

Reflections on the Transfer of Power and Jawaharlal Nehru  
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Trinity College, University of Cambridge - 14th November 1968.

This is the second Nehru Memorial Lecture. At the suggestion of the former President of India the first was given, most appropriately, by the Master of Jawaharlal Nehru's old College, Trinity. Lord Butler was born in India, the son of a most distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service, who was one of the most successful Governors. As Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India he was one of those responsible for the truly remarkable 1935 Government of India Act, the Act which I used to speed up the transfer of power. Thus Lord Butler's ties with India are strong and it not surprising that he gave such an excellent lecture, which has set such a high standard.

He dealt faithfully with the life and career of Jawaharlal Nehru from his birth seventy-nine years ago this very day up to 1947. My fellow trustees of the Nehru Memorial Trust have persuaded me to deliver the second lecture.

This seemed the occasion to give a connected narrative of the events leading up to the transfer of power in August 1947, and indeed to continue up to June 1948, when I ceased to be India's first Constitutional Governor-General. It would have been nice to show how Nehru fitted into these events, but in the time available such a task soon proved to be out of the question, so I have deliberately confined myself to recalling the highlights of my Viceroyalty and to assessing Nehru's relations to the principal men and events at the time, and to general reminiscences of him to illustrate the part he played up to the actual transfer of power.

Early in 1944 I visited XXXIII Corps in Bombay Presidency prior to their coming to my Operational Command. I spent the night of 22 January at Ahmednagar and, knowing that Nehru was a prisoner in the fort, I telephoned to Delhi to seek the Viceroy's permission to visit him. This was refused, just as a similar request made in November 1921, that the Prince of Wales and I - or alternatively, I alone - should be allowed to see Gandhi, who was in Bombay when we were there forty-seven years ago, was also refused.

It is not suggested that any important results would have flowed from these meetings; the incidents are only mentioned to show how strong my personal desires had always been to meet and get to know the men who were going to control India's destiny.

However, in January 1946, the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, told me that he wanted Nehru, who had been released from prison but had not yet achieved a ministerial position, to visit Burma and Malaya. I had turned over the Government of Burma to the former Civil Governor, so Wavell asked him to issue the invitation to Burma. Wavell told me later that his proposal was emphatically rejected. However I agreed that Nehru should come to Singapore and Malaya.

This visit very nearly went wrong, for the local authorities proposed to confine Indian troops to barracks during Nehru's visit and refused to provide any form of transport for him. On 16 March 1946, only two days before Nehru's arrival, I got back to my headquarters in Singapore, after visiting my troops in French Indo-China, to find this disturbing situation and immediately countermanded the restriction on Indian troops and in fact ordered military transport to be provided into the city to enable the Indian soldiers to see their political leader. I put Brigadier Chaudhuri, later to become Chief of the Indian Army Staff and now Indian High Commissioner in Canada, in

charge of this programme and lent Nehru one of my own cars and invited him to call on me in Government House on arrival.

When he came I told him he could go where he liked and could do what he liked but asked him to refuse the invitation of local Indians to lay a wreath on the memorial to the Indian National Army. The INA had broken their oath of loyalty and had taken part in savage acts against their fellow prisoners of war who refused to fight for the Japanese. I pointed out that when India became independent she would need to rely on men who did not break their oath and that soldiers should be loyal to the Government they had undertaken to serve. He saw the point and agreed not to lay their wreath.

We then drove together in my open car through cheering crowds to the Indian Troops' Welfare Centre, where my wife was working. Such was the enthusiasm of the Indian soldiers that they rushed forward in mass. My wife lost her footing and went down in the rush. Nehru and I formed a rucker scrum and together we rescued her.

Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, this seems to have been the occasion when the seeds were sown of a friendship which later developed and was to be of great help to us both in the extremely difficult circumstances a year later when I came out to India as Viceroy and he was leading the Interim Government.

It was on 18 December 1946, that the Prime Minister, Mr Attlee, offered me the Viceroyalty of India. I was horrified, knowing from first-hand experience how complex and intractable the situation in India had become. Where the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, had failed, what hope was there of anyone else getting a solution accepted by the Indian leaders?

There did seem to be a glimmer of hope if the Indians could be faced with a definite time limit, so that they could see my appointment was going to be no perpetuation of British rule but meant its end by a fixed date. After protracted discussions the Prime Minister agreed to fix June, 1948, as the final date. Furthermore at my request he made the Board of Admiralty promise to take me back in June, 1948, at my existing seniority as a Rear-Admiral and give me a comparable command at sea to the one I would have to give up. This promise was given, though somewhat reluctantly.

I felt it would be necessary to have my own hand-picked staff in addition to keeping Lord Wavell's staff. In fact Lord Ismay, who had been Winston Churchill's Chief of Staff in the war, and Sir Eric Miéville, who had been Assistant Private Secretary to the King, in due course joined my staff. Both had been with Lord Willingdon when he was Viceroy, as Military Secretary and Private Secretary respectively. Pug Ismay and I were both polo players; he accepted with the words: 'If you are prepared to go out for the last chukka 12 goals down by all means count me in on your team'.

Important in this hand-picked staff were Captain (now Vice-Admiral Sir Ronald) Brockman, my Admiral's Secretary in South East Asia, who had had years of Whitehall experience in the First Sea Lord's office in politico-military matters; Lieutenant Colonel (now Major-General) Vernon Erskine Crum, who had been my Conference Secretary in the South East-Asia Command, and came to fill a similar role; and Alan Campbell Johnson who came as my Press Attaché. He had served with me as a Wing Commander in Combined Operations Headquarters and in H.Q., S.E.A.C. He had left the R.A.F and formed his own public relations consultant firm, to which he returned after India.

They were supplemented by a team of first-class shorthand typists from Whitehall, specially selected by the Treasury. All of them, as well as Lord Wavell's staff, headed by Sir George Abel, did a truly marvellous job. I could never have succeeded without their loyal, tireless and invaluable help.

After all these requests had been met I asked to be allowed to discuss the matter with His Majesty, who as King-Emperor was particularly concerned with the appointment of his own Crown representative for dealing with the Indian States and their rulers.

I pointed out to him that the chances of complete failure were very great indeed, and it would be bad for him to have a member of his family fail. He replied: 'But think how good it will be for the monarchy if you succeed!' And he then asked me formally to accept the appointment; so I had no option.

Even then I felt there was a final condition which unless it was accepted would enable me to escape. The Viceroy was under the orders of the Secretary of State for India. At my next meeting with ministers I said I could not negotiate in India with Whitehall ministers breathing down my neck. I must be allowed to make my own decisions in India, and the Secretary of State would have to accept and support these.

Mr Attlee consulted Sir Stafford Cripps, and even after twenty-two years I can remember his next words: 'You are asking for plenipotentiary powers above His Majesty's Government. No one has been given such powers in this century'. There was silence for quite a while, then he went on: 'Surely you can't mean this?' 'Escape at last', I thought as I firmly replied that I did indeed mean just that and would quite understand if as a result the appointment were withdrawn. But Cripps nodded his head and Attlee replied, 'All right, you've got the powers and the job'.

A noteworthy incident occurred within a week of arriving in India; Nehru asked me whether by some miracle I had been given plenipotentiary powers. To the question 'Why do you ask?', he replied that I behaved quite differently from any other Viceroy. 'One has the feeling that what you say goes', he added. 'Well, what if I have?' I replied and received the heartening answer, 'In that case you will succeed'. What a remarkable piece of perception this was on Nehru's part and how right his evaluation proved to be.

I arrived in Delhi, with my wife and younger daughter Pamela, on 22 March 1947. Traditionally the new Viceroy should not arrive until his predecessor had left, but I had specially asked for a personal 'turnover' interview with Lord Wavell. I remember the gist of what he said. 'I am sorry for you Dicky. You have been given an impossible job. I have tried everything I know to solve the problem of handing over India to its people; and I can see no light. I have only one solution, which I call "Operation Madhouse" - withdrawal of the British, province by province, beginning with women and children, then civilians, then the Army. I can see no other way out'. He also warned me that he had reached a complete impasse about the court-martial sentences on convicted members of the Indian National Army.

The next day he left and I was sworn in as Viceroy of India. I broke with precedent and made a short speech ending with: 'I am under no illusion about the difficulty of my task. I shall need the greatest goodwill of the greatest possible number, and I am asking India today for that goodwill'.

And so I become Viceroy, and work started in earnest. I opened my first despatch box, and took out a paper which had been sent to me for an immediate decision. It was a death sentence for

murder, requiring my confirmation. I read through the case carefully - there was no doubt about it I'm afraid - and so I sadly signed the sentence.

And then I paused and tried to take stock of the atmosphere in Delhi and the people I knew I would have to deal with. So perhaps this is a suitable moment to introduce the principal characters in this hectic piece of history to show how Nehru fitted in.

It is important to try and appreciate the unique nature of the event itself. Twenty-one years afterwards it clearly emerges as one of the really formative events of the century in its effect on future world affairs - political, strategic, economic and social. It can be compared in its significance for the future with the Russian Revolution, the rise of the Nazi Party and the Communist takeover in China. These examples were violent totalitarian developments, whereas Indian independence was a democratic peaceful exercise. It was, as Lord Samuel so aptly put it, an event unique in history, a Treaty of Peace without a war.

Lenin, Hitler and Mao Tse-tung all capitalised on revolutionary situations, but the margins between their particular success and failure were narrow and the elements of chance and personal decision at the critical moments will long be the subject of historical debate. In the case of India in 1947 these factors of uncertainty were definitely present but with this difference. It was essentially a set-piece event conditioned by a political and physical time limit. Moreover the effective power was in the hands of half a dozen leaders operating in one place at one time.

There were limited options open to us, but somehow between March 1947, and June 1948, a decision affecting the government of a fifth of the human race had to be reached and implemented. Such a situation could only be resolved if the leaders I was to deal with had outstanding qualities. Nehru and the other primary figures, Gandhi, Jinnah, Patel and Liaquat Ali Khan were by any historical reckoning remarkable men.

It is tempting to develop the theme of the differences between them of personality and outlook, ideology and interest, but it would seem more interesting to stress the points of similarity which in some measure conditioned and certainly helped to ease my negotiations with each and all of them.

Firstly, they were all mature men past middle age who had dealt with each other for most of their lives.

Secondly, they were all immersed in the arts of agitation and dedicated to the task of achieving independence.

Thirdly, they were all professional lawyers steeped in the law and especially in British constitutional law. In this respect they were almost more British than the British.

Fourthly, they were all masters of the English language, indeed of a clearer and purer prose than many of our British politicians. It was not only Churchill who carried on the tradition of Gibbon and Macaulay. The classical polish of Nehru's written and spoken words was truly memorable.

The events I was called upon to preside over as the last Viceroy were new to me but for all of them these events were culminations of a lifelong struggle. When the moment of decision was reached its impact upon them varied, and the outcome was in no small degree affected by their relations with and attitudes to one another. One needs therefore to view Nehru in terms of each of them.

Gandhi, the oldest, exerted his influence at two levels, spiritual and political. Those closest to him always felt that the spiritual leadership which had earned him the title of Mahatma was the more important. I doubt if this would have been the opinion of my predecessors, although Lord Halifax, when he was Viceroy, had shown clear understanding of the dual aspects of his power. However, by 1947 Gandhi, or Bapu as his followers called him, seems to have realised that he was politically no longer in the front line. None the less his personal influence particularly over Nehru, remained profound to the end, and Nehru never wholly broke away from the status of being his disciple. While this had had to some extent a limiting effect on Nehru's authority, particularly in dealing with Jinnah, it also had the advantage of giving him the cover and aura of being Gandhi's chosen son.

For Gandhi the transfer of power was the culmination of his life's work but partition meant India's vivisection and the end of his deepest aspiration for Hindu-Moslem unity. He was a saintly man torn by emotion. The centenary of his birth is being celebrated throughout the world in October 1969.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of Vallabhbhai Patel, the transfer of power was the moment of practical fulfilment. He had always been the uncrowned boss of the Congress Party, the realist who recognised that agitation is no substitute for the actual exercise of power and that the power now being transferred put a high premium on his special administrative talents.

In considering Nehru's relations with Patel, much has been made of the conflict and even rivalry between them. Indeed, just before his assassination, Gandhi had asked me to help him bring about a reconciliation. I told them both, as he lay there dead, of his last wishes. They wept and embraced each other. To their lasting credit they achieved, under conditions of the utmost stress, a highly effective working partnership.

Nehru's background and interests were international. It was only natural for him as the first Prime Minister of the new India to assume responsibility for external affairs as well, and to extend India's freshly won independence to her role in the outside world. Patel, for his part, by taking on the key departments of Home Affairs and later the Indian States, concentrated on consolidating the regime from within. In the circumstances of the time this was a natural and indeed necessary division of duty, and they had, more than they could perhaps recognise in themselves, complementary characters.

Success had come very late in life to Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Qaid-i-Azam. He was essentially a 'loner', playing from weakness in strict terms of power, but from strength in terms of the need for the transfer to be based upon agreement and consent - which, of course, included *his* agreement and *his* consent. As with De Gaulle - and he was cast in a not dissimilar mould from the French leader - Jinnah knew that his '*Non*' could be maddeningly decisive. I recall from the meetings I had with him at the time that Nehru was himself fully alive to this aspect of Jinnah's personality and authority.

Finally there was Liaquat Ali Khan, Jinnah's deputy in the Muslim League and Nehru's deputy in the fragile Interim Government. He was a very different personality from Jinnah, tough but far less abrasive, a highly competent loyal follower, but not a leader. He was man with whom it was possible for Nehru to achieve more effective intellectual rapport than with Jinnah.

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Mountbatten was Chairman of the Gandhi Centenary Celebrations Committee in the United Kingdom. See page ix.

These then were the principal *dramatis personae* who shared the stage with Jawaharlal Nehru

As for Nehru himself, he was a many-sided personality of whom it could fairly be said the predominant characteristics in each of the other great protagonists were all contained and blended in himself. He was truly Gandhi's disciple in his emphasis on personal and moral values. He was not without Patel's toughness of fibre, Jinnah's remoteness or Liaquat's equanimity. But of course his individuality was not simply the sum of theirs. He had very rare qualities of his own - the artist's insight and the philosopher's wisdom. Churchill, for whom Nehru and all he stood for had for so long been an anathema, when at last he met him face to face recognised in him a kindred spirit and was big enough to describe him as a man who seemed to know neither fear nor hate.

The drama itself was to be played out in two acts. Act One from March to August, 1947, saw Nehru as Prime Minister of the Interim Government, in which he was the primary figure with whom I had to deal in handling the day-to-day business. At the same time he had to prepare himself for his role in Act Two as the head and centre of affairs in a successor government over which we were negotiating. I was thus involved with him in two capacities. In both he was to be subject to pressures, irritations and frustrations which could easily have overwhelmed a lesser man. But the outstanding qualities of his character sustained him and carried him through. But because he was highly sensitive to the human factors in life he suffered more than most from the personal controversies and tensions involved in high-level political affairs. His most lovable characteristic was his real charm.

Now to resume my reminiscences of him. The first Indian leader with whom I had an interview was my Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, whom you will remember I had had the good fortune to meet in such friendly circumstances the year before in Singapore. He began by assuring me of the goodwill of all Indians, which I had just asked for at the swearing-in ceremony.

Within a week I had to put this goodwill to the test. Lord Wavell had had to veto the Indian Government supporting an impending Assembly motion, backed by all parties, calling for immediate release of all ex-Indian National Army prisoners. On 1 April Nehru admitted that this situation confronted me with a grave dilemma. The debate in the Assembly was due in two days' time; it could not again be postponed. If I renewed the veto it would wreck my reputation with Indian politicians of all parties at the very outset of my vital negotiations on the transfer of power. If I reversed it the Commander-in-Chief, my friend and wartime colleague, Field-Marshal Auchinleck, would almost certainly resign, with terrible damage to my relations with the loyal Indian Army, with the British generally and H.M. Government in particular.

I asked Auchinleck to see me that evening. He made it clear that if I ordered the release of these renegades, some of whom had been convicted of criminal offences, over his head, he would lose the confidence of the Army and once his utility had gone he would not feel justified in staying. He finally saw that unless both sides would be prepared to take one pace forward I would be faced with two alternatives, either of which would destroy my position in the negotiations I had been sent out to conduct.

The next day I asked him to come to a meeting with the senior ministers of the three main political parties, Nehru, Liaquat Ali Khan and Baldev Singh (the Sikh leader). It was a long, tense and very difficult meeting, but eventually Nehru broke the deadlock by persuading his colleagues to stand up to the Assembly the next day and to refuse the demand for immediate release, provided they could say that the Commander-in-Chief had agreed to the Federal Court reviewing the cases and recommending whether there should be any alteration in the sentences. On thinking the matter over after the meeting Auchinleck generously agreed.

Goodwill and statesmanship were shown by all concerned. Nehru made a courageous and balanced speech in the Assembly; the resolution was withdrawn and that was the end of the I.N.A. as a political issue. I breathed again.

I have recounted this episode at length not only to show the appalling dangers which could blow up and wreck negotiations, but specially to show the degree to which goodwill was now shown on all sides led by Nehru at the very start of my time. Auchinleck was magnanimous, helpful and loyal. Nehru had already had some idea of the I.N.A. problem in Singapore when he agreed not to lay a wreath on the local I.N.A. memorial, but it must have taken great moral courage to persuade his colleagues to accept this solution. He knew I realised this, and so this incident turned from a near disaster to consolidating the friendly relations which had begun in Singapore.

Perhaps I should now describe my method of doing business with Nehru and the other leaders. I felt it essential that my discussions with the leaders should be *tête à tête*, with no papers, note books, or any of the usual business paraphernalia. At each interview we sat comfortably in two armchairs having a real heart-to-heart. During the first meetings I avoided political business altogether, and asked my visitors to tell me about themselves and their early life. This produced a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, which made it much easier when we came round to talking business.

Interviews were normally scheduled to last one hour. Then a stenographer would come in and I would dictate the essence of the previous hour's discussion. After this the next interview started, followed by a quarter of an hour's dictation, and so on.

The records of each talk were quickly transcribed and copies were immediately distributed to my staff. At the subsequent daily staff meeting they knew exactly what had happened at all my personal discussions, so that I did not have to waste time putting them in the picture before they could give their views.

In the first six weeks of talks I dictated 133 full records, which included many crucial meetings with Nehru, often recording verbatim, so far as I could remember them, the more important exchanges. Although these records were dictated with the object of keeping my staff in the picture, Henry Hodson, who is publishing next year the first full account of the transfer of power, using my papers, has paid tribute to their value to the historian. And so has John Terraine, who used them in writing the script of the forthcoming television series of 'My Life and Times'.

Though I made friends with practically all the principal people concerned with the Government of India and became fond of most of them, I found myself more attracted by Nehru than anyone else. Having been educated at Harrow and Trinity, and having lived so many of his formative years in England, I found communication with him particularly easy and pleasant.

After nine years in prison for his political activities, it was not surprising that he would occasionally fly into a sudden fit of temper at meetings, which was disconcerting, but after a while he learnt to master his emotions and admitted that these sudden tantrums did not help a meeting or advance his own cause.

To revert to my first interview with Nehru on 24 March. I asked him what he thought was the greatest problem confronting India. He characteristically replied 'the economic problem'. We discussed the difficulties of running the Interim Government. The Cabinet, which Mr Jinnah pointed out was still legally 'The Viceroy's Executive Council', consisted of 14 members; 6

Congress party, 5 Muslim League and 3 minorities, who invariably sided with the Congress ministers. This meant I could never put any question to a vote in the Cabinet because the result was a foregone conclusion of 9 to 5 in favour of the Congress party.

Nehru told me that in the light of the Congress party resolution for an Independent Sovereign Republic and with the forces at work he did not see how India could remain in the Commonwealth. But they did not want to break any threads and he even suggested 'some form of common nationality', a characteristic thought. I recorded: 'Pandit Nehru struck me as most sincere'.

I was careful not to treat Nehru as the sole spokesman for Congress and listened freely to criticism of, and opposition to, Nehru's views. But I developed closer personal relations with him than with any other political leader of any party. We agreed that the radical views we shared made us both suspect among our own social class, even among our friends.

It must not be thought that I confined my interviews and talks to the Indian political leaders or even to the members of my Executive Council, the Interim Government of India. I spoke to many leaders of minorities, to Secretaries, to Government and other principal civil servants, to senior officers of the three services industrialists and social workers.

I invited the eleven Governors of the provinces of British India to stay with me and had fruitful meetings with them. They told me of the August riots in Calcutta with 5,000 dead and 15,000 injured, followed by massacres in Noakhali and then Bihar, which had now reached the Punjab. They gave me a terrifying picture of the internal situation, as the pendulum of counter-massacres between the communities was swinging ever higher. Their accounts convinced me that the transfer of power would have to take place much earlier than we had planned in London.

I then invited the Residents of the Political Department in the principal Indian States to stay with me for discussions. They painted an equally black picture.

I had been friends with ten of the principal ruling Princes since we were on the Prince of Wales' staff together twenty-five years before. Practically all came to see me now to renew their friendship and offer their help. Their views could not have been more disturbing.

A unique member of my staff was V P Menon, a man of the humblest origins in South India, who had been deputy to Henry Hodson when he was Reforms Commissioner to Lord Linlithgow. 'V. P.' as he was affectionately known to his many friends, eventually succeeded Hodson and thus became my Reforms Commissioner. He had become closely associated with Vallabhbhai Patel, which made him an invaluable link with the strong man of the Congress party, though he never got really close to Nehru.

I soon brought him into my daily staff meetings, to which he made an invaluable contribution. It was at these meetings that I gradually hammered out the plan for the transfer of power, which would be sent to the British Government for approval before being put to the Indian leaders. I did not want the leaders to take part in the actual drafting, to avoid round-table meetings which had proved so abortive under my predecessors. This involved my asking each for their views, then putting forward a series of suggestions and subsequently obtaining individual reactions from the separate leaders to the various proposals. I began, of course, by doing everything possible to keep India united after independence.

I realised that Mr Jinnah was the man who held the key to the whole situation, so I first tried very hard to revive the Cabinet Mission plan with him in order to retain the unity of India, but he would

not hear of it. He insisted on the partition of India into a Muslim State, to be called Pakistan, and the very large non Muslim residue, which he used to refer to as Hindustan. He wished to include not only the provinces, like Sindh, which had a very large Muslim majority, but also Bengal and the Punjab which had very large non-Muslim minorities. I told him that if he insisted in partitioning India he would have to agree to partition these two provinces and only to include the Muslim majority areas in Pakistan. He objected violently to 'a moth-eaten Pakistan'. He pointed out that it was unreasonable to divide these great provinces, as their inhabitants were primarily Bengalis or Punjabis, which was more important than whether they were Muslims or Hindus.

I then applied the same logic to the whole of India, claiming that a man was an Indian first and foremost before he was a Muslim or Hindu. Therefore the whole of India should not be partitioned. This annoyed him and he started patiently, all over again, explaining that a Muslim minority could not live under the permanent bondage of a Hindu majority government, so partition of India was essential; thus we went on in a circular argument, round and round the mulberry bush.

I tried to tempt Jinnah by offering him Bengal and the Punjab unpartitioned provided he would agree that, though the Provinces with Muslim majorities would have self-government, they must be within an overall federal government at the centre. However, he said he would sooner have a moth-eaten Pakistan that owed no allegiance to a central government than a larger and more important area which came under it.

I then ascertained from the Congress and Sikh leaders that, heartbroken though they were at the very thought of partitioning India, if the Muslim League would not accept a transfer of power on any other basis, they would have no option but to accept if they were not to remain indefinitely under British rule.

At this stage of developments such an alternative would have been unthinkable and also quite unworkable. There had been no recruitment to the Indian Civil Service or Police since 1939 and the British means of administering India were irreversibly running down.

However, I was determined that the British should not be saddled with the responsibility of breaking up the unity of India, which it had taken them so many years to create and build up. So I devised a scheme whereby the elected members of the Constituent Assembly should vote, province by province, whether they wished power to be transferred to a unified or a partitioned India.

When my plan was completed my Chief of Staff, Lord Ismay, took it to London with Sir George Abel, to submit it to the Cabinet on 2 May.

I was exhausted and wanted to get away for a few days. There were two other Viceregal Residencies I could have moved to, Belvedere House in Calcutta, which would have been equally hot in May, or Viceregal Lodge in Simla, which was cool and refreshing in the Himalayas.

I sent for my Military Secretary and told him that my wife, and daughter Pamela and I wanted to move to Simla for a rest, with the minimum staff. The only guests would be Nehru and Krishna Menon. The move was to take place in a week's time. He replied that the house was shut up and it would take a minimum of three weeks to open it and get the necessary additional staff up from Delhi. I replied that in that case he was to book rooms for us in a hotel in Simla. The Military Secretary was horrified. He said that was completely out of the question and asked for a couple of hours to work out an emergency scheme.

He came back and said that if we were prepared to have no luncheon or dinner parties, no garden parties or cocktail parties and above all no balls, he could manage it on a skeleton staff. I was only too delighted to accept his conditions and so we went. On arrival I wrote out a chit: 'Please report how many people we have brought up from Delhi'. I have never forgotten the reply for it was such an odd figure: 333.

I was so shaken by this figure that I later asked to be told how many people lived in the Viceroy's compounds in Calcutta, Simla and Delhi. This figure was to include wives and dependants living with the members of the Viceroy's staff and retinue. The figures were 243 in Calcutta, 908 in Simla and 5,820 in Delhi, making a grand total of nearly 7,000.

However, we did use this enormous staff to good effect in entertaining thousands of Indians who had never before set foot in Viceroy's House. Our totals in 15 months were 7,600 to lunch; 8,300 to dinner; 25,300 to garden parties: Total, 41,200.

It was to Simla that the comments of the British Cabinet and their amendments to my plan were telegraphed to me by Lord Ismay. The amendments did not appear to involve alterations of substance though they altered its presentation. I wrote to the Indian leaders, inviting them to meet me in Delhi on 17 May to receive the plan which His Majesty's Government had approved for the transfer of power - and then I became worried.

I had built up the plan entirely by myself based on the views the different leaders had expressed, and therefore saw no reason why they should not accept the version amended by the British Government. But what if I had not completely understood their minds? Any refusal, once the plan was put to them officially and publicly, would mean the complete breakdown of the system I had been working on. It would be utter disaster. I had Nehru here with me, a friend whom I could trust. Why should I not avoid this appalling risk by letting him have a preview and getting his reaction?

I summoned my staff - I told them that I had a hunch that I should show the draft to Nehru. The staff unanimously objected. I ought to show the amended plan to all the leaders or none. It was now too late to do this. Then I reminded the three members of my staff who had been with me in the South-East Asia Command, of the hunches I had occasionally had there and that in overriding all advice and following these hunches I had been proved right. So I rejected their objections and gave Nehru a copy of the amended plan to take to bed with him on the night of 10 May.

The next morning, while I was talking to the Governor of the Punjab, a letter arrived from Nehru saying that he had no doubt that Congress would reject the proposals and that they would provoke deep resentment throughout the whole of India. In conversation later he stressed that in their present form they would be equally unacceptable to the Muslim League and the Sikhs.

This was a bombshell of the first order. Although baffled, I was grateful to Nehru. What an unmitigated catastrophe it would have been if I had not followed my hunch and all parties had rejected the plan publicly on 17 May. I was determined to regain the initiative at once. I had the text of the letter telegraphed to London and sent for my brilliant Indian Staff Officer, V P Menon, who had come up with me.

We had previously discussed the possibility of transferring power on a Dominion Status basis under the 1935 Government of India Act. I authorised V P Menon to see if he could redraft the plan on these lines to Nehru's satisfaction. He succeeded because Nehru realised that this would mean a

much earlier transfer of power, even though it were to two governments and it left a good chance for the essential unity of India to be maintained.

When I arranged to show this new plan to the other leaders they also indicated provisional approval. The plan offered a Pakistan with real power at an early date, which Mr Jinnah could hardly refuse, truncated though his Pakistan might be.

But the confusion in London can be imagined. The Cabinet were bewildered. They were not accustomed to doing business like this. They decided that either a Cabinet Minister should come out to India or I should come home. I quickly decided to go home and took V P Menon with me, on 14 May. I was invited to stay at Buckingham Palace.

I explained to the Cabinet that the basis of the new plan was to transfer power quickly on a Dominion Status basis to one or two central governments responsible to their respective Constituent Assemblies; that the constitutional regime to which power was transferred should be that of the 1935 Act, modified to allow Dominion independence; that in the event of partition the armed forces should be divided according to territorial recruitment and not by communal allegiance. Above all the will of the people, through voting in their various assemblies, should be ascertained on the question of partition.

Mr Attlee was splendid in ensuring quick Cabinet approval to the new plan and our team got back to Delhi on 30 May. I discussed the plan with the two leading figures in the Chamber of Princes, my very old friends the Maharaja of Bikaner and the Nawab of Bhopal, and reminded them that under the Cabinet Mission's statement of 1946 all the 565 ruling Princes of India would have paramountcy retro ceded from the King-Emperor to themselves and not to the successor governments of British India on the day of the transfer of power. I promised to devote my full attention to the complex and difficult problem of the future of the Indian States once the plan for British India had been accepted.

My successful negotiation with them is a long story in itself, which time does not allow me even to touch on today. Suffice it to say that I have retained all my old friendships with the Princes and their successors to the present day, as they realised I did my best for them in the difficult circumstances in which they suddenly found themselves.

On 2 June I called a meeting of the leaders, Nehru, Jinnah, Patel, Liaquat Ali Khan, and Baldev Singh, leader of the Sikhs. Nehru asked for the Congress President, Kripalani, to be present as well. This threatened to wreck the whole procedure with Jinnah until I offered a third seat also to the Muslim League and Jinnah finally agreed to nominate Abdur Rab Nishtar.

The atmosphere was tense and I decided to do as much of the talking as possible myself to avoid the highly strung leaders making the type of comment which would rile the opposite party and start a row. Finally I had copies of the new plan handed round to each of them to take away and discuss with their working committees, who had been assembled in Delhi for this purpose; I asked for their reactions in writing by midnight.

Nehru was helpful as ever and the Congress party letter accepted the plan on condition that the Muslim League also accepted. However, Jinnah, true to form, refused to give his acceptance in writing but came to see me in person that night to explain that he and the working committee could do no more than recommend acceptance by the Council of the All India Muslim League, which alone could constitutionally decide. It would take a week to assemble, a week in which I felt the whole atmosphere could go wrong, as it had when the Cabinet Mission were holding their

meetings. The Congress party had made their acceptance conditional on the Muslim League's simultaneous acceptance. I warned Jinnah that during the week's delay he might lose his Pakistan, but could not move him to accept on behalf of the League.

I asked Jinnah if I would be justified in requesting Mr Attlee to go ahead and announce the plan on the following day. To my relief Jinnah replied with an unwonted 'Yes'. I then told him that at the meeting on the following morning, 3 June, I would say that I was satisfied with the assurances I had received from him, provided he would undertake to support me, at least to the extent of nodding his head. The next day Jinnah did in fact nod his head when I looked across at him at the critical moment, and as Hodson says 'Pakistan with the two Provinces divided went through on the nod'.

Lord Ismay and Sir Eric Miéville then handed round copies of a long paper which they had been preparing for weeks called 'The Administrative Consequences of Partition'. The severe shock that this gave to everyone present would have been amusing if it had not been rather tragic.

Gandhi was of course heartbroken at the thought of partition with its consequent break in inter-communal unity and had been preaching against the Cabinet Mission's plan, which he himself had turned down the year before. I asked him to come and see me urgently to clear this up. Judge of my astonished delight on finding him enter my study with his finger to his lips to indicate that it was his day of silence. So I did all the talking and persuaded him not to wreck the agreement reached with all parties. He scribbled a few friendly notes on the backs of used envelopes.

On the evening of 3 June I broadcast over All India Radio and explained the plan to the peoples of India. I persuaded the leaders of the three principal parties, Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh to broadcast their virtual agreement to this plan after me, thus tying up the decision.

On the next day I held a long press conference for some three hundred representatives of the Indian and World Press to expound and explain the plan and answered many searching questions. The press received the plan well.

In answer to a question, I replied that I hoped to be able to transfer power to the two new Dominions - India and Pakistan - about 15 August. Everybody was astounded that I picked a date only ten weeks ahead, but I knew I was faced with the virtual breakdown of normal government.

As I have already explained, my Executive Council, which I was using as the Interim Government, contained a built-in Congress majority. With partition in sight the parties really began to pull in opposite directions. I tried the expedient of setting up two 'Shadow Cabinets', one for each future Dominion, but even this eventually broke down. I could have imposed 'Direct Rule by the Viceroy' under Section 93 but, as I have explained, the marvellously efficient machine the British had built up over the centuries had almost run down. In any case it would have been a thoroughly bad solution, particularly at this moment. The Indians soon confirmed that they opted for partition, so they would have to be the ones to carry it out, and not the British.

I set up a Partition Council of leaders right away and working parties of civil servants under H M Patel and Mohammed Ali Chaudhuri, later Prime Minister of Pakistan. They were kept hard at it and this prevented open splits, since all concerned realised that this might wreck everything. If I had gone at a slower pace the whole transfer of power could easily have broken down in the very types of disputes which had prevented even a theoretical solution being found before I came out. With all the hindsight now at my disposal I would not change the date.

All the parties agreed that the actual boundary lines between the two new Dominions should be settled by boundary commissions under a British judge. Sir Cyril, now Lord, Radcliffe took the chairmanship. We were mutually most careful never to have any discussions about the boundaries. He did a superlative job. His decisions were inevitably unpopular with both sides, but their unpopularity in both Dominions was equal, so it is clear that he drew scrupulously fair boundaries, for which service he has never received proper recognition.

And now for an odd anecdote: on 5 August the Governor of the Punjab sent one of his C.I.D. officers to tell me of a Sikh plan to assassinate the Qaid-i-Azam during the Pakistan independence celebrations on 14 August. I got him to repeat his tale to Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, who immediately demanded the arrest of the Sikh leaders. I would only agree if the authorities on the spot concurred. The Governor of the Punjab and the two Governors, designated to succeed him after partition, met and all three agreed that such arrests would only cause a deterioration of the situation.

When I told Jinnah I had decided to accept their advice, he was upset and Liaquat was furious. 'You are risking the life of the Qaid-i-Azam', he said. I replied that I intended to accompany him on the state drive during which the attempt was to be made.

My wife and I flew to Karachi on 13 August; my head C.I.D. officer met us at the airport and said the plot was on and a bomb would be thrown at Jinnah's open car on the state drive. I tried to dissuade him from going on with the state drive. He insisted and tried to dissuade me from driving with him, but I insisted and so the plans were left unchanged.

It was disconcerting, to say the least, to be aware during the tumultuous welcome Jinnah and I received on the state drive that somewhere in this vast crowd there was at least one man with a bomb. For some reason he did not throw it, so we got back to Government House safely and Jinnah, in a moment of rare emotion, laid his hand on my knee and said: 'Thank God I've brought you back alive'. I thought this was a bit much, so I replied: 'Thank God I've brought *you* back alive'.

We returned to Delhi on 14 August. For once there was nothing requiring my immediate action. Nehru had given me his splendid book *The Discovery of India*. At last I had a moment to dip into it. I wanted to know how I would fare when our positions were reversed. As Viceroy my sole decision had always been final. Now free India had chosen me as their constitutional Governor-General, Nehru's would be the final word. I turned to the epilogue and read: 'We have a long way to go and much leeway to make up before we can take our proper station with others in the van of human civilisation and progress. And we have to hurry, for the time at our disposal is limited and the pace of the world grows ever swifter. It was India's way in the past to welcome and absorb other cultures. That is much more necessary today for we march to the one world of tomorrow where national cultures will be intermingled with the international culture of the human race. We shall therefore seek wisdom and knowledge and friendship and comradeship wherever we can find them, and cooperate with others in common tasks, but we are no suppliants for others' favour and patronage. Thus we shall remain true Indians and Asians, and become at the same time good internationalists and world citizens'.

I liked this philosophy; I looked forward to working with the author.

I cannot end without paying the highest possible tribute to the superlative help and unfailing support I received from my late wife Edwina. On arrival she sought out and made real friends with the families of the Indian leaders, and those women who were leaders in their own right. During

the riots and massacres she organised practical relief and went to all the danger spots with complete disregard for her personal safety. I basked in the reflected love the people of India came to bear for her.

Both my daughters, Patricia and Pamela, helped greatly but the latter was with us the whole time and so was able to achieve more with the Youth Movements in India. All our family became great friends with Jawaharlal Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi - India's Prime Minister today - and his sister, Nan Pandit. This friendship between our families was one of the greatest rewards of our time in India.

Now to return again to my main theme. Nehru helped me out of a final, slightly ludicrous difficulty. I was not warned that I should consult the astrologers before fixing the date for the transfer of power, and only discovered barely a week beforehand that they had pronounced 15 August inauspicious, though the 14th would be lucky. Nehru's ingenious solution was that I should summon the Constituent Assembly late on the evening of the 14th so that it could take over as the Legislative Assembly of independent India as Midnight struck, which apparently was still an auspicious moment.

This was done and just before midnight Nehru made a truly great speech in the Assembly, and I propose to end by quoting his words: 'Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom'.