again that largely accelerated or retarded its growth different points of time."⁴³⁰ Haunting this factor there is also an ethnic factor: "Almost in direct opposition to the Bombay- Ahmedabad group stands the Bengal faction, which is committed to aggressive trade unionism and independence from government action."⁴³¹ This to large extent explains why trade unionism became impotent in the India soil. By 1946 what was clear was that the Bengali dominated AITUC was seeking a radical socialist path, in line with the Bengali intellectuals and political elite. Spotting the danger and the implications it could have on a fragile new nation, Sardar Patel, second in command to Jawaharlal Nehru, initiates the creation of an alternative to the AITUC.⁴³² Thus was created the INTUC, as an extension to the Congress Party / System. The whole process and the first tranche of membership came from the Gujarati interests. In the words of Ornati: "Ideologically as well as administratively the blood- stream of the INTUC flows from Ahmedabad (Gujarat)."⁴³³ At the end of the day, when it comes to the politics of Industrial Relations in India, it is a trench warfare between the Bengalis and the Gujaratis, the two main predator nations⁴³⁴ of the Subcontinent, others are just by-standers.

⁴²⁹ Sinha, 2004, 132.

⁴³⁰ Bose, 1979, 3.

⁴³¹ Ornati, 1954, 116.

⁴³² Ornati, 1954, 115.

⁴³³ Ornati, 1954, 116.

⁴³⁴ Byrappa, 2016, 54.

11-Precursory Study on South Asian Security and Geopolitics⁴³⁵

Abstract

Security issues in South Asia could be the key to world peace. Understanding the particular dynamics of security creation and its provision in the region therefore become extremely important. This said, there are major hurdles to the proper comprehension of the underlying complexities. Most of the home-grown security studies and analyses are sponsored or directly provided by the security establishment, focusing mainly on the tactical capacities of the military apparatus. The outside academic community, mainly the Singapore-Australia-USA triangle mainly concentrate on the global perspectives with predominance given to the India-China aspect of the security configuration. For these reasons vital and insightful concepts are missing for the proper and realistic understanding of the security policies and configuration of South Asia. The purpose of this essay will be to introduce some of these analytical concepts and give a deeper understanding of the issues at work, in short provide a historic background to the conflict and security configuration of South Asia.

Key words: *South Asia, geopolitics, Indian Ocean, Curzon Doctrine, Frontiers, Ashoka, Civilisational Sovereignty, Bengal, India, Pakistan, Fringe Mesopotamia*

Introduction

South Asia is a sphere of multiple and multi-layered ambiguities, a treasure trove of misconceptions and dislocated realities in space and time. In most subjects it is difficult to dissipate the clouds of confusion and falsification of inherent realities. The difficulties increase as one moves to more rigid topics like security policies, strategic outlays and configurations. When we talk about strategic thinking and its implications on geopolitical realities, we have to be sure of knowing certain corner and key elements of it. South Asia is no different to this primary demand. We, as historians, academics, analysts and related public have to know: who is providing the security to a specific geographic

⁴³⁵ Byrappa, R. (2018). Precursory Study on South Asian Security and Geopolitics. *ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA*, 31, 83–97.

entity? Based on what priorities? And to whose benefit and at whose expense? Paradoxically, some historians and ultra-nationalists on the one side stress the indivisible civilisational nature of South Asian tradition and society, upon which all their argumentation or justification is based; and at the same time they over-emphasize the irreconcilable nature of the now existing state structures with one another. For example, throughout the millennial history of South Asia, Bengal as a whole was one strong entity but today West Bengal is irreconcilable with East Bengal (now Bangladesh).

The consequences of these perceptions for strategic thinking is as follows: Firstly, if we take a civilisational perspective then South Asia is in a state of civil-war. And as it happens with all civil wars, they would have to end one day and the concerns will not be particularistic, South Asia as a whole will take centre ground. If we see things from this angle, taking into account the eventual unification of South Asia, the nationalist outlay of policies is self-defeating because they are mutually destroying all the irreplaceable strategic options of the South Asian subcontinent. Secondly, if we accept the continued digressions into the particularistic nationalist narratives, conquest and war become inevitable since no one country can ultimately defend its territory without the territorial integrity of the whole of the South Asia, a situation where the strongest state becomes structurally imperialist.

Geographic delineation and definition

There is no one way to delineate South Asia. As mentioned earlier there are ambiguities abound in geographical and geopolitical terms. The fairly recent European tradition bequests borders everywhere, especially when security policies are concerned. After all the defence of a country's borders is considered first and foremost priorities of the state. Just as in the dominating religious beliefs in the West, theoretically there exists a clear boundary between good and bad. In Asia, and especially in the South Asian political and philosophical tenets the notion of borders is relatively ambiguous. Yes, the idea of borders is not new to Dravidian philosophy and political theories but it is a more dynamic notion than the static western conception. In the South Asian

conception everything depends upon the hierarchy of power and civilisational expansion of a paramount power. During the reign of emperor Ashoka (265-238 BCE) on the western flank, border regions were assumed when South Asian civilizational expanse came into to contact with the Greek or Persian civilisations, when a certain equality of status was assumed. In the north and east for example, much of these territories came under Ashoka's civilisational paramountcy with the exception of a local civilisational temptation by the Tang dynasty, which was exclusively northern than anything else. Although, British colonial policy was to secure more or less well defined borders, they were none-the-less obliged to follow the traditional South Asian notion of border regions. This is very much what the so called Curzon Doctrine (1904-1905) bequests. After Independence, something strange happened, learned as they were, the incoming elite decided to partially abandon the notion of "South Asia" and its civilisational sovereignty.

Strict physical geographic definition of South Asia

In physical geographic terms the definition of South Asia could be easiest to establish, although here too there are ambiguities to be dealt with. If the definition of a 'continent' is a continued stretch of land mass, then one can easily assume a 'sub-continent' to be a sub-system of this with particular characteristics that distinguish it from the greater. In this sense, geographers tend to base their analysis upon the work done by geologists. It has now been established that for millions of years the Indian tectonic plate had crossed the Indian Ocean encrusting itself into the larger Eurasian Plate, and the movement is still continued, in the process giving the Himalayas a few centimetres in height each year. This geological collusion has overtime reinforced the Indian plate's past as a virtual island, with the creation of high mountain barriers across its Eurasian encounter. Although adjoined to the larger Eurasian continent, the Indian subcontinent not only maintained its specific geographic characteristics, it further added others to make its specificity much stronger. South Asia, for millennia, had remained an impregnable fortress and to this day it retains this character.

In an ongoing debate on what belongs to South Asia and what not varies unto reasons ranging from ethnical to socio-religious, and I am sure that the debate will continue. However, we can make some logical assumptions. When the Indian tectonic plate nested itself into the Eurasian plate, it created a range of mountains. The logical question is: can we separate these ranges, geographic and geological elements from the region that was the base cause of their creation? The answer to this question has far-reaching consequences on South Asia's geopolitical situation and thus on the security implications of the region. Like the Carpathian basin, it becomes extremely difficult to defend the low lands if someone else is roosting on the mountain ranges that form the northern arc over the subcontinent. Beyond security issues, the livelihood of millions in there depends upon resources from these mountainous regions, an essential part of the natural and productive cycle. Indeed the monsoon that is synonymous with South Asia, makes these ranges a vital catchment area of rain water forming reserves above and underground. For South Asia delineation is not an appropriate term.

It was probably to circumvent this problem that the renowned British military geographer, Sir Thomas Hungerford Holdich, talked of 'frontier', 'borderland' and 'transfrontier'⁴³⁶ rather than the simple, straightforward and mean 'border'. The many decades that Hungerford Holdich spent in the Subcontinent were actually spent mapping out the borderland, which sometimes took him into lands that were more than 500 miles beyond what was actually British India. In effect what Hungerford Holdich is saying is that if we can envisage South Asia as a house, the walls naturally belong to it, and it is not unreasonable to think that the perimeter of the land that surrounds the house belongs to its natural environment. If we consider the walls to be part of the house, which is evident, and the land surrounding it as an integral part, then the whole system becomes one indivisible unit. So it is with South Asia and the regions surrounding it, that they become part and parcel of the South Asian eco-system. It is not a question of core and periphery but one integrated functional system. Other authors and historians have taken a similar attitude

⁴³⁶ Holdich, 1901, 5.

when pushed to define the perimeters of South Asia.⁴³⁷ It was with this in mind that the veteran geographer, Hungerford Holdich, summarised the situation as follows: *"A boundary is but an artificial impress on the surface of the land, as much as a road or a railway, and, like the road or the railway, it must adapt itself to the topographical conditions of the country it traverses. If it does not, it is likely to be no barrier at all."*⁴³⁸ Geographically therefore it is extremely difficult and arbitrary to draw lines of delineation. And as Hungerford Holdich emphasizes, in security terms a border makes no sense in South Asia. For this reason geography has a profound influence upon the history, politics, economics, sociology, culture and the security of South Asia.

Shifts in the historic and strategic definition and delineations of frontiers

Geography is one thing and the movement of history is another. As the regular flow of news items from the subcontinent shows, problems of historic definitions and delineations are one of the biggest and most serious problems plaguing South Asian territorial integrity and security. Concepts of security are very interesting and could be extremely useful but can become useless and potentially dangerous if we do not take into account a whole range of realities on the ground. This is what happened with the subcontinent when the freedom fighters refused to accept the fact that South Asia cannot be divided and appropriated on a conceptual basis. Dividing or delineating on religious basis was an anathema to the whole South Asian system. Not only this, the burdens of division and dislocation were imposed mainly on those who had nothing to do with the entire process. In this sense, the shifts in delineation, rather than solving anything tangible were generating a whole new set of security risks unheard of before. The departing British colonials are often blamed for this but in my opinion it would be inappropriate to put the whole blame upon them.

Historically speaking, the British Indian Empire came close to giving a meaning to the South Asian identity forged by Emperor Ashoka's reign (275-232 BCE). For the first time British rule in India tried to reflect the complex strategic

⁴³⁷ Johnson, 2005, 7.

⁴³⁸ Holdich, 1916, 184.

and defensive security structure put in place by Ashoka. Compared to the Moghuls who tried to forge a trans-Pamir empire, the British annexed Sri-Lanka, Burma, Tibet, and parts of Persia and Afghanistan, treating these acquisitions as an integral part of the defensive perimeter of South Asia. However, there was a slight difference between the security system conceived by Ashoka and the British colonials.

When Ashoka took control of the perimeter he did not work to alienate the local people, he did not expand his own state-system, rather he integrated the periphery through monetary and religious systems, leading to long-term bonds of trust. The East India Company, to a certain degree, paid attention to this fact and let the sovereignty of these border nations intact as long as the paramountcy of the company was acquiesced. This attitude was a result of two factors: firstly, there was no impending economic need or rationality to invade these territories, since they produced little that the Company needed or consumed almost nothing in terms of goods sold by it. Secondly, due to the nascent condition of its administrative consolidation in the Subcontinent proper, it was not prepared to come into direct contact with the other imperial powers of the region, notably Qing China in the east and Persia on the west. The result of these ponderations was that the Ashoka security configuration was not disturbed, the traditional pact between the paramount power and the border nations was intact.

Long after the Ashoka period, Arab sultans dominating the Indo-Gangetic plains were particularly keen to protect the western gate against the threats of the Mongol and other incursions from central Asia. What the Arab Sultans did was to populate the border regions with the Turkic populations coming from the southern Caspian areas. The ethnically Turkic population was deemed to have better knowledge of the Central Asian hordes and therefore better trained to confront with them.⁴³⁹ “Although Mongol raids into north India continued through the second half of the thirteenth century, there was considerable migration of Mongol and Turkic groups searching for Sultanate patronage and instances of disaffected Sultanate amirs looking for allies in

⁴³⁹ Eaton, 2013, 40.

Mongol camps. ... The old traditions of policing the frontier by slave commanders slowly shifted to include new bodies of immigrants who had intruded into the region."⁴⁴⁰ In this way a new physical and conceptual security policy and frontier delineation was put in place, but this came at a cost, ethnic conflict was created in the frontier and a safe delineation was transformed into a troubled and porous trans-border region.

When analysing South Asian defence policies and problems one has to pay attention to this fundamental change. As John F. Richards explains: "*Expansive early modern states imposed new types of territoriality on frontier regions. Settlers and colonial regimes refused to recognize any existing property rights among indigenous peoples (or if they did so initially, these were soon abrogated). Instead, they viewed these lands as empty, to be claimed by the encroaching state. In turn, the colonizing state conferred property rights on its frontier settlers.*"⁴⁴¹ The Turkic tribes were supposed to be socially better equipped than the *Pathan* (Pashtun) tribes that had resided in the frontier valleys for thousands of years. The reality on the ground was that it created an unbridgeable enmity between the new arrivals and the *Bhumiputra* (sons of the earth).

The British Crown, after the coup d'état against the East India Company, openly espoused the same policies as the Arab Sultans, strengthening the ethnically foreign elements to the South Asian culture, ethics and attitude to life. Indeed, the British Crown adopted an open policy to promote certain segments of migrant populations sitting on the perimeter of the Subcontinent.⁴⁴² It recruited a tiny minority, beside itself, that never considered itself to be ethnically part of South Asia. Tan Tai Tong calculated that between 1858 and 1910 the recruitment of Punjabis had increased by 309% to 93 295.⁴⁴³ And by ploughing in the tax revenues from all over South Asia into the development of Punjab, the British Crown had forged an identity, and given it an economic salience, that was antagonistic to the rest of the Subcontinent.

⁴⁴⁰ Eaton, 2013, 41.

⁴⁴¹ Richards, 2003, 4-5.

⁴⁴² Farooqui, 2015, 50-52.

⁴⁴³ Yong, 2005, 70-71.

This fact had a major implication during and after the 'struggle' for independence, and of course had a profound impact on the post-independence strategic thinking; this structural antagonism put Nehru under huge pressure after the British packed up and went home.

Characteristic security threats and region-specific geopolitical problems

From afore mentioned historic and structural development, one is able to get a better insight into the dilemmas weighing upon the new Indian republic and its Prime minister. On the one hand he had the armed forces that did not belong to him, since they *en bloc* belonged to one hostile community that had never given-up its own colonial ambitions within South Asia. The division of the Punjab was intended to solve this problem but one has to realise that the Northwest gate to India had become a hostile zone. And on the other hand Nehru was confronted with regional players like China who were willing to use salami tactics to dig deeper into the South Asian sphere of influence. The Chinese method of colonialism is silent sequencing doctrines. It designates a core territory as indivisible and consequently builds and bestows buffer state status to territories surrounding it and then with time lapse designates the newly acquired territory as an indivisible core element of the Chinese territorial integrity. By trying to stop China militarily in Tibet would have increased the power of the Punjabis over the core of South Asia. So rather than lose the core to his inner enemies he decided to allow the Chinese to occupy Tibet in the hope that it will satisfy their appetite, at least for a couple of decades; he obviously misjudged this eventuality. These inner structural problems of delineation at all levels lead Nehru to re-evaluate and to temporarily abandon the well tested defence and security arrangements in South Asia. The ensuing chaos is something common to all South Asian countries, a characteristic that is still persistent in the security configuration of South Asia.

Interstate conflicts

Following on from the previous section, the big question concerning conflicts and wars in South Asia is: Can the conflicts between some of the South Asian

countries be considered as civil-wars? The following quote from Rob Johnson corroborates that logic: *"A regional study enables us to make some general comments about the nature of conflict. The term 'conflict' has been selected deliberately, not because of a problem with the definition of war in any legalistic sense, but because the number of deaths caused by politicized violence in 'unconventional' settings often far exceed those that occur during inter-state or 'conventional' fighting. Conflicts embrace armed confrontations, insurrections, communal rioting, insurgencies and episodes of terrorism, as well as wars."*⁴⁴⁴ The division of South Asia was artificial and consequently follows that the ensuing conflict to date is artificial but in security terms, these conflicts can be deemed as 'civil-war' like in their nature.

India –Pakistan conflict and rivalry

The conflict between India and Pakistan is composed of a sequel of logical calculations by different political and military communities in the months and years leading to independence of both countries. In such, these acts could be seen both as a line of coincidences, but at the same time the result of some upper planning. The first thing to know about the conflict between India and Pakistan is that it is artificial, but none-the-less, in a perverse sense, constituting the national interest for both countries. India needs the conflict with Pakistan to keep a strong grip on some of its federal states who demand more autonomy and less concentration of power in New Delhi. In the same manner Pakistan needs the conflict with India to trample out separatist ambitions nurtured by some of its provinces. This is especially true when both countries, in the immediate aftermath of the British withdrawal, lacked legitimacy and viability.

It is a fact that, in whatever perspective we analyse the situation, both countries were artificially created in the period of 1945-1950. In a sense, the conflict was conceived and built to oppose each other for a special and specific reason, namely that of legitimising their existence over their constituent parts. For this reason, until the day India and Pakistan will stop having legitimacy

⁴⁴⁴ Johnson, 2005, 7.

problems, the Indo-Pakistan conflict will continue. In this way, inner structural tensions are diametrically aligned to the conflict.⁴⁴⁵

Being prepared for possible transfer of power Nehru did not wield the necessary legitimacy in India, at least not in the same manner that Gandhi did; and he did not have a political organisation that could integrate the local elites and bring about a political consensus and thus create a strong territorial unity. The saga of the 'partition' did have an immediate impact in the areas concerned but nationally it petered out. Embarking on high profile military engagements with Pakistan to build national consensus at home was not to Nehru's taste apart from a few incidents like the invasion of the State of Hyderabad and the *fait accomplis* of the 1962 Indo-China War. Nehru never really wanted a military conflict with Pakistan however much it was a thorn on his side, instead it seems that he was expecting a political rivalry at the worst. Religious rhetoric was never his cup of tea, especially given the fact that his origins are blurred, he was not a champion of a Hindu India against an Islamic Pakistan. As explained earlier, the conflict has its structural roots beyond post-independence settlement. One could actually go back to the early days of the crown rule and find evidence to the fact that the outlines of two different and distinct entities, in their administrative and judicial forms. A defence community was built-up in the north-west as a barrier against a combined Persia-Russian invasion. In essence what happened during the final months of independence and afterwards is that this military community, which had power through conquest as its *raison d'être*, had to reassign itself. The Sikh community, which had a large control of this martial entity, tried to create an independent state. Whatever historians might say, in strict security terms, it would have been suicidal for Nehru to accept an independence settlement where one of the biggest military strength was concentrated at the gates of India. Nehru, to further his personal ambitions accepted settlement by integrating half of the Punjabi population into India. This community mirrors exactly the same methods as the Pakistani military establishment, it uses its

⁴⁴⁵ Misra, 1972, 27.

predominant position in the military establishment to further its economic consolidation in India.

Structurally it is anyone's guess what will happen if this Punjabi community is forced to relinquish its preponderance over the Indian and Pakistani armed forces. The whole nature of the conflict will change to cooperation. This is not some sort wishful thinking, it is an impending structural reality, if the Punjabi community is side-lined. When this will happen none can foresee but signs are that changes will first come from the Indian side because of the increasingly international outlook of the Punjabi (Sikh) diaspora. It would be structurally dysfunctional to maintain the predominance of a community that has 'integrative' relations with a diaspora that is increasingly building strength in the armed forces of other world powers.

India –Bangladesh conflict and rivalry

The partition of the Indian subcontinent was devised to destroy one of the strongest nationalisms in the whole of Asia in the early 20th century – namely that of the Bengali people. Religious divisions and communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims was only a side show while the real struggle was happening on two fronts. One, as earlier mentioned was taking place between the *Fringe Mesopotamians*⁴⁴⁶ (the elite of northwest of India) and the Punjabis who were the main military contingency of South Asia and the backbone of the British military might in the region and beyond. The Punjabis as an ethnic group was composed of a powerful Sikh community, a sizeable Hindu community and a very large Muslim community. They had their differences but they were well cemented by their common adoration for their British masters. This, the other *Fringe Mesopotamians* were unwilling to leave intact as it became evident that the British had decided to leave. It was evident they were going to split the mighty Punjab, the creation of Pakistan was the consequence of this and not

⁴⁴⁶ *Fringe Mesopotamia* is the defence and alliance community that the British had nurtured in the north-west of British India. Since their origins, customs, culture and posture towards South Asian civilisation this community can be considered as pertaining to the Mesopotamian sphere, on the fringe of it. Today it is Pakistan and the north-western states of India, from Gujarat right up to Kashmir. The only problem was and still is that this community is not uniform and is prone to high rivalry.

the other way round. This decision had a parallel development on the eastern front; and the ingenuity of Nehru and Gandhi was to link both fronts and win the day for *Fringe Mesopotamia* as a whole.

In 1757, precisely one hundred years before the Indian Mutiny, when the East India Company conquered Bengal, willingly and most of the time unwillingly it was unleashing a powerful phenomenon thence unheard of in the Subcontinent – modern nationalism. Indeed, Bengali resources, up handedness and arrogance served the Company well when they offered it the entire subcontinent on a silver plate. Bengal became the backbone of the East India Company and in return a powerful and extremely articulate Bengali elite emerged that even the British aristocracy started feeling unsure of their own high-handedness, they hated them and the East India Company behind them. The masquerade of the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny was to reduce both aspirants to rouble.

The Company vanished overnight and so did the Bengalese as a military force; but Bengali nationalism had deep roots, made of strong fibre. The best minds might come from South India but Bengal had meticulously woven its administrative fabric deep into the heart of British India. The Sikhs and Punjabis with the military might, the Bengalis with their unparalleled control over the administration, judiciary and the organs of the press a remaining section of *Fringe Mesopotamians* had nothing except Gandhi, Nehru and the British sympathy. Its interest was thus intertwined with that of the British aristocracy; Bengali nationalism had to be destroyed and Bengal divided. The British tried in 1905 and failed as both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis united to defend the integrity of their nation but not for long. Gandhi and Nehru were masters in the art of deception and intrigue, and they got the job done, Bengal was divided. While both of them played the serenade to the principles of nonviolence, Bengali blood was flooding the streets of Calcutta like a monsoon in deluge.

As if this was not enough, a plan was drawn to make eastern Bengal a colony to Pakistan, a master more brutal and unapologetic than the worst of the Bengali nightmares.⁴⁴⁷ The initial partition plan did not include Bengal. The

⁴⁴⁷ Misra, 1972, 28.

name 'Pakistan' holds a secret in the sense that it is a compound of the names of provinces of today's Pakistan, with no mention of Bengal. Logic says that it must have been added to the list of demands at the last moment, at the request of Nehru. What he feared most was not Pakistan or even China, it was the return of Subhas Chandra Bose⁴⁴⁸ to a united Bengal, making it his base to challenge Nehru. Every patriotic family in India had a picture of Bose hanging on their wall. These passages are too few to elaborate how Nehru used his power to further enslave and antagonise the divided parts further. It took the courage of the first and truly Indian leader, Indira Gandhi, to come to the rescue of an economically decimated Bangladesh (East Pakistan) in 1972. Dividing Bengal into two can only be seen as a temporary measure to hold Bengali nationalism in check. Today, since Bengali nationalism was never based on religious beliefs, there is a chance that the cultural and linguistic nationalism could stretch across the artificial borders.⁴⁴⁹ Bangladesh has been one of the best managed economic growth story in the whole of South Asia. And if this success continues there is a strong possibility that the two Bengals would like to resurrect some sort of cultural reunification.

Fringe Mesopotamia is hoping that the anti-Muslim trend in the world at large and Hindu nationalism in India could keep tension high and make the rapprochement between the two Bengals (West Bengal and Bangladesh) difficult if not impossible. This could do the trick but together the Bengalis constitute a linguistic community of more than 400 million people. In 1972, when Bangladesh was created, Indira Gandhi hoped to consolidate India's eastern flank by having a friendly and grateful country there. And the first Bangladeshi foreign policy initiative led to the later creation of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), to definitively end the Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru era of communal divisions and mutual mistrust. This path to peace was always marginalised by *Fringe Mesopotamia* as both Indira Gandhi and her son Rajeev Gandhi were assassinated. They and South Asian unity were victims to a fanaticism inaugurated by the great Mahatma himself, so

⁴⁴⁸ Subhas Chandra Bose a Bengali nationalist leader who disappeared mysteriously on a Japanese plane at the end of WWII. The evidence concerning his death is still contested.

⁴⁴⁹ Khan, 1985, 838.

rapprochement between the two Bengali communities might not be easy, but structurally it could happen. The Bangladeshi foreign policy attitude and posture is one of the most accommodating. *Fringe Mesopotamia* has conquered most of India and might use a conflictual path to consolidate South Asia further. This posture might push Bangladesh to do the same. A miscalculation on the part of Fringe Mesopotamia could be one of the biggest risks that haunts India – Bangladesh security concerns.

India –Nepal conflict

Nepal is a land-locked country and prone to buffs of panic and suffocation. It cannot sustain uncertainty, it needs long term assurances from its two big neighbours. On the domestic side Nepalese politics has been tumultuous, and its relations with India have taken the same turn and there is a reason for that. Although the population of Nepal in its majority is Hindu, ethnicity plays a bigger role, with stark differences between what is called Hill Hindus and Valley Hindus. The Valley Hindus feel more affinity to the neighbouring Indian provinces than with the customs and ways of life of the Gurkha Hill Hindus. In the 1950s Nehru tried to fiddle and pull strings in the domestic issues and enhance the position of the Valley Hindus who preferred closer association with India. This was not to the liking of the Hill Hindus, the independent spirited Gurkhas. More recently Nepal has accused India of imposing a whole scale embargo to twist its arm, not even taking into account the shock and devastation caused by a deadly earthquake. The Nepalese consider this to be a form of declaration of war. From its perspective, India is using the only peaceful method that it can to effective means.⁴⁵⁰

India –Sri Lanka conflict

India's conflict with Sri-Lanka is a turning point and a milestone in South Asian security policy. India started to see its defensive and security priorities in terms of the whole of South Asia again.⁴⁵¹ To this extent, it was a long awaited

⁴⁵⁰ Yadav, 2016. February 04.

⁴⁵¹ Hagerty, 1991, 352.

structural adjustment from a historian's point of view. There was precedence, both in India's continued involvement in Nepal and India's liberation of Bangladesh from the clutches of Pakistani repression and brutality. The 1980s are seen as a more assertive foray into an attempt to defining the security perimeters of South Asia as the indivisible part of the Indian sphere of concern and primacy. Of course the reality on the ground was different since the United States was heavily implicated in Pakistan and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. This said, with Nepal and Bangladesh tightly pulled into the Indian sphere, the eastern front was more or less consolidated.

The India and Sri-Lanka conflict is built at several levels as it is customary in South Asia. Tensions or fire in any one level could easily spill into other leading into a generalised inferno. One of the priorities of security policy in the region is to keep these levels compartmentalised and isolated. As with the other instances, here too events and the pattern of actions and reactions is dictated by the structure of historic build-up. Love-hatred relationship between the two countries is a fact. The reasons for this contradictory picture is not all too evident to understand, but we have to isolate certain trends. As Sasanka Perera argues: *"In the final analysis, both Sinhals and Tamils of today are descendants of immigrants from mostly southern parts of India. At the level of popular perception, Sinhals believe that they belong to a superior ethnic group called "Aryans" who trace their descent from northern parts of India."*⁴⁵² So structurally, the Indian involvement in the Sri-Lankan conflict was bound to fail because it was difficult to take sides or keep equidistance for long. That is exactly what happened with Rajiv Gandhi's policy, but there were other ingredients that led to the poisonous atmosphere that arose.

The Sri-Lankan situation has to be understood from another perspective, from that of nascent nationalisms. Up to the 1950s the whole of the Indian Ocean rim and the Indian Ocean islands came under direct or indirect influence of British India. But this changed as every single territorial unit openly celebrated nationalism and became temporarily insensitive to pan-regional alliances and irksome to the slightest insinuation of outside influence. As William L. Dowdy and

⁴⁵² Sasanka, 2001, 6.

Russell B. Troad point out: "Today the ocean littoral is composed not of dominated colonies but of proud, independent nation-states jealous of their prerogatives and suspicious of the intentions of all outside."⁴⁵³ It was for this reason that most of the South Asian nations entertained a deep suspicion of India's benevolent intentions and Sri-Lanka was the best example.

Conclusion

Geography is a defining element in the history of South Asia, and consequently the role played by geopolitics is quite substantial. It is for this reason that any outside analyst or policy maker inside South Asia should have an intimate understanding of the geopolitical aspects of the region and how they were transformed over the centuries and to what consequences. Geographic delineations in South Asia also reflected the mosaic of ethnic input into the defensive security arrangement for more than 2000 years from the times of Emperor Ashoka to as recently as 1904 when the Curzon Doctrine took centre ground. Unfortunately the break-up of this security configuration has led to a dysfunctionality of purpose. Rather than recreate, in one way or the other, the protective system after the 1947, the South Asian components have constantly eroded the outer walls of the indivisible South Asia. From a geopolitical and geostrategic point of view, the interstate conflicts between the so called South Asian conflicts are 'structurally' nothing more than civil wars on the political level and ethnic wars on the socio-religious level. India as the biggest player in the game should have taken the lead for the creation of some sort of pan-South Asian security arrangement. But unable to perform the mission because of its time consuming democratic set-up, and more importantly India fell into the ethnic trap as some ethnics nurtured for security purposes became sovereign states in which the martial elements dominated the political structures. Sovereignty of the new states in reality meant nothing more than the primacy of military establishments. Nationalism was gathered to support this position, making any form of military cooperation impossible. This structural dysfunctionality is supported and used by China for enhancing its own designs

⁴⁵³ Dowdy & Troad, 1983, 437.

in South Asia but these violations could lead India to seek more concrete and radical solutions to recreate the long due South Asian security configuration. And in this endeavour cooperation with the United States could be an option, although India would like to keep its independence in terms of security, and not make the mistakes committed by Europe after the Second World War.

Overall Conclusion:

By building some valuable concepts I hope to have constructed a few steady steps-stones on which others can move safely in the right direction. I am also persuaded that these concepts that I explored and delineated in the South Asian context are at the same time universal in their application. The two dominant concepts that recur in my writings are Predatorism and Fringe-attitude or Fringe-ness. Both are oriented towards the demonstration of how systemic change and takeover happens, the dynamics of how systemic replacement takes place. The process could be socio-cultural, geographical and economic. And it could be quick or be drawn-out over the centuries when civilizations can succumb or agonize. These two concepts dominate the historic evolution of South Asia but soon I realised that they are visible all around me in Europe, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. In this respect, the diversity and complexity found in South Asia acts as a kaleidoscope for universal extrapolation.

I also tried to show how universal concepts change when they are applied to the Indian context. How their overall significance changes to give a new meaning. I tried to demonstrate how this could produce a dangerous gap between what outsiders assume the historic evolution to be and how the reality was shaped on the ground. Federalism, nationalism, democracy, human and labour rights and collective security are some of the concepts to name but a few. India is treated as a national community, but it is a multi-national country which gives a different meaning to the idea of democracy. This explains why while in other democracies issues dominate, in India ethnic politics dominates. The arbitration is between ethnicities and not issues, a process which disjoins

economic development from the democratic will of the people. The efficiency of the process is still slacked by the caste system (loyalties). But miraculously, the civilisational (traditional) India refuses to be impeded by Fringe Mesopotamian patterns of implanted divisions and discriminations. The Indian Civilisation is synonymous with the concept of democracy because the backbone of its *raison d'être* is its capacity to build and maintain compatibility. My sincere hope is that when the Indian Civilisation is restored to its original intent then democracy and development will go hand-in-hand to make India the true mother of all democracies.

Finally, my mission was to show the structural dimensions of India's history over the last few centuries. The intention here was to show the weight of layers of colonization, of all kinds, weighing on the main current of civilisational flow of history. The soft and deceptive nature of these colonisations meant that the people of India were unaware of it, and they were unaware of its magnitude. India was a diffuse and decentralised civilisation confronted by well-organized bandit-like groups proclaiming to be kings of vast territories. On top of this, Fringe Mesopotamian Brahmins were meticulously dividing society into castes, further weakening the unity that existed. When the Indian people did realize what was really happening, it was too late. In terms of structure, reading into India's history is not so simple, we are confronted with multiple historic trends. The interplay of these trends can be interpreted as a 'transnational' history for the moment. Much more research has to be done to delineate a truly national history.

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