Chapter – III

India and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 - Its

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There is hardly any country in the world with which we have better, warmer and more cordial relations than the Arab world. India’s cultural relations with Arabia date back to prehistoric times. From the times immemorial, India’s communications with West Asia have been both along the land and sea routes. Direct voyages in those days were rare. Indian and Arabian traders used to meet half way to exchange their products. The Indians sailed from the Western Indian sea ports along the coast, entered the Persian Gulf and rested at Bahrain, where recent diggings by a Danish Mission have uncovered seals and other objects which show that the island’s cultural group ran the trade between the Indus civilisation and the Sumerian. Large quantities of Indian merchandise were conveyed over the oxus to the Caspian Sea and transferred from there by the Curus and through the adjoining countries to Euxina.

Trade relations got impetus in the subsequent centuries. The Arabian steeds in King Harsha’s camp were as popular as the sword made of Indian steel. Our kapas was in great demand and the Arabs took it over giving it the name of qutun which became cotton throughout the Europe. With the advent of Islam, relations between India and the Arab world were further strengthened.

Indian physicians and medical systems enjoyed a wide reputation even in pre-Islamic Arabia. The famous pre-Islamic Persian academy of Gondeshapur invited Indian physicians to meet their counter parts and a curious blending of sciences took place there. Equally important in the context of Indo-Arab relations is the influence of Indian astronomy. Through Al-Baruni Indian astronomy exercised a far reaching influence on Muslim astronomical sciences of subsequent
generations. In the field of mathematics, it was the concept of Sine which contributed to and revolutionised the science of triangles. The Arabic numerals 1,2,3, as they are called in the West, were borrowed by the Arabs from India and were consequently known as *Al-Arkan-al-Hindia* or Indian numerals. The Indian science of music also made a deep impact on Arabic musicians. This impact helped to produce the greatest Muslim musician of medieval India Amir Khusro. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Arab travellers and geographers whose works are important sources, though yet unexplored in the reconstruction of the history of India, particularly after the 9th century A.D. the names of Al-Baruni and Ibn-Batuta are too well known to need any introduction.

India and a major portion of Arabia having come under foreign influence, during the succeeding centuries there was a set back to this process of exchange of ideas.

The name of Palestine is derived from the Philistines, who lived in the Southern coastal part of the country in the 12th century B.C. It is necessary at the outset to correct a misconception. The Israelis were not the earliest inhabitants of Palestine, they were invaders, when the Israelite tribes after their exodus from Egypt invaded the land of Canaan in the 12th century B.C. they found a settled population and an established culture. The population then included the Canaanites, the Gibeonites and the Philistines. The Philistines were never completely subdued by the invaders and retained control of their coastal plain along the Mediterranean. The rest of the country was occupied and settled by the Israelites, who established the kingdom of Israel. The kingdom lasted for two centuries, after that the country was occupied by the Persians and the Greeks and the Romans from 4th until the 7th century A.D. the Palestine came under the Christian influence. Emperor Constantine built the Church of Holy Sepulcher, and his mother Helena. Built two other Churches in Bethlehem and at Jerusalem. In A.D. 637 occurred the Moslem Arab conquest of Palestine, many of the indigenous
Ottoman empire, the rise of national liberation movements began to appear on the horizon. So it was necessary to prepare new plans to meet the new situations. British imperialism after a thorough survey of the situation arrived at a conclusion which emphasised the utmost importance that Palestine represented in the new conditions, and it could play a big role because of its position. In 1869, the reopening of Suez Canal added a star in its importance because Palestine constituted for the British a point where the three continents meet, its control was essential for the protection of Sinai and the Suez Canal that was the road to India and Africa and adjacent to Egypt. It also formed the area from where any future expansionist plan could be launched following the collapse of the Ottoman empire. Thus Britain started to design its plans for Palestine. Britain decided to settle a foreign group in the area which would constitute a majority and a defensive offensive garrison. At that time when Britain was developing its plans for Palestine and looking for the ways and means to fulfill them, Zionism was already on the scene. Zionism was, at the beginning an expression of bourgeois nationalism of the middle classes of European Jews, at a time when Feudalism was collapsing and European Bourgeois nationalisms were rising together with the colonial expansionism. Zionism taking advantage of these developments, offered itself as a systematic political attempt at a new and total solution to all the Jews in the world.

Growing sense of helplessness, homelessness and persecution of Jews all over the world made Theodore Herzl, a Viennese journalist to think of it and in 1898, he produced a pamphlet, ‘the Jewish state’ in which he proposed the creation of a Jewish national home, the three motifs: religious Zionism, the need of asylum from persecution and discrimination, made Herzl’s political idea fused and in 1897, he succeeded in holding the first international Zionist Congress. It was the first step in the process of colonial usurpation in the modern history. Almost overnight he found himself as the head of the political Zionism. The Zionist organisation for years tried hard to interest any great power in its plans,
‘to establish for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law’. A reading of Herzl’s diaries as well as subsequent Zionist action reveal that the term ‘public law’ refers to nothing but the patronage of the imperialist powers. Herzl managed to approach directly the Sultan of Turkey and put forward in may 1901 his proposals of Zionist immigration to Palestine and in return he promised that the Zionists would take care of the financial problems of Turkey. The Sultan however did not agree to the idea of mass immigration to Palestine. The Zionist executive body then turned towards the Great Britain in October 1902 to seek a chunk of Sinai Peninsula for immigration and settlement. It received in 1903 an offer from the British government to settle in British East Africa, Herzl somehow tried to reconcile the offer but no concrete action was taken upon it because Zionist movement in Europe was planning to create a national home for the Jews in Palestine. But at that time there was a very little Jewish population, the country had been populated for more than thirteen centuries by Palestinian Arabs. According to official statistics of British mandate, the Arabs of Palestine constituted in 1895-1897, 90 percent of the total population of the country and owned 99.5 percent of the land.

When the Earl of Shaftsbury presented a memorandum to Palmerstone, entitled ‘a scheme for the colonisation of Palestine’ he explained the politics and economic importance of setting Jews there. The British Ex-Governor in Ceylon, E.L.Milford, explained openly in 1845 the importance of Judaisation of Palestine to British interests. Thus, Theodore Herzl the founder of the modern political Zionism, looked towards Britain which had enormous interests in Egypt and India. Herzl approached the British government and the Zionist organisation entered into negotiations with the British government, but before anything could be finally settled, Herzl died in 1904, meanwhile the British government offered territory in Kenya for the Zionist colonisation, but a young chemist Chaim Weizmann led fierce opposition which rocked the Zionist Congress of 1905.
Weizmann was enthusiastic and devoted to Zionism, he perfected a method of extracting acetone from the grains at a time when this material was running short and essential for the manufacture of explosives. His name came to be known by British cabinet and was already known to Arthur Balfour.

The outbreak of First World War put on the agenda the question of the Ottoman possessions, including Palestine, and this was the opportunity the Zionists were waiting for. The British government which realised very easily the necessity of controlling Palestine, began to pay increasing attention to the mutual interests of the Zionism and British imperialism. In 1915, Herbert Samuel, the Jewish Zionist British minister presented a memorandum to the British government entitled “Palestine: Five Alternatives” the memorandum explained the necessity of including Palestine within the sphere of British domination. The memorandum mainly emphasised on the suggestion of establishing a British protectorate in Palestine.

In 1916, Arthur Balfour became the Foreign Secretary and the memorandum met with the approval of a number of British ministers including Balfour. When Britain was planning for Judaisation of Palestine, it was simultaneously practicing a policy of hypocrisy and deception towards the Arabs. Thus in Hussein-Mac Mohan correspondence which took place in 1915-16, Britain promised to safeguard the independence of Arab East, including that of Palestine, and same with the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which was a secret agreement between France and Britain, in this agreement too Britain excluded the area of Palestine and put it under international administration. These treaties had become a temporary convert to Zionism with the gradual exhaustion of both Russia and France in 1917 it had become imperative to ensure an early armed intervention of U.S.A. and President Wilson had shown himself ‘warmly responsive to the Zionist deal’. A formula was submitted by the Zionist organisation for the consideration of the British government on July 18, 1917, it was worded as:
"His Majesty's Government after considering the aims of the Zionist organisation, accepts the principle of recognising Palestine as the National Home of the Jewish people, and the right of the Jewish people to build up its national life in Palestine. His Majesty's Government regards as essential for realising of this principle the grant of internal autonomy of Palestine, freedom of immigration for the Jews and the establishment of a Jewish national colonising corporation for the settlement of the economic development of the country. Meanwhile, however, the Jewish Conjoint Committee, which officially represented the Anglo Jewry, sent the times a letter strongly protesting against the Zionist project. The 'Holy Land' they wrote, 'has necessarily a profound and undying interest for all Jews, as the cradle of their religion, the main theatre of Bible history, and the site of its sacred memorials...... since the dawn of their political emancipation in Europe have made the rehabilitation of the Jewish community one of their chief cares, and they have always cherished the hope that the result of their labour would be the great memories of their environment and a source of spiritual inspiration to the whole of Jewry.'

Balfour had long sympathies with the Jews, he visited the United States, there the Zionist influence was very strong. With Herbert Samuel there were some other prominent jews, who formed a committee in accordance with the ideas of the memorandum which Samuel presented, it had recommended that His Majesty's Government should issue a public declaration, formally recognising the high historic interest which Palestine possessed for the Jewish community and affirming that at the close of the war the Jewish population in Palestine would be secure, in the enjoyment of civil and religious rights with the rest of the population, reasonable facilities for immigration and colonisation and such municipal privileges in the town and colonies inhabited by Jews as may be shown to be necessary.
The bold and uncompromising phraseology was not however acceptable either to the foreign office or to some influential British Jews. But after some months of redrafting, it finally received official approval as the famous Balfour Declaration. The Declaration was formally made on November 2, 1917, in the form of a letter addressed by Balfour to Lord Rothschild, a leading English Jew in sympathy with the Zionist aspirations.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

Foreign Office, London.

November 2, 1917.

I have much pleasure in conveying to you on behalf of His Majesty’s Government the following declaration of sympathy with the Jewish Zionist aspirations, which has been submitted to and approved by the Cabinet.

“His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by the Jews in any other country.”

I shall be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist federation.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour.

This Declaration was the British promise of a Jewish National Home, it signified the fulfillment and salvation to the Jews. This project got a favourable attitude from Woodrow Wilson in the form of the approval.
The Balfour Declaration put the seal on Weizmann’s efforts, and gave the backing of a great power to Jewish immigration in Palestine. The Jews from different parts of the world started pouring in Palestine. This terrified the Arabs, the Arabs would not have time to build up any effective opposition. This sixty seven word letter was a dream for the Jews and a nightmare for the Arabs. Since the declaration was against the people of Palestine, it was decided that the Declaration should not be published there. The Declaration took the form of a promise about the territory to a foreign group so that this group can make this territory a National Home of the Jewish people.

The clauses in the Declaration were a deliberate exercise to mislead the Arabs. These clauses did not mention the Palestine as the Arab people’s territory, whether Christian or Muslim, who comprised 90 percent of its population and 97 percent of the land ownership. The Declaration simply refers them as ‘existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.’ All the evidences suggest that the Declaration was a violation of the principles of International Law. The British or any country had no right to establish a national home for Jews on the Palestinian soil. The Declaration brought the British much ill will and complications.

The Zionists were determined to use the Balfour Declaration as a means by which to make Palestine a Jewish land and create there an independent Jewish state. The Arabs on the other hand were determined that Palestine should remain an Arab land because Palestine was and ever has been an Arab area. The Arabs of Palestine are the descendents of the indigenous inhabitants who have lived in the country since the earliest recorded time and who were there when the Jews entered it in Biblical times and went on living in it after the Jews dispersed. The Arab and Jewish aims were incompatible and an Arab Jewish conflict was inevitable. There was no Arab organisation which could compare with the Zionist organisation. The Arabs did not receive any aid from outside and could not boast of any comparable international linkages or backing. Moreover, since the Arab
leadership was in the hands of Mufti Haj-Amir al-Husayni, who was extremely anti-British and anti-Zionist, the Arabs could not get any sympathy from the British.

India heavily criticised this act of Britain and Indian concern for Palestine was greatly voiced by its most eminent mentors Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. In Nehru’s view:

"Palestine attracts a great deal of attention because of its old history and associations, and also because of its being a Holy land for the Jews, Christians and Muslims. The British policy (which) has created a special minority problem here- that of the Jews, and the Jews side with the British and oppose the freedom of Palestine, as they fear that this would mean Arab rule. The two pull different ways and conflicts necessarily occur. On the Arab side are numbers, on the other side great financial resources and the world wide organisation of Jewry. So England pits Jewish religious nationalism against Arab nationalism and makes it appear that their presence is necessary to act as an arbitrator and to keep the peace between the two. It is the same old game which we have seen in other countries under imperialist domination."6

The Indian response to the Palestine issue was not of the nature of an official government policy until August 15, 1947, but being a broad based political organisation, the Indian National Congress was bound to respond in a manner that reflected the internal situation that India was facing of the struggle against colonialism. In a letter to his daughter Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru strongly criticised the Balfour Declaration which contained the promise of establishing a ‘Jewish National Home in Palestine.’

Mahatma Gandhi declared that the Palestine belonged to the Arabs in the same sense as England belongs to English and France to French. He said “it
would be a crime against Humanity to give Palestine wholly or partially as a national home to the Jews.”

Jawaharlal Nehru argued and rejected the Balfour Declaration, that the Declaration was made to win the goodwill of international Jewry and this was important from many point of views, it was welcomed by the Jews..... one not important fact seems to have been overlooked, Palestine was not a wilderness, or an empty uninhibited place, it was already somebody else's home. So this general gesture of the British government was really at the expense of the people who already lived in Palestine.

The Balfour Declaration of November 1917, caused much anxiety among the Arabs, who intensified their struggle against both British imperialism and Zionism. The Zionist leaders, while opposing self government in Palestine, welcomed the Balfour Declaration and supported the British during and after the First World War. Britain's undertaking to the Zionists was not merely opportunism, there was the concern for imperial communications and for defending the Suez Canal. Nehru realising the British tact said: “so England pits Jewish religious nationalism against Arab nationalism, and makes it appear that her presence is necessary to act as an arbitrator and to keep the pace between the two. It is the same old game which we have seen in other countries under imperialist domination, it is curious how often it is repeated.”

After the First World War the Allies were faced with a major problem of delineating the political status of territories and peoples formerly under the Ottoman rule, in this context a clever strategy was chalked out by Allied powers at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the territories, which were formerly governed by the Allied powers and were inhabited by the peoples not yet able to stand by themselves, were put under the mandatory system. Since the treaties of Versailles and Lausanne empowered the Allied powers to apportion the ‘Freed territories’ as their mandates. And according to Sykes-Picot agreement between
France and Great Britain the administration of Syria and Lebanon was awarded to France and that of Palestine, Transjordan and Mesopotamia (Iraq) to Great Britain. Various mandate instruments were created by the mandatory powers, which were subject to approval of the League of Nations. Palestine and Transjordan were included in the same mandates, but were treated as distinct territories. Consequently, the ground was carefully prepared for the regular influx of the Jews into Palestine. No Arab leader except Amir Feisal was invited to the Peace Conference to represent the Arab case as well as the Palestine question, since Feisal relied heavily on the British, he could not play any significant role in the Conference. But he insisted that all the Arab people desired independence, considering his insistence the Americans pressed Britain and France to test the reactions of the population to the proposed mandatory arrangements. For this purpose an inter allied enquiry commission was set up, the King-Crane Commission which was sent to visit the proposed mandatory territories to take the views of the population in regard to the mandates, more than 72 percent of the King-Crane Commission report showed that the people of the area are against the mandate system and against the entire Zionist programme. But the findings of the report were never considered and the report was conveniently shelved and forgotten.

The mandate system was condemned by the Indian National Congress as a cloak to cover imperialist greed. Nehru maintained that:

"the Arabs, supported by the Christians and other non-Jewish peoples, have demanded self determination and complete freedom. They have taken strong objection to the mandate and to fresh immigrants on the grounds that there is no room for more... They (the Arabs) have declared that Zionism had been an accomplice of British imperialism; responsible Zionist leaders had constantly urged what an advantage a strong Jewish National Home would be to the English in
guarding road to India, just because it was a counteracting force to Arab national aspirations.\textsuperscript{10}

The main thrust of the British policy of mandates was for the establishment of a Jewish national home. At the Peace Conference Dr. Weizmann stated his movement’s aspirations in the following words: \textquoteleft\textquoteleft\textit{to make Palestine as Jewish as England is English.}\textquoteright\textsuperscript{11} The object of Weizmann was to prepare Palestine for the thousands and millions of the Jews of the world. These fundamental Zionist principles that statesmen like Balfour and Wilson were ready to accept as a valid goal. The Zionist strategy was to bring immediately into Palestine so many Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe that they would become the majority, and that this should happen in such a speed that the Arabs would not have time to build up any effective opposition. The Zionists in order to work up enthusiasm for their cause, have to go all over the world preaching the return of thousands and thousands of oppressed Jews.

The years following the First World War and Balfour Declaration saw a great influx of Jewish immigration in Palestine. The dislike of Jews by the Arabs was increasing day by day. The frustration of Palestinian Arabs manifested themselves in violence, however in March 1921, there was a serious outbreak of violence in Jaffa when 170 Palestinians were killed and 507 injured. After seeing this unrest the British government issued a statement known as the Churchill White Paper of 1922, which disclaimed any intention of British government to create a \textquoteleft\textquoteleft\textit{wholly Jewish Palestine}\textquoteright\textsuperscript{12} or to effect \textquoteleft\textquoteleft\textit{subordination of the Arab population and culture in Palestine.}\textquoteright

The Churchill White Paper of 1922, which explained the basis for the division of the Palestine mandate into areas open and areas closed to Zionism also laid down other principles which controlled the interpretation of the mandate, thereafter.\textsuperscript{13} to the Jews the White Paper was an assurance to the policy of the Balfour Declaration.
India and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 - Its Implications and Consequences

In any case the British were not prepared to enforce the mandate without an attempt to gain Arab consent, but despite all efforts the Arabs continued to reject the mandate though the concept of the mandate was enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations in 1919. It was interpreted as an idea of tutelage under which the development of the population of the former Ottoman territories would be promoted until these peoples should reach a stage where their independence could be recognised.

As the mandate was approved by the League of Nations in 1922, it was formally recognised by the United States. The establishment of the British mandatory regime in Palestine from then until 1939, Britain was left to her own devices.

The Indian National Congress criticised the mandate system as being a new form of colonialism that enabled the European powers to continue their domination of the weaker nations in West Asia and Africa. It expressed its respect for the sentiments of Jews that Palestine was Holy to them because it contains many of their shrines, and they can have claim to freedom of access for the purpose of offering worship but the place was not less holy to the Muslims who in addition had exercised sovereignty over the area for centuries and they can only go there for worship, can not receive the sovereign rights in place. The Indian National Congress also maintained that in Palestine the British were following their pet policy of divide and rule as they followed in the Indian Sub-Continent.

The tasks undertaken by Britain as mandatory power over Palestine of facilitating the establishment of a Jewish National Home and preparing the people of Palestine for independence were mutually exclusive. The British government refused to admit this and set about both tasks in an atmosphere of uncertainty. The Zionists had the dedication, the brain power, the connections, the material resources and a favourable emotional climate in the West, with Britain to ensure
India and the Balfour Declaration of 1917- Its Implications and Consequences

their success in Zionist determination. The reaction of the Palestinians to the appointment of Britain as mandatory was first angry and then violent, they demanded immediate self determination and independence.

The sudden increase in Jewish immigration from 1925, caused widespread unemployment and a serious economic depression, the Palestinians saw their country slipping from their grasp. They watched their land being bought up by foreigners. They saw European immigrants flooding into their ports, they brought with them arms and ammunitions, all Jewish settlements which sprang up overnight like mushrooms were heavily fortified. The Jewish agency was given open license in every kind of depredation against the Arabs, so as to make them flee for life. While the Jews could carry all kind of weapons a ban was enforced on the Arabs against carrying any kind of arms, even knives and sticks.

Stressing the need to sympathise with the Arabs, Nehru argued, "India and Palestine have both their national problems, and both struggle for independence, they have something in common in this struggle and the opponent is the same......we must, therefore understand each other and sympathise with each other." He thus found something common to the Arabs and the people of India, viz. their fight against the British government. His meeting with the representatives of the Palestine National Movement at the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities held in Brussels in 1927, gave him greater insight into the Palestinian affairs. He was very much influenced by the struggle of the Palestinian people against British imperialism. From the 1920s onwards Nehru utilised the Foreign Department of the Indian National Congress as an agency to oppose British imperialism in India and abroad including that in West Asia. Though Nehru was sympathetic towards the Jews, he believed that the Arabs were fighting British imperialism in Palestine. He was of the opinion that the Jews should not rely on the British support but should reach an agreement with the Arabs to safeguard their position in an independent Arab country. To Nehru, the British appeared to be exploiting
the differences between the Jews and the Arabs in the same manner as they were promoting communal tension in India.\textsuperscript{15}

Meanwhile, some extremist Zionists disputed over the wailing wall, that shrine of Orthodox Jewry which was yet a Muslim property and the outer face of the chief Muslim sanctuary of Jerusalem Harm-al-Sharif, the third most Holy spot in the Sunni world, these young extremists expressed their hope of winning back the Harm, when some Jews began to encroach slightly on the status quo at the Wailing Wall, the Muslims interpreted them, and the Mufti was riposted with vigorous and provocative counter measures. An attempt by the government to bring about agreement in the matter was baffled as much by the Jewish reluctance to give way as by the Arabs.\textsuperscript{16} In August, 1929, these provocative demonstrations by both Jews and Arabs changed into massacres, at the end of the month there were 133 Jews killed and six agricultural settlements were totally destroyed, under the pressure to do something about the matter the British sent the Shaw Commission of enquiry in 1930, to investigate the situation. The Shaw Commission of inquiry in its report on the causes of the Arab rebellion of 1929, pointed to Jewish immigration as the primary cause, in the words of the Commission, 'the Arabs have to come to see in Jewish immigration not only a menace to their livelihood but a possible overlord for the future,' the Shaw Commission recommended that the Jewish immigration be controlled and non-Jewish settlements given voice in discussion. It was not the solution of existing Palestine problem, and the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations severely criticised the manner in which the British government had administered Palestine.

In 1930s, Hitler's rise to power and the spread of Nazism in Europe directly resulted in the exodus of Jews. As a result the German and Polish Jews flocked to Palestine. This enormous influx frightened the Arabs, it appeared that the attainment of a Jewish majority was in sight and with it a Jewish state. The
fear of this among the Arabs created increasing unrest. Arabs declared a general strike in 1936, which continued for six months, trains were blown up, Jewish settlements invaded, Jews and British police murdered. The situation in Palestine deteriorated considerably. The issue of Palestinians was now taken to the neighbouring states who explicitly committed themselves to the cause of Palestinian Arabs. Despite the formation of the Arab Higher Committee on April 25, 1936, consisting of members from various Arab countries of which the Mufti of Jerusalem was President, no immediate political solution was to be found to the Arab Jewish problem. As a result, violence and counter violence continued unabated in Palestine. The reaction of the Indian National Congress to this state of affairs was unequivocally in favour of the Arab cause. Jawaharlal Nehru greatly criticised the Jewish inflow, addressing the 50th session of the Indian National congress in 1936, he observed that the Arab struggle against British imperialism in Palestine is as much a part of the great world conflict as India’s struggle for freedom.17

Nehru held the British government responsible for the breach of promises they made to the Arabs. Although, the Arabs had supported the British government in the disintegration of the Ottoman empire on clear understanding of independence, instead of helping them in securing their independence, they converted Palestine into mandatory with a burden of creating National Home for the Jews. Nehru greatly denounced the Zionist action of pushing out the Arabs from all the places of importance in order to dominate the Palestine economy. He visualised the problem of Palestine as purely a national struggle for independence and in his opinion the controversy boiled down to the issue of nationalism versus imperialism. Nehru appreciated and identified the common bond of friendship between India and Palestine because of the sharing of common experience and circumstances.18
The reaction of the Indian National Congress to this state of affairs was unequivocal. In 1936, the All India Congress Committee conveyed its greetings and sympathy to the Arabs in their struggle for freedom. As a mark of respect the Indian National Congress observed September 27, 1936, as Palestine Day by holding meetings and demonstrations throughout the country as an indication of support for the Arab cause. The Indian leadership led by Jawaharlal Nehru contended that a Jewish settlement could be effected only in an atmosphere of goodwill and peace and not if the Jews went to Palestine with a view of dominating the country. In Nehru's views, events in Palestine after the issue of Balfour Declaration represented a gross betrayal of the Arabs by the British. He did not dispute the rights of the Jews to regard Jerusalem as their holy land and said that this entitled them to free and unhindered access and right to worship, but he pointed out that the Balfour Declaration had gone beyond this fact and had envisaged the creation of a Jewish state within the Arab community. This was a gross injustice which took no account of the fact that the area was also Holy to the Muslims and Christians. Nehru believed that Palestine is essentially an Arab country and must remain so, and the Arabs must not be crushed and suppressed in their own homeland. Nehru always decried the attempts made by various organisations to give the Palestine issue a communal touch. To Nehru the problem of Palestine was a nationalist one, for the Arabs were fighting against the imperialist control. It was therefore a pity that instead of aligning themselves with the struggle against imperialism, Nehru pointed out, the Jews of Palestine had taken the side of British imperialism and desired its protection against the natives of the country.

The findings of the Royal Peel Commission of 1937 were published in a volume (the Peel Report), where after admirably setting forth the background and history of troubles, it advocated the division of the country into a small Jewish state, a large Arab state and a considerable area which was to constitute under the mandate. Though the Zionists showed the willingness to discuss the proposal
the Arabs would not hear of it and in December 1937, the revolt blazed forth again more fiercely than ever with the murder of a British official and his police escort. The cabinet however adopted the recommendations and another Commission the Woodhead Commission came out to demarcate the boundaries of the Arab and Jewish states, in accordance with the decision for partition which the previous Commission put forward and which the cabinet had adopted. At its Calcutta session in 1937, the All India Congress Committee recorded its emphatic protest against the reign of terror that has been established in Palestine by British imperialism, with a view to coerce the Arabs into accepting the proposed partition of Palestine and assure them of solidarity of the Indian people with them in their struggle for National freedom.  

The Arabs who were supported by the neighbouring Arab states and India rejected the partition plan entirely and claimed their right to independence in the whole of Palestine with and immediate stopping of Jewish immigration and land purchase. The state of security deteriorated with the murder of a Commissioner by the Arabs because he was widely considered one of the authors of the partition plane. In 1938, 5,700 major acts of terrorism were recorded and some hundred Arabs were convicted by the military court and hanged.

The leaders of India expressed their full support to the Palestinians. The All India Congress Committee at Hripura session, in February 1938, passed the following resolution:

The congress condemned the decision of Great Britain as a mandatory power to bring about the partition of Palestine in the teeth of the opposition of the Arabs and the appointment of the commission to carry out this project. The Congress records its emphatic protest against the continuation of the reign of terror which is still being maintain in Palestine, to force this policy upon the unwilling Arabs. The Congress expressed its full sympathy with the Arabs in their struggle for national freedom and their fight against imperialism. The Congress
holds that the proper method of solving the problem by which the Jews and the Arabs are faced in Palestine is by amicable settlement between themselves and appeals to the Jews not to seek the shelter of the British mandate and not to allow themselves to be exploited in the interest of British imperialism.24

The period between 1936-1939 saw great disturbance, Britain faced great difficulties when clashes between Jewish and Palestinian committees mounted. The partition proposals drove the Arabs into open rebellion, confronted with this crisis the British government called an Anglo-Arab-Jewish Congress at London and also invited some neighbouring states, who had shown themselves increasingly concerned in the Palestine question. Both Arabs and Jews rejected this new British proposal, and the Government of Britain was eventually left to announce a new policy in May 1939, when Hitler had occupied Czechoslovakia and the Second World War clouds were visible to everyone.

So seeing the war clouds looming large over its head and the Arab unrest, the British issued a policy statement known as the MacDonald White Paper of 1939 which pointed out that:

"the Royal Commission and previous commissions of enquiry have drawn to the ambiguity of certain expressions in the mandate, such as the expression, 'a national home for the Jewish people,' and they have found in this ambiguity and the resulting uncertainty as to the objectives of policy a fundamental cause of unrest and hostility between the Arabs and Jews."25

The White Paper recommended a proposal for the establishment of an independent Palestine state in such treaty relations with the United Kingdom as will provide satisfactorily for the strategic and commercial requirements of both countries in the future. The proposal for the establishment of the independent state would involve consultation with the Council of the League of Nations with a view to the termination of the mandate. It urged that all Jewish immigration in
Palestine would be stopped forthwith, it limited the Jewish immigration, during next five years there would be only 75,000 Jewish immigrants it stated and further immigration was to be dependent on Arab consent. The High Commissioner to Palestine would have the powers to regulate or prohibit the transfer of land.

To the 1939 White Paper the Arab political leader’s reaction was of different kind some declared it unacceptable and some protested against it. While the Jews were embittered by the White Paper, they furiously condemned it as an outrageous breach of faith, claiming that it denied them the right to construct their National Home in Palestine. The White Paper caused great suspicion among Zionist leaders about the future British intentions towards Zionism. The Zionists quickly saw the need to transfer their base of operations from Britain to the United States. Ben Gurion acknowledged that achieving the aim would not be an easy task, the Jewish community in Britain exerted tremendous pressure on the British government to retract their 1939, White Paper policy.

The British Parliament received the White Paper with little enthusiasm. The Labour Party naturally opposed it, it was strongly criticised by the strong imperialists like Churchill and Amery. In June 1939, seven members of the Permanent Mandates Commission reported unanimously to the League Council that the White Paper was not in accordance with the interpretation, which in agreement with the mandatory power and the Council, the Commission had placed upon the Palestine mandate. But the outbreak of Second World War prevented the Council from discussing the White Paper which thus remained de facto in force.

In 1940, the issue of the Land Transfer Regulations, denying Jews the right to acquire land in Palestine, came as severe blow, they organised country wide demonstrations with arms and bomb incidents, and their cooperation in war nevertheless continued. The Jews saw that thousands of their kin denied refuge in Palestine, a ship carrying 750 Jewish refugees blew up and sank near Black sea port and it was also suggested to them that they also had been made the objects
of a political gesture. These events caused a hardening Zionist feeling and increased terrorism. There were meetings, organised protests and demonstrations against the British policy.

Increased pressure for the pro-Zionist solution began to be exerted by American Zionists, in May 1942, the American Zionist Organisation met in New York and adopted the Biltmore Programme, and presented it to David Ben Gurion, head of the Jewish Agency's Executive committee, the Biltmore Programme demanded:

- the establishment of a Jewish state, which would embrace the whole of Palestine,
- the creation of a Jewish army,
- the repudiation of the White Paper of 1939, and unlimited Jewish immigration in Palestine.

This Programme went much further than the Balfour Declaration, the avowed Zionist objectives had now surfaced. By stepping up their demands, the Zionists expressed their growing conviction that a policy of moderation did not pay, that Britain could no longer be relied upon, and that it was expedient to seek the support of the United States. Officially the Jewish Agency agreed to observe a truce with the Arabs for the duration of war. But this attitude was not followed by the extremist Jews. The war gave the Jews a unique opportunity to equip themselves with arms, partly stolen from the allied forces.

Meanwhile, the systematic annihilation of millions of Jews by Nazi Germany led many people, both Jews and non-Jews, to conclude that they ought to have a state of their own. Beginning in 1943, an intensive propaganda campaign was mounted by the American Zionists with a view to bring the American public opinion to support Zionist aims. Finally in January 1944, a resolution endorsing the Biltmore Programme was introduced in both the Houses
of Congress, calling for concrete action on the part of the United States government to:

"use its good offices and take appropriate measures to the end that the doors of Palestine shall be open for free entry of Jews into that country, and that there shall be full opportunity for colonisation so that the Jewish people may ultimately reconstitute Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth."\(^26\)

This resolution was a landmark. American support for Jewish statehood was now a fact. However, Zionist efforts to obtain Presidential endorsement of this resolution met with some resistance, the Zionists were largely unsuccessful in getting the United States' full backing for their policies.

Consequently in 1945, the Labour Party came to power and it declared its support for unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine and the British government had come to the conclusion that in determining a post war policy for Palestine the collaboration of the U.S. government must be sought, since both political parties in that country had courted the Jewish votes in the Presidential elections of 1944, by pledges of support for the full Biltmore Programme, in October 1945, President Truman called upon the British government to open the gates of Palestine to 100,000 displaced Jews in Europe, in reply the British government proposed the creation of an Anglo-American Committee of enquiry to study the matter, shifting the burden of responsibility to the United States both the governments appointed a Committee, composed of non-official citizens of the two countries. The joint Committee held hearing in Washington and London, visited the displaced person's camps in Germany and Austria and made a tour of Palestine. After completing its task on April 20, 1946, the Committee presented a report with three major recommendations:
India and the Balfour Declaration of 1917- Its Implications and Consequences

a) that the government of Palestine be continued as at present under mandate, pending the execution of a trusteeship agreement under the United Nations,
b) that 100,000 immigration certificates were to be immediately granted for the Jews, for the admission in Palestine who have been the victims of the Nazi persecution,
c) that the land transfer limitations be rescinded.27

The U.S. and Great Britain neither accepted nor rejected these recommendations. Instead, the two governments appointed a new Anglo-American Commission, to devise ways to implement the Committee's recommendations. The new Committee rejected the idea of early partition of Palestine into two states. The Committee advised that the hostilities would disappear and until such time Palestine would be placed under U.N. Trusteeship and the mandate should continue. The United States accepted these recommendations but the British government reserved its rights for policy statement. Ultimately the two governments failed to reach an agreed decision.

The Arabs reacted demanding the abrogation of the mandate, the withdrawal of the British troops and the establishment of an Arab democratic state and threatened the Russian support.

The Zionists were profoundly disappointed by these developments. In December 1946, at the World Zionist Congress in Basle, the American Zionist leaders asserted that the British rule in Palestine was "illegal" and declared that "we have the right to resist this rule and pledged the support of American Jewry to this resistance."28

From 1946-1947, ruthless civil war and terrorism by British and Jews continued. Conditions had so deteriorated that the Anglo-Jewish conflict had become a brutalising series of reprisals. Having failed to solve the Palestinian question, inspite of having held the mandate over Palestine from the League of
Nations since 1922, the British had no choice but to handover the volatile issue to the U.N. The Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, informed the House of Commons on February, 1947, that as the mandate had proved unworkable, the question of Palestine was being referred to the United Nations. On April 2nd 1947, Britain requested the General Assembly to consider the Palestine problem for that it requested for a special session on the issue. Then on May 15, 1947, the U.N. set up the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). The Committee composed of eleven states (Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Uruguay, Guatemala, India, Iran, the Netherlands, Peru and Yugoslavia) under the presidency of a Swedish delegate, it visited Palestine and submitted a report to the General Assembly. The report recommended the establishment of an independent and economically unified Palestine at an early date and if the recommendations were pending then the area should fall under the United Nations supervision. Here the unanimity ended and the report was divided into a majority and minority plan. The majority plan endorsed by Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and Uruguay provided for the partition of Palestine into an Arab state, a Jewish state and Jerusalem under international control.

The minority plan was favoured by India, Iran, and Yugoslavia. It advocated a federal state of Palestine, composed of two states, Jewish and Arab, each of them enjoying local autonomy with its capital at Jerusalem. It also provided for a three-year transitional period during which responsibility for administering Palestine would lie with an authority designated by the United Nations, as also for the election of a Constituent Assembly and the formulation of an appropriate Constitution. Jewish immigration would be permitted on the Jewish side within a reasonable limit, to be determined by a nine-member International Commission composed of three representatives each of the Jews, the Arabs and an appropriate organ of the United Nations. The Arab states favoured the minority plan, because it satisfied their basic considerations, like a single independent state.
with Arab majority and limitation of Jewish immigration. While India opposed the majority plan. In an emotional letter written to Albert Einstein on July 11, 1947, Nehru recognised the wonderful achievements of the Jews in the past and the miseries they had to face through the ages of persecution. But he maintained with Einstein that the Jewish approach towards the Arabs in Palestine was wrong and that an amicable solution should be found to the problem without the use of force.

At the UNSCOP, the Indian side argued that the plan for a federal state gave full expression to the principle of self-determination and did not represent the play of great power politics. The Indian delegate at the UNSCOP, Sir Abdur Rahman, stated before the General Assembly that Great Britain wanted the creation of Jewish state for political and strategic reasons in total disregard of the principle of self-determination. The note presented by Sir Abdur Rahman, also decried the way political rights were being confused with religious rights. It said: “it would be entirely wrong....... to regard that country (Palestine) as being in some way peculiar politically, whatever importance it does posses from a religious or sentimental point of view but there is no reason why political considerations and why political rights in a state should be confused with religious rights.”

India’s position was made clear even at home. Emphasising the Indian stand in the Constituent Assembly, Nehru stated the proposal for a federal state was “not only a fair and equitable solution of the problem, but the only real solution.”

Both plans were thoroughly debated by the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly at its fall session in 1947, both Arab and Jewish representatives were heard again. The political scene grew tense and it became clear that the Zionists with full support of U.S. were determined to obtain a decision favouring the majority plan. Finally, on November 29, 1947, the General Assembly voted the recommendation of partition of Palestine as proposed by the majority plan.
By January 1948, the Palestine situation had taken a turn for the worse. In a note written to the chief ministers on January 5, 1948, Nehru observed that “in Palestine there is organised religious conflict on an intensive scale, probably the prelude to large scale disorder and battle.” This prognosis of Nehru was to prove true after six months when the region witnessed a bloodbath after the creation of Israel. Despite the pressures exerted on him by the carrot and stick policy of Zionists, Nehru stood firm and refused to dilute the Indian stand in any way.

On the other hand the Americans who had voted for the partition of Palestine seemed anxious to win back the Arab support which was essential for them in view of the oil situation, and the possibility of war in West Asia. In February 1948, the Arab League had threatened withdrawal of oil concessions if the United States continued to support the partition of Palestine. Owning about 42 percent of the oil resources in West Asia, the United States had much to lose if the Arab threat became a reality. Therefore as a safety measure the U.S. did a strategic withdrawal of its position on Palestine. Its delegation in the United Nations withdrew support from the General Assembly and supported the proposal for a temporary trusteeship for the whole of Palestine. However, the U.S. resolution failed to gain acceptance in the face of the consistent Soviet support for the partition plan. The Soviet Union declared that the partition plan was the best possible solution in the circumstances, and declared that effective measures should be taken to implement the plan.

The Arab state was to include the central and Eastern part of Palestine. And Jaffa, Haifa and a major part of Negev around 56 percent was given to Jewish state. Jerusalem and Bethlehem were to stay outside of both states, subject to an administration responsible to the Trusteeship Council. The General Assembly also took note of Britain’s decision to terminate the mandate by August 1, 1948, provided for the establishment of the two states within two months after the
British withdrawal, it established a five nation U.N. Palestine Committee to implement the resolution and called upon the Security Council to assist in its implementation of the plan. Britain accepted the partition resolution but refused to cooperate with the U.N. in Palestine. She announced that she would not admit the U.N. Palestine Committee before May 1, 1948.

Arabs were greatly shocked over the attitude, they never expected that it would be the solution. When the resolution was passed in November 1947, they refused to accept it. They announced in December 1947, that they would intervene with the military force to prevent its implementation. They argued that according to U.N. Charter the Assembly did not possess the right of binding decision but only of recommendation, so they adopted an attitude of non-cooperation. In the neighbouring Arab states volunteers were recruited for the defense of Palestine, and in 1948, armed detachments started to enter Palestine and attacking Jewish settlements. By February these clashes had resulted in over 2,500 casualties and as days passed the toll mounted. Hostilities began to precipitate within Palestine and a large scale Arab exodus from Zionist held areas.

On May 14, 1948, Britain officially terminated its mandate over Palestine, it withdrew the forces from the country and the same day on May 14, 1948, the Zionists invoked the U.N. Partition Resolution and proclaimed Palestine 'a Jewish state' to be called Israel. A few hours later President Truman extended de facto recognition to this new state. Later Russia followed it, Israel immediately received a flood of supplies and of immigrants.

India criticised the denial of independence to Arabs, it argued that when other Arab states of West Asia which had been placed under mandate system had already acquired self government then why this had not to be done with Palestine and its peoples. India taking in view both the communities, Jews and Arabs, proposed for a single Palestine state based on federal principles, where all the inhabitants of the area continued to be the citizens of a single Palestinian state.
But unfortunately the big powers did not like peace, and its repercussions the Palestinian Arabs are facing, there is no state of peace, conditions are getting worse day by day. For the Arabs the establishment of the state of Israel was an infringement upon the rights of the indigenous Arab population, it dispossessed them of their homes and made them refugees in their own homeland. In a letter to chief ministers on May 20, 1948, Nehru wrote:

"the international situation has, as you know, flared up in Palestine and a bitter small scale war is going on there. I must say that the U.S. government have handled the Palestine question with quite extraordinary ineptitude and opportunism. It is difficult to say whether this war will continue for very long as, in any event, the area is very limited. It appears also that the King of Transjordan is playing a hand mainly in his own interests."

The emergence of the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century coincided with the rise of nationalism in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire. As the British were looking for the strengthening of their presence in India, Egypt and Africa, it became necessary for them to protect all the vital routes leading to these countries. Palestine is the only country which connects the three continents and could play a big role because of its position, for the British imperialism. So Britain decided to settle a foreign group in that area which would constitute a majority. For this reason it decided to place Jews there, through the Balfour Declaration to the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. The Palestinian people were reduced to the status of refugees and derived out of their homes. This imperialist-cum-Zionist game had been treacherous and had dastardly effects.

The Indian National Congress was bound to respond in a manner that reflected in part the internal situation in India and in part its views on Palestine in context of the struggle against colonialism that was convulsing Asia. India's policy towards this grave problem of Palestine grew and crystallised on the
fundamental issues arising out of the complex situation at home. History had tied India with the West Asian region through diverse contacts and the Palestinian issue has dominated India's West Asia policy partly on the humanitarian grounds and partly due to the political and ideological similarities. Nehru identified the similarity between the freedom struggle of India and Palestine on the ground that both are National Liberation movements against the British imperialism. He argued that "only on the stable foundation of Arab-Jew cooperation and elimination of imperialism" the future of Palestine could be secured. These views of Nehru were no doubt the reaction and reflection of the general political background of Asia and particularly India. So it became quite natural that Nehru's approach was meant to fight the imperialist intervention in the region.

The views expressed by both Nehru and Gandhi were identical in character. They had preferred a federal state comprising of the interests of both Arabs and Jews, as they were never prepared to accept the victimisation of one by the other. Both leaders had sympathy for the Jews, but not at the cost of the Palestinians. The partition of Palestine thus brought permanent trouble in West Asia. If Nehru's plan of a federal state would have been accepted, the problem perhaps might have been resolved much earlier.
References

10. Ibid. pp. 763-64.
India and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 - Its Implications and Consequences


21. Ibid. p. 118.


23. N. V. Rajkumar; p. 54.


26. The Jewish National Home in Palestine: Referred to in Hearings, 8, 9, 15, 16 February, 1944, p. 391.


33. Ibid. p. 68.


35. Jawaharlal Nehru; “Letters to the Chief Ministers,” 1950, pp. 127-28