CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST CONFLICT —- THE MIGRATION OF THE ARABS — THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AND THE INDIAN ATTITUDE.

In the words of Fisher, "After world war II the world at large became greatly concerned with affairs of the Middle East. The advent of the State of Israel and the enormous flow of oil focused attention upon the area and emphasized its importance in matters of politics, transportation, communication, religion, culture, markets, military strategy, imperialism, and nationalism. Ships flying the flags of more than fifty different nations passed through the Suez Canal every year. No nation or people could ignore the evolving problems of the Middle East."

With the signing of the last of the armistices between Israel and Syria in July 1949, the Israeli-Arab war had officially come to an end. But the crucial part of it was that these agreement were mere armistices; they did not create a state of peaceful relations between Israel and her Arab neighbours. It was, therefore, not surprising that the years following the signing of the armistices would see the continuation of the Arab-Israeli clashes through devices other than large scale military action that might be characterised as war. The feeling of humiliation and frustration suffered by all the Arab states alike increased the Arab hatred for the new state of Israel. The result was that Israel could not establish normal political and economic relations with the states that surrounded her entire land frontier. This state of isolation encouraging and engendering a feeling of peril and emergency in the country resulted in a research for external support which, in its turn, stood in the way of Israel developing normal

relation with her Arab neighbours. That some of the external support sought by Israel came from powers who themselves were deeply involved in conflict with some of the Middle East Arab states, created further barriers on the path of Israeli-Arab understanding.

"The crusade in support of Zionism, however, had triumphed in Israel in a manner that was not foreseen by even the most optimistic among the Zionist zealots". By the time hostilities had completely ceased, 70 per cent of the area of mandatory Palestine made up Israel's territories inhabited by 759,000 Jews and a non-Jewish population of only approximately 38,000. The state of Israel had been recognized by the United States and the Soviet Union as soon as it was proclaimed. It was admitted to the United Nations soon afterwards. It could, therefore, look forward to the world organisation and the two leading powers for protection against future Arab onslaughts. It was in this way that the Arab wolf could be kept away from its doors. The problems of the new state were primarily those of economic consolidation and viability.

The greatest losers in this conflict were the Palestinian Arabs. Some 52 per cent of the Arab population of mandatory Palestine had become refugees and another 17 per cent were rendered destitute. Of the refugees, some 65 per cent or 280,000 joined the 300,000 residents in that part of Palestine that remained Arab and was joined up with Transjordan. In the cramped Gaza strip occupied by the Egypt 200,000 refugees came to live in extreme distress with the 70,000 indigent Arabs already resident there. Small groups were scattered in other Arab countries. These people had not only lost everything—their lands, their homes, their country—they had no hope of returning to their homes. But since they were turned into refugees, they could not directly redress the situation. Their only

function remains a negative one, namely providing grist to the mill of Arab League's anti-Israel politics and evoking the sympathy of the world due to their pathetically miserable living conditions.

Egypt which was the main belligerent among the Arab countries also turned out to be the main loser. For Jordan which was the second main party in the Arab coalition, defeat was recompensed by territorial gains. But Egypt which might have obtained the Negev retained only the Gaza strip with 200,000 Arab refugees to boot. The only gain historically for Egypt was the revolution in 1952. But in post-revolution Egypt the galling memory of defeat at the hands of the Zionists did not die. On the contrary, the young army leaders of revolutionary Egypt believed that they had been betrayed by the old regime and that, therefore, it was their solemn duty to avenge the defeat. The misery and the hopelessness that marked the lot of the Palestine refugees provided them with the occasion to fulfil their wish to avenge defeat as well as fight for a righteous cause to bring justice to their brother-Arabs of Palestine.

It is an undeniable fact that what the Zionist call the 'State of Israel' is a piece of land, a part of Arab Palestine which was handed over to them by the great powers of the world. It did not belong to them. It is snatched from the Arabs by the use of brute force. The present rulers of the so-called State of Israel have no legal claim over a territory a majority of whose residents is thrown out at the point of bayonets. The partition resolution adopted by the U.N. General Assembly was a violation of the principles of national self-determination and no organization, however, powerful it may be, has no right to decide the fate and future of a people without their consent. In this case the Palestinian Arabs were completely ignored and an alien Government was imposed on them. The partition resolution gave a preferential treatment
to the Zionists because the area handed over to the Jewish State comprised fifty six percent of the total area of Palestine and only half of its inhabitants were Jews who owned less than nine percent of its land area. Also the unilateral proclamation of the establishment of a Zionists State on a land which did belong to the occupants was juridically invalid because the Mandate for Palestine was declared terminated on that day and the status of the country was therefore subject to determination by the minority of its people. Moreover, the provisions of the U.N. resolutions were to come into force two months after the withdrawal of British forces. But the Zionist enclave was brought into being by the use of violence and force. "It was given to the world as fait accompli." 1

Today Israel occupies forth-fifth of the land of Palestine. It is according to international law and to all codes and tenets of justice, an illegal occupation. The establishment of this enclave has uprooted over 1,246,885 Palestinian Arabs who live on doles in tents, camps and barracks. Their land confiscated by the Zionists terrorists and their property looted, their women raped and their kith and kin murdered on the streets. It is the greatest human tragedy which can befall on a group of human beings. The Arabs who are left behind in Israel live as second class citizens and in military camps. The plight of the Arab refugees provoked the distinguished British historian and statesman, Arnold-Toynbee, to comment: "In taking the Palestine Arab's homes and property by force, the Israeli's are sinning not only against their own conscience, in the light of their own people's past experience, but also against the conscience of mankind...........It is a moral tragedy.

that the descendants of the Jewish exiles should have inflicted on the present day Arab population of Palestine the wrong which their own ancestors once suffered. What hope is there for the human nature if we inflict on others the very wrongs that we ourselves have suffered? The experience of having been victims should deter us from victimising our fellow human beings. The present situation in Palestine is tragic but the refugees have not forfeited their rights. They are still the lawful owners of their homes and property. They still have the right to live in their own homes and their own country. Infact they have the same fundamental human rights as every one in the world.

In my belief no attempt to settle the Palestine problem can be permanently successful unless it does justice to the rights of Palestine's Arab inhabitants. I should take to see the greatest possible number of the Palestinian Arab refugees not only to recover their homes and property but return home under a Palestinian Arab Government¹.

The tragedy of the Arabs inside the Palestine has become so unbearable and they present such pathetic of misery that it even provoked the well known Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, to charge his Government that "Israel had imbued her Arab inhabitants with the feeling that they were second rate citizens both by things done to them and things not done".²

India's position on the problem of Arab refugees is clear. Its unequivocal in demanding that they should be given back the possession of their land and property without any conditions. This stand is constant and has been expressed by the Indian Government representatives in the United Nations on more than one occasion. But the refugees problem is

not the only problem the Arabs face because of the Zionist enclave in their midst. The rulers in Tel-Aviv are a constant source of danger to the Arab countries.

Since the Palestinian refugees forcibly evicted from their country have a distinct political personality of their own, and are determined to get back the land from which they have been dispossessed, the question of exploiting them for political reasons by any of the Arab States does not arise at all. Dr. Davies, the former Director of the United Nations Works and Relief Agency for the Palestinian Refugees, while contradicting charges of political exploitation by the Arab Governments, said in a speech delivered before the Conference of voluntary agencies in Geneva on 18 January 1961: "The Palestine refugees problem has defied political solution, not because of alleged whims of Arab politicians or the reputed shiftless nature of the refugees, but because of depth and universality of the conflict between Arabs and Israeles". He also said that Arab Governments had been most generous in making of every possible contribution to the welfare of the Arab refugees.

Thus, it should be clearly borne in mind that the position of Arab Government vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugees is like that of a brother offering help and hospitality to another brother who has been illegally dispossessed of his home and hearth by some outside intruders. Obviously, the dispossessed brother would not like to become a permanent liability on the brother who has given him shelter, and would remain eager to explore all possible means for regaining his property. Similarly the Arab refugees abhor possibility of renouncing their just claims to their own land and being absorbed somewhere else, as that would put a seal of approval on the heinous crimes the Zionists have committed against them.
The Arab States, have on every occasion, declared at the United Nations willingness to resettle in their countries those refugees who wish to be settled after they have signified their choice between repatriation and resettlement, in accordance with the U.N. resolutions. As far back as 1955, Ambassador Kamil Abdul Rahim, speaking in the General Assembly on behalf of the Arab states, said, "The Arab countries would be quite prepared to welcome all those who preferred to stay out of Israel, but they had no power over the overwhelming majority of refugees who want to go back". The position of Arab States remains unaltered.

The question of Arab States ability to absorb them or the vast land resources of Arabs compared to the Israelis is not entirely irrelevant, but also completely illogical. The suggestion that since Arabs have larger land as compared to the Israeli, they should rehabilitate the Arab refugees amongst themselves, is like asking a man who has been forcibly thrown out of his house, that since his brother has a much bigger house than the one the robber has occupied, he has no right to claim his own house back.

The treatment Israel offers to over a quarter of a million of Christian and Muslim Arabs marooned in Israel is a shocking example of the worst type of religious and racial discrimination prescribed anywhere in the world, compared to this even the policy of apartheid in South Africa would seem lenient and humane. There have been numerous state laws written in the Statute Book of Israel which have virtually reduced the position of Arab citizens as third class subjects, the first class being the European Jews, followed by the non European Jews. Arabs are not allowed to move about freely in any part of Israel and cannot go out of the country.

Reminiscent of the notorious apartheid practice in certain towns of
South Africa the Arabs have to carry identity cards with the letter 'B' written on them indicating their lower status. For travel to any area outside their municipal limit, Arabs are obliged to obtain a special permission from military authorities. Quite often this permission has been refused point blank even in the case of a dying patient who had to be carried to a hospital outside the prescribed limits. Numerous such instances have been cited by even Jews writers travelling in Israel and have also been reported and taken note of by various organisations of the United Nations.

There are thousands of Arabs considered as absentees because they moved from their area of residence to another in Israel. Their property was confiscated and put at the disposal of the guardian of enemy property. Whenever new immigrants arrive in Israel, the Arabs are evacuated from their homes under any pretence in order to accommodate the new immigrants. Israel also forces the Arab people to emigrate from Israel. Article 101 of the Emergency Regulations empowers the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army to arrest for one year any Arab without giving reasons of such an act.

There is no other country in the world where a section of its population is legally singled out for a discriminatory treatment merely because its religion happens to be different from the one professed by its rulers. In Israel, Arabs belonging both the Christian and Muslim faiths, have been officially subjected to various regulations of Matrrial Law since 1948 which have rendered their status even less than that of third class citizens. This is perhaps the Israeli concept of socialism in action.

Arabs cannot get jobs in important Government departments such as the police and the Foreign service. Arabs are prevented from forming their
own political parties and are prohibited from making any contacts with the outside world, which the authorities may consider of "an important political nature". They can neither go to meet their friends and relations across the borders nor are they permitted to come back to their country once they leave the land. The most shameful aspect of all such restrictions is the fact that they form a part of all official laws and regulations.

On the question of international justice and the rights of the Arabs on their territory, India is irrevocably and plainly with the aggrieved party, that is, the Arabs. The Indian Government supports the Arabs' right over the water of river Jordan which Israel has been attempting to divert to make the desert bloom. Jordan is an international river and a single drop of its water cannot be taken without the consent of riparian countries. When Israel declared that it would not discontinue its schemes of diverting the course of river Jordan despite Arab protests, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru met the Arab Ambassadors in New Delhi and assured them of India's support on the issue. He had the support of the whole country on this fraternal assurance to the Arabs. Indian newspapers and intellectuals felt equally strongly on this issue. A typical example of the Indian resentment against the Israeli intransigence was a long letter by India's former Ambassador to Iran, a distinguished historian and President of the Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity, Dr. Tara Chand. His statement needs to be quoted in full because of its clarity and deep understanding of the problem.

"An alarming situation has arise as a result of the announcement made by Israel that the water of the Jordan river would be diverted from their normal course for use in Israel territory. Evidently this development may lead to far reaching consequences and requires the immediate attention of the people of India."

"The Israeli Government plans to begin the operation early in 1964."
They aim at irrigating the Negaf desert area at the expense of the Arabs by diverting the waters of the Jordan and its tributaries which rise in Syria and Lebanon, and which are of vital importance to the economy of these countries. The result will be that while the greater portion of the waters flow through the Arab lands, the unilateral action of Israel will deprive the Arabs of a considerable portion of their share.

"The Jordan is an international river. The principle of international law lay down firstly, that no country should attempt to direct a water course so as to cause harm to other countries, and secondly, that the right of a state on that part of a waterway which runs inside its territory is not an absolute one, but is subject to the right of other countries through which the same water course runs."

"It is obvious that the plan of the Israeli Government to disturb the recent utilization of the Jordan waters in defiance of Arab wishes will not only be flagrant violation of the decisions of the Syrian Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission forbidding Israel from proceeding on any activity of diverting Jordan river water in the demilitarised zone but also set at naught international laws and conventions as embodied in agreements and treaties and judgements of International Court of Arbitration. This attempt to take law into their own hands, despite the principle recognized internationally and supported by the U.N. threatens to create crisis which may affect the peace of the world.

"It is, therefore, incumbent on all those who believe in the principle of peaceful solution of international disputes to prevent the Israeli Government from unilateral action to divert the Jordan waters and thereby to cause hardship to the Arab nation.

"It is the primary responsibility of the United Nations to intervene
immediately so that no ugly situation fraught with dangerous consequences may develop. The India Association for Afro-Asian solidarity is of the opinion that the threat of Israel to divert the Jordan waters furnishes a just cause for Arabs grievances and resentment and we appeal to the Government of Israel to desist from a course which may lead to war and bloodshed. 1.

Dr. Tara Chand mirrored the feelings of his Fellow Indians when he expressed his views in such a cogent and clear manner. What is needed is not a study of the picture portrayed by Israel's slip propagandists inside and outside India but a realistic appraisal of what actually Israel is. The Arabs say that it constitutes the greatest danger to their territorial integrity, peace and prosperity. That their fears are not absolutely baseless or imaginary is proved by the ominous postures of Israel.

India and its national leaders resolutely opposed the Zionist Philosophy as a matter of principle. Their antipath towards Zionism was reflected in the official statement of the Indian National Congress and after independence in the attitude of the Government of India. It would be a gross mistake to presume that this policy was formulated to ingratiate the Indian Muslims or to appease the Arabs. The Indian National movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and his disciple Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru cherished certain principles which were close to the heart of every conscious Indian. One of them was the separation of religion from nationalism. The foundations of a secular India are laid on this principle.

This is the origin of Gandhiji's aversion to Zionism. Zionism seeks to instil a sense of separateness in the Jews and expects from them to be

1. Dr. Tara Chand, Indian Express - 9 January 1964.
loyal only to Israel irrespective of their citizenship. The ultimate
destination of every Jew according to Zionist doctrine, is Israel. Mahatma
Gandhi's rejection of Zionism was categoric since he refused to be pressuris-
ed into accepting it as a basis of nation-state. When his old associate
from South Africa, Hermann Kallenbach who was a dedicated Zionist approached
him in 1937 to entice him in approving the Zionist doctrine, Gandhiji
politely but firmly refused to accept Kallenbach's arguments. Gandhiji
mirrored the feeling of India and what he said twenty-eight years ago on
the sinister effects of Zionist doctrine still holds water and is imbibed
in the official policy of the Government of India.

But Gandhiji's were not the astray misgivings. He had a thorough study
of the ramification of a transplanted society in Palestine and would not
budge an inch from his earlier stand despite unceasing efforts by the
apologists of Zionism including British Member of Parliament, Sidney
Silverman, and the American author and his personal friend, Louis Fischer.
His replies to them were similar at what he had told to Kallenbach. On the
eve of Palestine tragedy he was more convinced of the grievous wrong done
to the Arabs and wrote a long article in August 1947 in Harijan expressing
his moral support to the helpless Palestindans who were being uprooted
from their homes and fields.

Gandhiji/hurt when he was told that the Zionist lobby has given
a new twist to his convictions against the Zionist antics. The international
Zionist magnates especially in Britain and the United States came out with
a startling classification of his pronouncements. They said that Gandhiji
was opposing the Zionist moves because he wanted to please Indian Muslims
some of whom are his close associates. He did not let the lie spread and came
out with a stronger statement. "I have said often", he wrote, "that
I would not sell truth for the sake of India's deliverance. Much less I
would do so for winning Muslim friendship". But the Zionist lobby was

not silenced and even now its functionaries hold to the same erroneous views. This has harmed the Zionists themselves.

But Gandhiji was not alone in his condemnation of Zionist. As has been mentioned earlier, the Indian National Congress held similar views and expressed them publicly whenever the issue came up. One of the main reasons of mutual understanding between the Indian leaders and the Arab nationalists was their common aversion to the religion being used as a means to achieve political ends. The Egyptian political leader, Mr. Saad Zaghlul and Gandhiji had intellectually come very close to each other because of their secular approach to national politics. It was because of their secular outlook, that Indian National leaders never reconciled to the transplantation of a Zionist enclave in Palestine. The National Congress which is now a ruling party adheres to its earlier declarations since it has inherited the glorious past, of a secular outlook and humanistic anti-imperialist and anti-colonial approach. The plea that the Jews have no state and are therefore, entitled to a homeland does not fail to carry conviction with the leaders who control the Government. The argument of a historical reality or a political fate-accompli also does not appeal to the Indian Government as it would amount to the acceptance of a very dangerous principle and open a floodgate of justifications for all the imperialist-cum-colonial powers to maintain their hegemony over the economically backward, politically unstable and militarily weak nations. The argument that the Jews have conquered it, colonised, and developed it and are therefore the rightful owners of the Palestinian lands is also wide of the mark. The right of a people to own their lands is imprescriptible and no coup d'état or International power politics can snatch away this right. If the western powers had a soft corner for the persecuted Jews they should have offered some chunks from
their own territories and helped them in establishing their states there. The demonstration of their philanthropic and altruistic attitudes by rehabilitating them on other peoples' soil has never appealed to Indian leadership. It sets a very dangerous precedent and if allowed to go unchallenged, it may have very dire consequences and might upset all the political arrangements based on the principles of international law, or decent international behaviour. The Indian leadership, by and large, has therefore not reconciled itself with the establishment of Israel and consequently the Indian Government has not recognised the state of Israel so far.