

INTERLUDE – ENVISIONING THE NEW INDIA

At the stroke of the midnight hour, India awoke to freedom of a kind, as well as to a host of unresolved problems that had only been discussed theoretically before. In political and intellectual circles, there had for some time been a deeply felt need to anticipate the nature and content of the post-independence Indian state. With formal independence achieved, the need for a definite programme and direction for the new Indian state now became a matter of urgency; there was a need to order various contending ideas into manageable forms and to find at least an interim closure to the debates on the nature of the new India.

The debates, when recounted in terms of their particular arguments, have a spurious rationality and calmness about them: they took place against the very turbulent backdrop of the violence and population transfers of 1946–8, the problems of accession of states to the new Union (notably Kashmir and Hyderabad), armed conflict with Pakistan, and continuing economic and political pressures from the former colonial power. But the debates need to be recounted here in that spurious calmness; because that was the way they were invoked, as legitimising principles for the actual politics of the independent Indian state. We must therefore examine the roots of what came to be called the ‘Nehruvian vision’ or the ‘Nehruvian model’ in India, describing thereby what might be called the political culture of post-independence India.

We might profitably ask whether this political culture took shape in the crucial period of transition from the temporary Dominion of India

to the inauguration of the Republic of India on January 26, 1950. This was a time when a creative intellect had great scope for imprinting itself on the state. Jawaharlal Nehru was the intellectual for that moment; to a large extent the contours of a vision of the new India were shaped by him. He was not altogether in a position to write the script himself. But he was nevertheless able very effectively to intervene in the foundational debates at crucial points; and the vision of a new India at its most attractive is one that probably most deserves the epithet ‘Nehruvian’.

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY: VISIONS AND FORMULAE

The retrospectively-named ‘Nehruvian consensus’ was often no more than an obligatory but fragile language of legitimacy. It had in part come into being in the course of forging the delicate coalition that was the Congress in the 1930s and 1940s; it was further framed in the debates in the Constituent Assembly, which sat from 1946 to 1949 to draw up a constitution for India. The component parts of that vision – secularism, equality before the law, and democracy based on universal adult franchise; economic self-sufficiency, ‘development’ as a rationale for the government’s legitimacy, the importance therein of technology and of a technocracy to run it; the social concerns which the government claimed to represent; the desire to find an international voice for India and the importance of playing a world role – all bore the imprint of Nehru’s energetic interventions: in the debates of the Constituent Assembly, in his speeches, in print, and in the public discussions, often initiated by Nehru, on the consequences of partition and on Hindu–Muslim relations in the new Indian state. It was a most humane, rational and inspiring vision; but we must also ask whether it was a vision ever realised, or whether it was its fragility or impossibility that made it so attractive.

To some extent, too, the ‘Nehruvian’ vision was based on a pre-existing set of formulae. The formulae can be baldly stated; they are easily recognisable in public debates at least from the 1930s. Claims to ‘socialism’ – or to some social concern for the poor and downtrodden – were obligatory, and were by the 1940s made by capitalists and avowed socialists alike (capitalists were extremely worried that socialism was in the ascendant and decided that the best way to protect themselves was to appear to concede ‘socialism’ while maintaining the ‘essential features of capitalism’). Also invoked were ‘science’, technology and technical

expertise as ways of achieving ‘modern’ social and economic goals – even by the Gandhians, who tried to redefine the ‘modern’ in such a way as to justify a decentralised, village-based and labour-intensive socio-economic order as more in keeping with ‘modern’ trends. To achieve these goals, a good deal of ‘national discipline’ was required, and the ‘masses’ were to have to make some sacrifices in the short term, or in the ‘transitional period’. And lastly, all solutions to social, economic or political problems had to conform to ‘indigenous’ values: borrowings from ‘foreign’ systems were to be treated with suspicion. This was a particularly useful tactical argument used against socialists and communists by Gandhians and by the right (often strategically merging with the Gandhians); but it was also used by socialists to argue that communists were ‘foreign’ elements controlled from Moscow. The appeal of the ‘indigenist’ strand of argument in a colonised country was rhetorically powerful, and could often put people who counted themselves in the ‘progressive’ camp on the defensive. These views could all be contained within a general view of ‘development’ as ‘progress’, and of India as a ‘modern’ country with a rich ‘tradition’.

And yet, to call them ‘formulae’ is not to suggest that they were meaningless. As ideas that formed the basis of the accepted political rhetoric of public arenas, they defined the boundaries of public standards to which people were expected to conform. This created the basis for public debate and the standards for acceptable action. Claims to political legitimacy had to be made in terms of a rhetorical appeal to the norms enshrined in the formulae. Deviations from such norms needed to be hidden, or justified as only apparent deviations, ultimately assimilable within the bounds of the norms. Those who disagreed strongly with the norms had to hold their peace or to find other ways of getting what they wanted in practical terms, while purporting to uphold the norms. So it was a set of constraining and framing boundaries for arguments and ideas; all arguments that hoped to claim any legitimacy had to place themselves within those boundaries; there was limited room for manoeuvre.

IN THE END IS THE BEGINNING: THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE STATE

The institutional framework within which Nehru had to work was in a state of flux, as the Congress searched for a role and a rationale to keep itself together. In the years running up to independence, the Congress had

increasingly sought to identify itself with the nation as a whole, and through the nation with the state. So the equation the Congress-is-the-nation-is-the-state was to form the basis of its leadership in defining the nature of the new state, in shaping its institutions, and in mapping out policy directions.

But the Congress was a conglomeration of different forces, pulling in different directions – a platform for anti-imperialist struggle, not a party, as many of its own members had said on many occasions. Its main objective since December 1929 had been that of *'purna swaraj'* – 'complete independence' – which had now formally been achieved, although post-dated to a future period when a constitution had been drawn up and temporary dominion status ended. What was now needed was a party, not a platform. Given the lack of agreement on several basic political questions, this seemed an unrealistic expectation: apologists for capitalism, socialists and Gandhians of varying description and levels of commitment or opportunism had shared the Congress in an uneasy coalition of forces held together only by common opposition to British rule in India.

The Mahatma's suggestion was that the Congress should now dissolve itself. But the abandonment of the security and legitimacy of the Congress label was uncongenial: it was a point of orientation at a bewilderingly disorienting time. The Congress Socialist, Ram Manohar Lohia, argued in 1947 that power could only be transferred to Congress because no other party was capable of receiving it.¹ Ironically, the Socialists first dropped the word 'Congress' from their name, in 1947, and then, in 1949, seceded from the Congress altogether.

Logically enough, therefore, the anti-imperialist coalition that was the Congress broke apart with the achievement of independence. Former allies on the left were divided into three groups: Nehru and a vestigial left in the Congress, the Socialists outside, and the Communists rapidly becoming the main opposition party. Thereafter, if Nehru was to have his way in his own party, dominated by the right, he had to use Gandhian tactics to morally blackmail his colleagues – go over their heads by threatening to resign, in effect threatening them with the 'people', for they knew that without Nehru the party's electoral appeal dwindled to next to nothing. The extent to which Nehru was able to impose his vision on his colleagues had much to do with these tactics: he was staking his personal standing against them. But he could, occasionally, rely on cross-party support outside the Congress.

The Congress had, therefore, to be built into a party, with an organisation and discipline, and to find equations to run the state apparatus inherited, more or less intact, from the British. Institutional continuity was stressed by Vallabhbhai Patel. It was Patel who promoted the cause of the successor institution to the Indian Civil Service, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS); the latter was almost entirely modelled on the former, complete with the horsemanship test that had been the bane of many Indian candidates who had been successful in the written part of the ICS examination. The IAS, the police and the army (with its regimental trophy cabinets continuing to celebrate victories in colonial wars and massacres of colonial peoples) provided strong links with a colonial past. Government departments changed hands but not organisations; in many cases the change of crest from the imperial coat of arms to the Indian national emblem – the capital of one of the third century BC Mauryan Emperor Ashoka's famous pillars – on government stationery and publications was the most tangible indication of change.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The Congress's need for a coherent policy for the party and the state became inextricably linked up with the need for a national identity. The Congress had projected itself as the sole representative body capable of speaking for the nation as a whole. With the creation of Pakistan this claim could, if anything, be intensified: those who did not agree with the Congress's vision of India should now have left, and those who remained were by default those who agreed. But the Congress had no coherent vision of India. Behind the scenes, the Congress right, led by Patel, argued, after the partition of India, that the matter had been decided: Pakistan was a Muslim state; the residual India would therefore be a Hindu state.

Nehru disagreed strongly. Quite apart from the fact that he himself would not have found it congenial, as a non-believer, to live in an India so defined, this would have reduced Muslims in India to the implicit status of foreigners. The cross-border movements following partition and the accompanying violence had made it clear that great insecurity existed. And if this insecurity was amplified, violence would continue until complete population exchange was complete – which was unviable, undesirable, and would retrospectively make a mockery of all for which the Congress had publicly stood for so long. It would also retrospectively

justify Pakistan by making explicit what many Muslim League and other Muslim publicists had often said: that the Congress's claim to being a secular party ought not to be taken seriously. And what of other minorities? In a 'Hindu' state, their position would be ambiguous. It was therefore imperative that the principles of secular democracy and equality before the law be observed.

It had long been the contention of Nehru and the Congress left that 'communal' identities were not true identities; they were made possible by the poverty of the people and their consequent search for resources of hope, manipulated by elites with a vested interest in sectarianism for their own narrow ends. 'Communalism', by this definition, was both a false nationalism and a false consciousness. The preferred way of overcoming this was by economic means: greater prosperity for the masses would lead to greater awareness that real issues were economic, not communal.

With this in mind, the left had been concerned to plan a future for India that included economic development and prosperity. The justification for a national state rested on the fact that a national state, as opposed to an economically retarding imperialist one, would have the interests of its own nationals at the centre of its vision. After independence, the Congress, which was in its own eyes the whole of the national movement, and was now also in charge of the state, would take control of economic development. In this way, it could claim legitimacy as the custodian of the national state.

This, in part, was a short cut: it gave the Congress the right to speak for the 'nation'. The rule of the Congress was assumed: universal adult franchise, when it came, would underline that fact. But the problem of a positive content for Indian nationalism remained to be solved. Too many pre-1947 versions of Indian-ness ultimately relied on versions of Hindu-ness, with tolerance towards minorities thrown in – or not, as was often the case. Typically, these versions drew their sustenance from a history that harked back to a 'Hindu' golden age of civilisation, ironically leaning heavily on the writings of early British Orientalist scholarship, even when placed in a newly nationalist argument. This was not necessarily thought of as a central problem as long as the cement of anti-colonialism could be relied upon to bind diverse elements together, and dissenting voices could simply be dismissed as 'communal'. But an agreed-upon, non-sectarian version of the Indian past had to be found.

Nehru had put his mind to this problem while in jail during the war. It was not a subject to which he was naturally inclined: he would have preferred to argue that nationalism was too narrow a creed whose time had come and gone – as indeed he had done in the 1930s, when expounding the need for socialism. In *The Discovery of India*, published in 1946, Nehru stated, as he often had at various public fora, that an obsession with nationalism was a natural response to the lack of freedom: ‘for every subject country national freedom must be the first and dominant urge.’² With the achievement of freedom the obsession would vanish; wider groupings of nations and states, and wider solidarities on the basis of internationalism would be possible. But the emotional pull of nationalism could not now be wished away. How could one find a common cultural and historical heritage for India that would serve to build a sense of the nation?

‘The roots of the present lay in the past,’ Nehru wrote, and so he was to concern himself with trying to understand the history of India.³ This would be ‘a process similar to that of psychoanalysis, but applied to a race or to humanity itself instead of to an individual. The burden of the past, the burden of both good and ill, is over-powering, and sometimes suffocating, more especially for those of us who belong to very ancient civilisations like those of India and China.’⁴ So the anxieties generated by the past in relation to the present had to be confronted and resolved.

Nehru confronted the ‘Hindu’ view of Indian-ness: ‘It is . . . incorrect and undesirable to use “Hindu” or “Hinduism” for Indian culture, even with reference to the distant past.’⁵ The term ‘Hindu’ was used in a geographical sense to denote the Indian land mass by outsiders, derived from the river Sindhu or Indus. The ‘Hindu golden age’ idea had been crucially shaped by the needs of Indian nationalism. This was understandable. ‘It is not Indians only who are affected by nationalist urges and supposed national interest in the writing or consideration of history. Every nation and people seems to be affected by this desire to gild and better the past and distort it to their advantage.’⁶ But it was a version that was, he argued, historically false (he could not have been blind to the fact that he was himself attempting something not dissimilar; to narrate an acceptable past for the ‘nation’, retrospectively to justify his own commitment to that ‘nation’). Although he acknowledged that some basic ideas and continuities had been preserved in popular and elite cultures, it was impossible to attribute this to one group of inhabitants of India.

Historically, India was ‘like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.’⁷ Each layer had enriched Indian culture, and had a place in a new national consciousness; the great rulers of India were the synthesisers who looked beyond sectional interests to bring together different layers. The crux of the alien nature of British rule was that it never adapted itself to India, never accepted India geographically as a home, and exploited India economically for the benefit of outside interests.

Nehru also warned against a view of India that over-glorified the past – a danger, he noted, that was also present in China. He agreed that both civilisations had ‘shown an extraordinary staying power and adaptability’.⁸ But not all ancient things were worth preserving: caste discrimination, for instance, had to be struggled against – in its origins, he reminded his readers, this had been based on colour. India was at present ‘an odd mixture of medievalism, appalling poverty and misery and a somewhat superficial modernism of the middle classes’.⁹ What was needed was to bring modernism to the masses, by the middle classes understanding and promoting the needs of the masses – he stressed his admiration for Russia and China in their attempts to end similar conditions (writing before the victory of the Chinese Communist Party, Nehru apparently backed the CCP’s vision of a new China).

‘Culture’ remained a tricky question for an inclusive nationalism, and Nehru’s solutions to the problem of Indian cultural unity were not altogether satisfying. He himself claimed to have experienced this unity emotionally rather than intellectually, in his travels through India. On the intellectual side, however, he tended to fall back on stereotypes. Nehru’s own language, then and later, tended to be imbued with some of the prevalent language of race and eugenics, as well as a patronising and at times paternalistic attitude towards the ‘masses’: he spoke unself-consciously of ‘sturdy peasants’ and ‘good stock’. (‘Good stock’ was, for Nehru, the result not of ethnic or racial *separation* but on the creative intermingling of the races that made up India.) His accretion-and-synthesis view of Indian culture fitted in well with cultural practices such as the worship at Sufi shrines of both ‘Hindus’ and Muslims. In other cases, this view did not work quite so well: the peasants, he wrote, had in common oral versions of the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* – this was, perhaps, true even of some Muslim and Christian

‘sturdy peasants’, but was not true, for instance, of the north-eastern ‘tribal’ territories of India that were to be inherited by independent India because they had been within the borders of British India. The difficulty of finding an inclusive ‘culture’ that would encompass class, regional and religious differences was an insuperable one – the communist-proffered model of an India of many nations and a multinational Indian state might have solved this problem better.

However, despite its problems, Nehru’s version largely succeeded in becoming the dominant left-secular master narrative of Indian history. Its major achievement was to disarm the view of Indian culture as ‘Hindu’. It could, of course, be argued that this was a matter of *naming*: a Hindu majoritarian ethic could hide behind the secular view of an overarching Indian culture, in which ‘Hindu’ culture, no longer so called, was given a large space, with any attempt to assert the particularism of a Muslim or any other minority culture being regarded as ‘communal’. This allowed Hindu sectarianism to survive behind a veneer of political correctness, even within the Congress. But this banishing of Hindu sectarianism into an outer darkness, in which it was the ‘ism’ that dare not speak its name, was in itself an achievement.

COMPROMISES AND THE CONSTITUTION

The practical business of defining future directions for India was, however, not in Nehru’s hands; it was the responsibility of the Constituent Assembly, where Nehru’s ability to obtain his desirable outcomes were constrained. ‘I feel greatly how much out of touch I am with the present sentiments of the Hindus,’ he wrote to Krishna Menon. ‘Over many matters we rub each other the wrong way and I fear that the Constituent Assembly is not going to be an easy companion.’¹⁰ Nehru’s natural allies in the cause of building a progressive constitution, the Congress Socialists, had boycotted the Constituent Assembly as it had been based on the old communal electorates and property franchise of colonial India, which they believed was no basis for framing a democratic and progressive constitution for the nation as a whole.

The Constituent Assembly met from 1946 to 1949 to frame a constitution for the new state – temporarily a self-governing dominion under the British Crown. Nehru had an over-optimistic time-frame in mind for the preparation of a constitution: he thought dominion status

would only last a short time, until June 1948 at the latest – the projected date of British departure according to Attlee’s announcement – by which time an Indian constitution would be written. Lord Mountbatten had, on Nehru’s request, agreed to stay on as governor-general of the new and temporary Dominion of India to ensure continuity of administration and smoothness of transition (Mountbatten held this post until June 1948). At any event, the document produced by the discussions turned out to be the longest written constitution in the world, reflecting awkward compromises and containing frankly irreconcilable principles that had to be reconciled by hiding them in minor sections of the constitution.

The composition of the Constituent Assembly, with its Congress majority, reflected the Congress’s strength in the 1946 elections – elected not under universal adult franchise but a limited property franchise, it did not represent the social forces that might potentially have supported a consensus to the left. Its president was Dr B.R. Ambedkar, long a voice of dissent from the nationalist mainstream, having been willing to use the interested assistance of the British administration to safeguard the position of the backward castes, and from August 1947 a member of Nehru’s first Cabinet. This Cabinet was itself a balancing of divergent forces in what was effectively a national coalition. Notably, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad within the Congress, and Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, also in the Cabinet though a member of the Hindu Mahasabha, together represented right-wing upper-caste Hindu opinion; Patel also remained a central pro-capitalist voice within the Congress.

The unresolved nature of the debates on what an independent India was to look like was reflected in the debates of the Constituent Assembly. Minoo Masani, former Congress Socialist and soon to be the main spokesman of Indian capitalist interests, classified opinions in the Assembly along two axes: ‘modernists’ and ‘traditionalists’, ‘socialists’ and ‘non-socialists’. Even this is shorthand; it did not nearly reflect all the interests and points of view to be reconciled. Moreover, the arrangement of political opinion did not divide neatly along parallel axes: both ‘modernist’ and ‘traditionalist’ opinion divided along socialist and capitalist lines. Matters were not made any simpler by many followers of Gandhi claiming, as Gandhi himself was occasionally, though not consistently, wont to do, to be socialists themselves – the boundaries of ‘socialism’ were fuzzy and there was no agreed-upon adjudicator to decide who could claim to be within them. Gandhi, regularly invoked in the debates of the

Assembly now that he had been anointed as 'Father of the Nation', was not a member of the Assembly or a participant in its debates, although the occasional remark from him might produce resonances therein. His assassination on January 30, 1948 added to and amplified the tendency of debates to claim a Gandhian lineage as legitimating principle.

The question of minority rights loomed large in the discussions – not only in the context of the movement for and creation of Pakistan, but possibly more urgently in relation to other and smaller minorities and the very large numbers of Muslims remaining in India after partition. The transition from British rule to Indian self-rule had not abolished the 'interest groups' that had been carefully nurtured by the British or had grown up in the interstices of colonial power and nationalist resistance; many of these had claims to special representation entrenched in the existing colonial constitution. 'Modernists' had an uncomfortable relationship with these special interest groups: their attempt to deal with individuals as individuals seemed to be undermined by collective bargaining by groups acting as groups. And yet, the question of minorities and their genuine insecurities had to be dealt with. Nehru had often said that a majority community had special responsibilities to assuage the insecurities of minorities; therefore the principle of minority representation and 'safeguards' had to be acknowledged. This eventually involved special representation for 'backward castes' and 'tribes', recognised (as they had been under the 1935 Government of India Act) under specific Schedules of the Indian Constitution (giving rise to the awkward Indian political expression 'Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes', or SC/ST for short). Such provisions were intended to be temporary forms of social protection and positive discrimination; economic and educational advancement, as Nehru put it, would quickly end the conditions in which they were necessary. The special provisions still exist today, with various accretions over the years – if this seemed dangerously akin to colonial enumeration policies, it also illustrated that a category that became the basis of claims to resources was extremely difficult to abolish later. It might have been different if power had been seized by a revolutionary nationalist force; but in an orderly transfer of power designed to protect mutual interests and based on mutual fear of the 'masses' among British and Indian elites, such continuities were logical. These continuities enabled various interpreters to conclude that the newly independent India was going to be British India with a few adjustments.

‘As evidence of the enduring quality of the 1935 Act,’ Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mountbatten’s press attaché noted in his diary after a conversation with Ambedkar, ‘he [Ambedkar] said that some two hundred and fifty of its clauses had been embodied as they stood into the new constitution.’¹¹ While to Campbell-Johnson this was evidence of a positive British legacy, for others it was proof of an inability to break free of colonial shackles – a mood which showed itself again later on, in the anguish felt by many in the Assembly that despite all the rhetoric of independence and sovereignty, India was going to remain in the British Commonwealth.

The Constituent Assembly began its work on December 8, 1946. On December 13, Nehru’s speech on the Objectives Resolution invoked the American Constitution, the Tennis Court Oath of the legislators of the French Revolution’s National Assembly, and the experiences of the USSR. He insisted that a future Indian political order would be based on the principles of democracy and socialism, called for a republican form of government, and rejected ‘an external monarchy’. He stressed the principle of popular sovereignty: in the princely states, the people, not their monarchs, would decide on their future (a principle that Patel, in his negotiations with the states’ rulers, in effect ignored in order to persuade them to surrender sovereignty to the Indian Union). As always, Nehru offered the route of compromise: the constitution would be based on basic principles that were ‘fundamental’ and ‘not controversial’.¹² But he also hinted at the possibility of revolution and of the impermanence of the constitution, gently prompting more conservative elements to accept gradual, top-down change as a better solution than revolution from below.

The implicit tensions that were part of the constitution-making discussions were enshrined in the written version. These tensions remained unresolved – between the principles of equality before the law and various minority rights and forms of positive discrimination; between the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution (equality, freedoms of various kinds ‘against exploitation’ of various description) and various exceptions to the Fundamental Rights; and between the Fundamental Rights and the ‘Directive Principles’ of state policy, which were not a legally enforceable part of the Constitution but were said to be desirable goals or aspirations that would justify future legislation. The central principle of ‘secularism’ was negatively defined: everyone would have the

freedom to ‘practise and propagate’ their religion, but the State and its organs would neither recognise nor support particular religions or religious organisations. The ‘Directive Principles’ were the box placed in a corner of the Constitution to which were banished principles that were undesirable to reject altogether given the demands of political legitimacy, but were impossible or undesirable to make a part of the actual legal framework of the state. These included proposals to abolish poverty, commitments to redistribute wealth and establish social equality, to establish a total ban on alcohol consumption (among the so-called ‘Gandhian principles’), as well as the more sectarian demand to ban cow slaughter; but the possibility of opening that box to justify diverse political agenda was always present.

ECONOMIC VISIONS: RETREAT ON ‘SOCIALISM’; THE ‘TRANSITION PERIOD’; THE COMMUNISTS

The vision of India to which Nehru remained publicly committed depended upon the disarming of sectarian tendencies through the delivery of economic progress for everyone, ‘irrespective of caste, creed, religion or sex’, as the phrase went; it remained committed to state intervention in economic matters through economic planning. This involved, therefore, both a productive and – perhaps more importantly – a redistributive imperative. However, Nehru had more or less conceded, by the time of his days as chairman of the Congress’s National Planning Committee, that socialism was to be deferred to some time in the future. He continued to distinguish his own commitment to socialism from the political goals of the ‘nation’ as a whole. He had accepted ‘the fundamentals of socialist theory’ – ‘the Marxian thesis’ ‘successfully adapted’ by Lenin – although he ‘had little patience with leftist groups in India, spending much of their energy in mutual conflict and recriminations over fine points of doctrine’.¹³ The ‘nation’, on the other hand, had not altogether accepted socialism. Thus, the link between economic planning and socialism (identified with Nehru since the exit of Subhas Bose from the Congress) had to be loosened.

Consequently, there was much talk of a ‘transitional period’ of indefinite length before socialism could be considered. Nehru was certainly not the only person on the left involved in this deferral. The Socialist Party’s 1947 programme, before it seceded from the Congress,

declared that ‘where democracy and civil liberties are in existence, the transition to socialism must be peaceful and through democratic means’. There was much emphasis on the ‘transition period’ to ‘a society in which all are workers – a classless society’, in which human labour would not be subject to exploitation for private profit, and all wealth would be ‘truly national or common wealth’. The transitional period, however, was essential, because ‘socialist society is not created in a day’.¹⁴

Planning was, however, not to be abandoned. State intervention *per se* had no necessary connection with socialism, and no particular negative connotations even for industrialists as long as it was not accompanied by nationalisation of existing industries. Nehru was able to link up the commitment to economic planning and industrialisation with a broader ‘modernist’ trend; his public roles as socialist and moderniser could be adjusted to prioritise the latter. ‘Modernity’ was understood then in unproblematic terms as scientific and technological advance and industrialisation. Meanwhile, the rhetoric of social commitment could be pushed even by industrialists who wished to pre-empt a move too far towards radical socialism: they believed that *some* ‘socialist demands’ could be ‘accommodated without capitalism surrendering any of its essential features’.¹⁵

Detached from the socialist imperative, the economic programme for the new India could be reduced to the goal of ‘national self-sufficiency’ as an escape from what Nehru described as ‘the whirlpool of economic imperialism’,¹⁶ and industrialisation as a central plank of that self-sufficiency as India attempted to ‘catch up’ with the advanced countries. This could draw on an older tradition of economic nationalism that could trace its genealogy back to the nineteenth century. Economic nationalists demanded protection for ‘infant industries’ so that they could, with time, compete with foreign industries; they pointed out that political dependence was a necessary concomitant to an economic relationship that relied on foreign sources of supply of essential manufactured goods, and that the employment and wealth-building potential of agriculture on its own was limited. This was an argument that could be built upon by Indian industrialists in later years: they wanted more space in which to operate, to be protected against foreign competition, to start new and profitable industries rather than be confined to the low end of the industrial spectrum – cotton and jute textiles, sugar and so on. Within the

nationalist movement, to the extent that a businessman's demand was a demand for national industry, it was a national demand that the left wing of the movement could also support. This was again able to provide a coalitional space in the post-independence period: industrialists were nervous about the details of Nehruvian policy, but most could live with the whole. An Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 stressed that heavy industry and industries of national importance would be established under state control: in effect, the long-term investments in infrastructure were to be taken care of by the state, while existing industries under private capital would remain in private hands.

In effect, then, the post-independence political economy was set up as a protected national economy, run on capitalist lines with a strong state sector. And with socialists committed to a 'transition period', it could be all but admitted that the shared goal was one of achieving a relatively successful capitalism rather than anything that could be recognised as 'socialism' – but the obligatory language of political legitimacy dictated that this was a step too far.

Planning was therefore constructed as a 'technical' process in which 'experts' with 'scientific' knowledge would take decisions on the basis of technical, and therefore apolitical, criteria. Nehru himself, as is evident from a number of his public statements, did not believe that there were such things as purely apolitical criteria; but he found this to be an enabling myth: an appeal to purely technical criteria depoliticised an area of activity that could therefore run parallel to the political arena of elected representatives, giving Nehru and a team of carefully selected 'technical experts' more or less loyal to him greater capacity for autonomous political action.

Even for the minimalist programme of Nehruvian economic and social engineering to work, the first steps would have had to be abolishing vested interests – some would have said 'feudal' remnants – in the countryside; in effect dismantling the 'feudal–imperialist alliance': *zamindars*, *talukdars* and various other intermediaries who exacted various kinds of payments from the actual producers. Land reforms were the basic minimum for this. Potentially, this could lead to agrarian capitalism, but social justice was to be administered through land ceilings: an upper limit on the amount of land that could be owned by an individual. Cooperative farming was envisaged among policy-makers, especially in areas where land holdings were too small to be productive.

In a way, Nehru's theoretical scenario – economic man replacing sectarian man – had been tested by events elsewhere in India, in which the Communist Party of India was extremely important. The *Tebbaga* movement in Bengal in 1946 had demonstrated ambiguities in class and community identities, with pro-Muslim League and pro-CPI loyalties co-existing among the peasantry; but this test case was not quite conducted in the best possible ground, given the strong sectarian context of the times, and the implications of the ambiguities were not acknowledged officially by the CPI itself. The movement for Pakistan had been strong enough to force the CPI to concede the importance of Pakistan as a rallying point for almost millenarian aspirations among poor Muslims, and to try and work within rather than against that movement. But the capacity to direct or control changes in the incomprehensible world of colonial negotiating tables remained beyond the capacity of ordinary people or the leadership of agrarian struggle. On the other hand, in the Telengana region of Hyderabad state, agrarian discontent and linguistic solidarities were organised from 1946 under the communist banner in solidarity against the (Muslim) ruler's attempt to split the movement on communal lines even as he claimed the right to independence or to accede to Pakistan rather than India. But here, solidarity had partly been due to agrarian conditions, partly due to language and regional loyalties – the CPI's own narratives of Telengana point to the eventual reorganisation of Indian states on linguistic lines as one of the movement's real gains. The simple dichotomy of 'communal' versus 'economic' man did not work: identities and solidarities were based on a far more complex mixture of factors. (In the end, the Telengana movement surrendered not to the Nizam of Hyderabad but to troops fighting it in the name of independent India who had in September 1948 invaded Hyderabad State in a so-called 'police action' against the recalcitrant ruler.)

NON-ALIGNMENT: ASSUMPTION OF SPACE TO MANOEUVRE

In one area at least, the identification of Nehru with the policies of his government would not be inaccurate: Nehru was to a very large extent able to mould Indian foreign policy, to make, and thereafter justify, the major decisions, and to leave a strong impress of his personal style upon India's international image and reputation – a personal style which, it

must be said by way of qualification, owed much to the firm hand of Krishna Menon, whose London-based Independence for India League had already done so much to provide India its international diplomatic profile.

It has been customary to separate Nehru's domestic policy from his foreign policy. This is largely unjustified; domestic difficulties can often be seen as connected with international pressures. Nehru himself insisted that foreign policy was the external reflection of domestic policy and particularly of domestic economic policy – he said this publicly and often – but it was perhaps as often the other way round. As he put it on other occasions, a country's independence consisted basically of the right to conduct its own foreign relations. 'External affairs', as it came to be called, was a particularly important concern for India, involving defining political and economic relations with Britain, with the superpowers, with other colonies and former colonies in Asia and elsewhere, and with its neighbours in the region. For a young state just emerging from formal colonial control, the overriding concern was with finding an independent voice in international politics and retaining effective independence for India. Nehru's external problems were reflected in internal equations. Internally, the Indian political system aimed at being consensual and non-confrontational, and the Congress was effectively a coalition of the moderate left and the centre-right, which meant that the Cold War, at the very least, impinged on the internal relations of the party.

Of the higher ranks of the Congress leadership, Nehru had the most international experience; force of circumstance had found him outside India, in Britain and Europe, at crucial points in the history of the twentieth century: the Oppressed Nations' Conference in Brussels in 1927; the Soviet Union in 1927 before the beginning of Stalinism proper; Europe in the mid-1930s, during the rise of fascism and the Spanish Civil War; and again in 1938, at the time of the Munich Crisis. By the end of the 1930s, Nehru had succeeded in establishing his hegemony over the Congress's foreign policy. As the only person acceptable to a Congress mainstream with an understanding of international politics and an international standing, he was able – although not without resistance – to make his own foreign policy. As a result, Indian politics, viewed from outside India, often appeared more 'progressive' than it actually was, viewed from inside India.

There were, of course, few things that could be considered purely 'external' affairs. A number of grey areas fell between domestic and foreign

policy. Many of these were legacies of the peculiarities of colonial rule in India: the problem of the princely states, of Junagadh and Hyderabad, but in particular of Kashmir; later of the Portuguese colony of Goa; and of course international border questions. Of these issues, Kashmir came to be an international one and came to dominate the question of Indian relations with Pakistan – although perhaps Junagadh and Hyderabad, involving similar issues of principle but dissimilar geopolitics, could theoretically also have done. And of course relations with Pakistan were also to be implicitly or explicitly linked within India to the ‘communal question’ of relations between Hindus and Muslims. The decisive question, however, which placed items on the international agenda and forced the Government of India to deal with them as ‘external’, tended to be their importance to the Cold War.

Nehru himself was in charge of foreign affairs in the Interim Government from September 1946. The Interim Government did not have significant powers. Nevertheless, it was necessary for Nehru’s claim not to be in government by the invitation of the viceroy but ‘by our right and by our strength’¹⁷ that he used the position to think ahead, to achieve international recognition and to set up diplomatic links with the world in anticipation of independence. (He made it clear that the Muslim League, although part of the Interim Government, could not expect to be included in foreign policy delegations and discussions, especially as they were not cooperating with the rest of the government, and had reserved the right not to be part of an eventual Indian Union.) The paradoxes of a still dependent Indian foreign policy were continuously present: Nehru sent sympathy messages to the Indonesian freedom struggle – at a time when Indian troops, under British command, were still in Indonesia, attempting at the request of the Dutch government to restore Dutch rule. (Nehru assured the Constituent Assembly that Indian troops would be withdrawn immediately – ‘we are not going to tolerate any delays or any subterfuges,’ he stated – but he admitted his powers in this respect were limited.¹⁸)

The central plank of Nehru’s foreign policy was outlined by him within a few days of the inauguration of the Interim Government. ‘We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale.’¹⁹ Non-alignment was at least as much a pragmatic as a principled position: military advisers had

pointed out that the Indian Army could at best expect to hold its own against the forces of a similar-sized regional enemy, and provoking Great Power rivalries in the region was not the best way forward. The Polish economist Michal Kalecki was later to describe non-alignment as a strategy of sucking two cows.²⁰ ‘It is a difficult position,’ Nehru confessed to the Constituent Assembly, ‘because, when people are full of fear of one another, any person who tries to be neutral is suspected of sympathy with the other party.’²¹

Nehru made it clear that India would cooperate with the newly formed United Nations – it was, he believed, still feeble, and had many defects, but ought to be supported. He was particularly critical of the Great Powers’ veto rights in the Security Council, which he believed defeated the purpose of a world forum in which states could participate as equals. Nehru was also keen to disassociate India from British Indian foreign policy. He was aware of the twin dangers of Indian delegates becoming Anglo-American ‘satellites’ at the UN, and of irritating them by ‘partiality towards Russia’. Non-alignment did not preclude leaning to one side at times, but required an avoidance of ‘entanglements with groups’. ‘Personally,’ he wrote to his sister, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the head of the Indian delegation to the General Assembly (and soon to be the Indian Ambassador to the USSR), ‘I think that in this world tug-of-war there is on the whole more reason on the side of Russia, not always, of course.’ Nevertheless, ‘[w]e have to steer a middle course not merely because of expediency but also because we consider it the right course.’²²

Non-alignment did not rule out cooperation or trade with the superpowers, particularly the USA. Such contacts were to be approached pragmatically. ‘We are likely to have dealings with them in many spheres of activity, industrial, economic and other,’ Nehru wrote to Asaf Ali, shortly to be the Indian representative in Washington. Nehru envisaged an inflow of capital goods from the USA to India, as well as many technical experts. ‘All these dealings will of course not be for humanitarian reasons but because they are to the mutual advantage of both parties concerned.’²³ But he expected US pressure on India to be particularly acute in a number of ways – his own 1927 prophesy, restated in 1946 in *The Discovery of India*, and British wartime fears that the USA would be the main imperialist power of the future had come true. ‘We have to be exceedingly careful in our dealings with the State Department,’ he wrote to Asaf Ali

in Washington. ‘The United States are a great Power and we want to be friendly with them for many reasons. Nevertheless I should like it to be made clear that we do not propose to be subservient to anybody and we do not welcome any kind of patronage. Our approach, while being exceedingly friendly, may become tough if the necessity arises, both in political and economic matters. We hold plenty of good cards in our hands and there is no need whatever for us to appear as supplicants before any country.’²⁴

In October 1946, Krishna Menon took the initiative to establish links with the USSR. He met Molotov in Paris, and in informal conversation Molotov regretted that at the present time the USSR could not offer to ease India’s food shortage, because the USSR had shortages of its own to deal with; but he offered India the USSR’s technical and military assistance. This was too much and too fast for the British government, especially at the beginning of the Cold War – India was not yet independent. Nehru advised Menon to go slow for a while. By November he asked Menon to make a formal approach to Molotov for diplomatic links, and requested him to make informal approaches to other European countries.

As part of his policy of laying out India’s foreign policy before world public opinion, Nehru also denounced South African race policy and maintained his principle of supporting anti-imperialist movements, in Burma (where Nehru’s expression of support was complicated by Indians being seen as occupiers and as part of the ruling classes themselves), in Indonesia and in Indo-China: he refused to provide overflight rights for Dutch aircraft in the Indonesian conflict and French aircraft in the Indo-Chinese conflict, and openly declared his support for Ho Chi Minh. Although he was still corresponding with Song Meiling, Chiang Kai-Shek’s wife, he avoided committing himself to taking sides in the Chinese Civil War, noting to the new Indian Ambassador to China, K.P.S. Menon, that the communists ‘have no bad case’.²⁵ (By the end of 1949, Nehru’s government had recognised the People’s Republic of China.) He noted that the USA had a ‘Negro problem’ in which Indian sympathies were with the Negroes. The Indian Ambassador to the USA was told not to hide this sympathy, but not to get entangled in the issue either. By January 1947, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was already denouncing Soviet Communism’s influence on India through the Interim Government; Nehru repeated that India reserved the right to an

independent foreign policy, and stated that Dulles had showed ‘lack of knowledge of facts and want of appreciation of the policy we are pursuing’.²⁶

Non-alignment with the superpowers did not preclude other forms of state groupings. Writing in the *National Herald* in 1940, Nehru had stated that the era of small countries was at an end. An ‘Eastern federation’ was a desirable group for the future. Such a group must contain China and India, and could include Burma, Ceylon, Nepal, Afghanistan, Malaya, Siam, Iran and possibly others: ‘That would be a powerful combination of free nations joined together for their own good as well as the world good.’²⁷ The idea of pan-Asian solidarity was not a new one in India, and had once included Japan as a potential member and source of inspiration as a powerful late industrialiser; but Japanese expansionist tendencies had alarmed those who had once assumed benign motives on Japan’s part. In August 1939, Nehru met Rabindranath Tagore – as it turned out, for the last time – in Calcutta en route to China. The poet asked him to go to Japan as well to express solidarity with the Japanese people and to ask them ‘not to lose their soul in the present adventure in China’, while at the same time condemning Japanese militarism and imperialism and their atrocities in China.²⁸ Nehru had had few illusions about persuading the Japanese to change their minds. But the idea of a pan-Asian fellowship of nations survived for him as an ideal despite its appropriation by Japanese imperialism.

In April 1947, Delhi hosted an Asian Relations Conference, organised by a non-official body – the Indian Council for World Affairs – but with implications for future policy since it was organised with Nehru’s support. The conference had a ceremonial value as the first large international conference organised by an almost-free India. Nehru’s speeches at the conference made no explicit reference to non-alignment. He spoke instead of ‘some deeper urge’ bringing Asian countries together. Sarojini Naidu, minor poetess and sometime Indian nationalist, also mystically invoked Asian-ness (in the 1920s she had asked, from a Congress platform, that East Africa be handed over to Indians for colonisation, because as a great nation India was entitled to colonies – and had been rapped on the knuckles for it by Gandhi).

Pan-Asian solidarity, however, did not get off to the best possible start. The Malayan delegate, Dr John Thivy – an Indian lawyer who had been in Subhas Bose’s movement and who later took Indian citizenship and was

appointed Indian ambassador to Syria and Italy – suggested that the gathering discuss the formation of a ‘neutrality bloc’ to refuse assistance in terms of raw materials, dockyards, arms, etc. to British imperialism as the only way to secure Malayan independence. This was not intended ‘to start a movement’, Thivy clarified, but to prevent aggression by alien powers. The suggestion was not taken up at the time; Nehru seemed unnecessarily cautious, and with Indian troops at this time being used or having been recently used to recapture imperial territories for Britain in Malaya, the Dutch in Indonesia and the French in Indo-China, suspicion of his motives was understandable. There was criticism of Nehru from all these countries, and a sense that smaller Asian states were wary of India and of China – both were suspected of harbouring ambitions to regional leadership.

If such ambitions did exist on Nehru’s part, they seem to have been more in terms of moral leadership and expectations of world status than ambitions to power. On November 8, 1948, in a speech to the Constituent Assembly, Nehru stressed the important part to be played by India in world affairs, and the inevitable responsibility this entailed in connection with the promotion of world peace and the welfare of mankind: ‘we dare not be little,’ he declared.²⁹

FINANCIAL DEPENDENCY, ‘DEVELOPMENT’, THE COMMONWEALTH AND THE COLD WAR

Indian membership of the British Commonwealth seemed, in the context of keeping away from ‘the power politics of groups’, to be a complete anomaly. Pragmatism rather than principles dictated India’s acceptance of Commonwealth membership, albeit in a Commonwealth whose formal structure had been specifically altered to include a republic. India’s acceptance was pushed successfully by Nehru against much opposition. Here is a good example of the triumph of *Realpolitik* over principle; and it was Nehru as the man of principle who could successfully pilot such a clearly anomalous project.

Political, economic and military ties with Britain remained far stronger, even after formal independence had been achieved, than should have been comfortable for a country whose rationale for independence had been self-sufficiency. The primary ties remained, as Nehru had always suggested, economic – a galling situation for a nationalist movement that

had set great store by freedom from economic dependence as a necessary condition of political independence. From the British point of view, there were wider fears that connected with Indian problems. From 1946 onwards, Britain's panic over its financial and military capability world-wide led to a scaling down of economic and military commitments. US pressures for convertibility of sterling, the British need for US loans, and *quid pro quos* related to Marshall aid, were also strong influences on British policy as Britain tried to preserve a world role with limited resources by trimming commitments and by looking for reliable allies. Transfer of power to 'responsible Indians', as hoped for, tended to mean to those who could be persuaded to remain on Britain's side in strategic – and with time, Cold War – calculations. Exactly what these calculations were became apparent only over time, even to the main protagonists; but the necessity of maintaining some sort of leverage over India remained central, belying the claims that power was in the process of being, or had been, altogether 'transferred'.

The economic relationship between India and Britain had significantly altered during the Second World War: from being a debtor of Britain's, paying interest on capital that was lent to the Government of India without necessarily being sought by Indians, India became a creditor. Private producers in India had been enlisted to produce not just the simple things like textiles for military uniforms, but also light aircraft, chemicals and more sophisticated products – creating the inadvertent industrialising effect that accompanies disruption of the normal links between colony and metropolis. Indian producers were willing to invest in new areas in exchange for promises of post-war tariff protection for these industries. This merged with a demand for state-protection-led industrialisation after the war, shared by Indian capitalists and socialists. Production had been paid for in paper currency, printed in large amounts, with obvious inflationary effects, especially at a time of scarcity of goods for civilian consumption. This increase in currency was backed up at first by cancelling India's debt to Britain, and then through the building up of the so-called sterling balances in the Reserve Bank of India's London branch against goods and services provided during the war under the same principles as the Lend-Lease Agreement.

After the war, the extent of Britain's debt to India and to the various constituent parts of the Empire and Commonwealth in the form of sterling balances led to searches in Britain for schemes to prevent these balances

from being drawn upon too quickly. It gradually became clear that the demand for capital goods for their development schemes from holders of the sterling balances (as payment in goods for these balances) would outstrip Britain's post-war ability to spare such capital goods for export, especially while at the same time aiming at a planned economy with full employment at home. This gave rise, after the war, to a British policy of maximising dollar- or hard currency-earnings in the sterling area as a whole, and inducing dollar-saving by ensuring, when possible, sterling area sources of supply of goods for countries within the area. (Britain's short-lived attempt to accede to US pressure in the summer of 1947 and have a convertible pound had swiftly had to be ended due to a massive flight from the pound into dollars.)

In India, the idea mooted in some business circles that India should look to the USA instead of Britain for economic assistance was, however, not particularly congenial either. Offers of loans from the USA came with conditions attached that seemed suspiciously like mechanisms of control not particularly different from earlier colonial bonds; US policy-makers frankly set out terms for the easy access of US goods and capital to Indian markets. 'We are going to permit no control of our industry by an outside agency,' Nehru wrote to Asaf Ali in Washington in May 1947, 'though we shall gladly cooperate on terms of mutual advantage with outsiders.'³⁰

There was much resentment in India at the situation: Britain was unable to provide vital capital goods after the war, but was not willing to release Indian sterling balances in dollars to enable India to obtain supplies from outside the sterling area. This amounted to continued colonial financial control after formal independence had been achieved – and to a forced loan from a poor country that was now told that the money was needed in Britain and therefore could not be returned. The (not unjustified) sense that Britain was building a social security network and a welfare state – ideas that had been equally considered in India before independence – with colonial loot, while India could not finance such measures herself added to the sense of injury.

Negotiations with Britain on the sterling balances also ran into claims by Winston Churchill, now in the Opposition, that Britain had defended India during the war and ought to allow Britain to give itself at least a discount on the balances. The official view, however, consistent with financial advisers' fears for confidence in Britain's creditworthiness, was

that Britain should honour her financial commitments. The question remained as to how quickly the balances would be released, in what form and at what exchange rate. The last question was resolved by retaining the exchange rate link between the rupee and the pound that had been set by imperial statute (the rupee–sterling link, in fact, outlived Nehru); but the rest was the subject of much hard bargaining.

Inevitably, it was Stafford Cripps, who became Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1947, who had to negotiate with India. The cordial relationship between Nehru and Cripps had by now been replaced by irritation on Nehru's part. '[T]he India Office crowd and the British Cabinet still move in the old grooves,' Nehru had remarked in May 1947. 'They are completely out of touch with recent developments in India, but they consider themselves experts who can lay down the law, especially Stafford Cripps.'³¹ Both in 1942 and in 1946, Cripps had appeared not to have dealt with him honestly, and attempts now to put pressure on India to accept British terms were not appreciated. During the bargaining over the balances, Britain threatened to expel India from the sterling area, but it was always doubtful whether this was a plausible threat. India would then have had no compunctions about spending in dollars, and Britain would have had no authority to prevent this. Moreover, it became clear that British military and strategic considerations required India to remain in the Commonwealth, which meant that an overuse of blackmail was counterproductive. (At the time, Britain was looking at the possibility of having airbases in Northern India as 'forward bombing centres' to target the Soviet industrial heartland; eventually, Peshawar in Pakistan won the privilege of hosting these.) The eventual agreement in June 1948 indicated the superior bargaining power derived from actually holding the money in one's hands: the gradual release of a scaled-down sum from the balances, with only a small part of this to be in dollars was secured by the Indian finance minister, Shanmukham Chetty, and was widely criticised.

The British still needed the Commonwealth as an international power centre and an economic bloc, remodelled in the ways suggested by Conservatives like Leo Amery so as to appear to be a partnership of equals (this was a difficult task while many countries remained formal colonies, but sought to be achieved by the claim that these colonies were to be 'developed' before they were fully trained for and capable of freedom). By 1943, it was realised that a post-war Commonwealth was the only

possible basis of British power in a post-war world dominated by the USA and the USSR. There was a military aspect to this as much as a purely economic one. Could British troops remain in India after a transfer of power? Stafford Cripps had suggested in 1945 that Indian forces might be available for internal security, but British troops could indeed remain. There was some talk of treaties for mutual defence. Mountbatten's instructions, as the last viceroy of India, had been clear: he was to encourage India to stay within the Commonwealth.

Mountbatten's record of his first conversation with Nehru on March 24, 1947, soon after arriving in India, provides evidence that he lost no time in attempting to settle this question. 'Nehru said that he did not consider it possible, with the forces which were at work, that India could remain within the Commonwealth. But basically, he said, they did not want to break any threads, and he suggested "some form of common nationality" (I fear that they are beginning to see that they cannot go out of the Commonwealth; but they cannot afford to say that they will stay in; they are groping for a formula). Nehru gave a direct implication that they wanted to stay in; but a categorical statement that they intended to go out.'³² (In May 1942, after the failure of the Cripps Mission, Nehru had in a long note to Louis Johnson left the possibility of future Commonwealth membership open to an independent India; but he said that such a Commonwealth would have to 'undergo a complete change after or even during this war'.³³) This is consistent with the difficulties inherent in what, if Nehru played it, was always going to be a tricky card to play: Nehru's history of commitment to breaking formal links with Britain, from his rejection of dominion status in 1927 onwards, made his insistence on the value of Commonwealth membership a clear anomaly. This was also a potential constitutional problem – India as a proposed republic would find it difficult to maintain a Commonwealth connection as long as the head of the Commonwealth was the King of England. It was also a difficult commitment to reconcile with the principle of non-alignment. In the run-up to the making of the new Commonwealth in 1949, most of the negotiations were centred on wrangling about finding a status for the King in the Commonwealth which did not involve one for him in the Indian Constitution. The tricky and emotive issue of sovereignty combined with nationalism was at stake. Eventually it was agreed that the King would be accepted by India 'as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such the

Head of the Commonwealth'.³⁴ ('The fact that even Winston Churchill should fall into line', Nehru noted, raised suspicion in India that some strange and unsavoury deal had been done behind the scenes.³⁵) Nehru's proposal on common citizenship was, unsurprisingly, not accepted by Britain.

Nehru sold Commonwealth membership to a reluctant Constituent Assembly by insisting that the connection was extra-constitutional and affected neither substantive questions of Indian foreign or domestic policy nor her republican status: 'it is an agreement by free will, to be terminated by free will.'³⁶ It was of course untrue that the British connection was not a constraining one. At the January 1950 regional conference in Colombo, Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary and the Labour cabinet member most committed to an imperialist future for Britain, agreed with Nehru that he opposed a regional defence pact in Asia on the lines of other emerging Cold War pacts. This was good diplomacy. Nehru for his part agreed to the bland rhetoric of what came to be called the 'Colombo Plan' for mutual technical and economic assistance; it placed before the British and Indian publics, and the publics of the region of South Asia (this was to become the acknowledged shorthand for the region) a vision of benign collaboration in a shared project of 'development'. Nehru and Bevin both knew that this was far from the truth – in private everyone admitted that the conference had been prompted by the need to protect the sterling area and by fears of communism in Asia – but both seemed to feel that this public stance was more palatable according to the emergent rhetoric of 'development': it would conform to the aspirations of Indian public opinion as well as projecting an image in consonance with the new British rhetoric of being in charge of a benign imperialism that was engaged in a progressive project to undermine its own existence. This benign project was engaged at the time in what has aptly been referred to as the 'second colonisation' of Africa: attempting to sort out British balance of payments problems by making sure African countries were 'developed' to become dollar-earners.

By 1950, moreover, British policy-makers were convinced that for all his anti-imperialist rhetoric, Nehru was reliably anti-communist and would acquiesce in British activities in Malaya, the major dollar-earning country (through rubber and tin) that had at all costs to be held by Britain. The Malayan Emergency had begun in 1948, a brutal war above all against Malayan communists, who were to be butchered in large

numbers by British ‘special forces’ while a battle for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the population was to be undertaken at the same time. For this to continue, British policy had to tread carefully. According to the British view, the USA was too unsubtle in its approach to Cold War problems: a little more subtlety and a little less rhetoric worked far better. Nehru had recognised the People’s Republic of China; he would nonetheless refrain from interfering in Malaya. British sources believed that Nehru would recognise that they had a mutual enemy in communism, given that he had communist problems at home himself, and believed that with proper steering he could be relied upon to let them deal with the Malayan Emergency without making too much noise.

AUTHORSHIP

The normative significance of the ‘Nehruvian model’ can with some justification be seen as a central feature of the political culture of post-independence India. The question is whether the vision fully deserves the qualifying adjective: how far was Nehru its author? The answer we might provide points to the fact that he was, to a large extent, its author; it may have been his most enduring achievement. But it may also never have been an effective vision, capable of being fully implemented.

The Congress, after the departure of the socialists, was a centrist party with a leftist rhetoric, dominated by right-wingers but fronted by a moderate left-winger with relatively little power to deliver major changes. This was a situation partly of Nehru’s own creation; he had failed to win the confidence of the left due to years of prevarication, and he did not have the goodwill of the right. In the first few years after the formal transfer of power, both the Hindu right and the capitalist right were in the Congress as well as outside it, although for the time being neither of the two rights, nor the rights inside and outside the Congress, were identified with each other. Minorities tended to cluster round the Congress because it was publicly committed to social equality and to the protection of their rights. The population’s expectations, after two hundred years of colonial rule, rested upon the new government, expectations stirred up by the revolutionary rhetoric of the left wing of the nationalist movement. But a commitment to major social change was notably lacking on the part of that government. The Congress’ cautious left rhetoric in the ‘Nehruvian period’ worked on the vaccination

principle: a dilute strand of what many in the Congress openly regarded as a disease, 'socialism', administered to the body politic, helped to prevent the disease itself from taking root.

International pressures, too, should not be underestimated. The unfinished business of empire and the emerging business of the Cold War collaborated in putting pressure on colonies and former colonies. The British expectation and the US desire that empires would be folded up after the Second World War in anticipation that the US economy's strength would be best served by 'free trade' and their consequent ability to penetrate markets across the globe without the need for formal political control did not quite materialise. The new reality of Soviet power, the Soviet Union's willingness to express support for anti-colonial movements around the world, and the dangers of communism in colonies or former colonies, led to a contingent and uneasy alliance between the European colonial powers and the USA: the USA would consent to the continuation of empire, the colonial powers would allow the USA greater influence in their colonies; if independence had to be conceded, there would have to be a transfer of power to a successor authority that could be relied upon to act as a bulwark against communism. In this context, non-alignment can be seen as a useful counter-manoeuve on the part of Nehru, who also had his own internal Cold War to fight, in addition to the problems of transition and stabilisation of the new state.

If, moreover, these principles as laid down seem to imply that post-independence India was a relative oasis of political rationality and democratic calm once the partition violence had died down, that would be wrong. The atmosphere in India in the 1950s was one of Cold War paranoia, as elsewhere. Indians with relatives visiting from Pakistan were regularly harassed and subject to police surveillance. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda records that when he visited India in 1950 as a protagonist of the world peace movement, and acting as messenger for the French nuclear physicist Joliot-Curie to his fellow physicist C.V. Raman and to Nehru himself, his baggage was searched, his documents confiscated and photographed, and every person in his address book visited and interrogated by the police. Neruda was, of course, a communist, as was Joliot-Curie. However, he had not expected to be treated as a semi-criminal in a country in which he had once lived, and whose freedom movement he had participated in: he was followed by the police, and both in Bombay and Delhi was told he could not leave the city limits. Nehru

himself, when Neruda met him, was completely unsympathetic to a man he had last met in India in the 1920s as a comrade. 'I thought perhaps,' Neruda noted, 'the silent man before me had in some subtle way reverted to a "zamindar" and was staring at me with the same indifference and contempt he would have shown one of his barefoot peasants.'³⁷ Whether Neruda had met Nehru at a time when the latter was particularly cornered and isolated in his own party is a question worth asking.

5

CONSOLIDATING THE STATE, c. 1947–55

On August 15, 1947, Nehru, referring to himself as the ‘First Servant of the Indian People’ (invoking in his rhetoric the Soviet People’s Commissars of the early days of the Russian Revolution), outlined the many problems that faced the new state. The predominant problems, he reiterated, were economic: the country was faced with inflation, the people with lack of food and clothing and adequate shelter. ‘Production today is the first priority,’ he explained; but on its own it would not be enough – the key social question would be one of distribution.¹ But these priorities would have to be deferred. For Nehru, the early years after independence, from 1947 to 1950, were ones of struggle, as he sought to maintain his political authority within his own party, and his government tried to maintain the stability and effective independence of the new state.

STABILISATION: ‘COMMUNAL HARMONY’

The problem of stabilisation was in the first instance one of ending the disorder and violence associated with partition. Vallabhbhai Patel, the central negotiator with the Indian States, and deputy prime minister and Home minister in Nehru’s first government, formed with Nehru the second part of what came to be called the ‘duumvirate’. As Home minister, Patel was in charge of suppression of rioting and revenge killings, and dealing with problems of the influx of refugees from West and East Pakistan.