Chapter II
REPUBLIC WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH

The sovereignty of the British Crown over India came to be legally and finally terminated on 26 January 1950 with the enforcement of India's Republican Constitution. India had used her freedom to become a republic and decided to continue her membership of the Commonwealth of Nations. It was a major event in the country's political life. As Prime Minister Nehru had explained, the Republic of India has nothing to do with England, constitutionally or legally. It is highly significant that there is no mention at all in the Constitution of India's relationship with the Commonwealth. This is witness to India's 'manifest destiny' of having taken the road of independent political development. Well might Nehru say that 'we are freer today to come to friendly understandings with other countries and to play the part .... of a bridge for the mutual understanding of other countries'.

It was the London Declaration of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting which laid down the basis of republican India's continued membership of the Commonwealth. After reciting that India was to become a sovereign independent republic, the Declaration recorded: 'The Government of India have .... declared and affirmed India's desire to continue her full membership of the Commonwealth of Nations and her acceptance of The King as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such the Head of the Commonwealth'. The other countries of the Commonwealth, 'the basis of whose membership of the Commonwealth is not hereby changed', accepted and recognized 'India's continuing membership in accordance with the terms of this declaration'. Finally, all Commonwealth countries declared that they 'remain united as free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely co-operating in the
pursuit of peace, liberty and progress'.

Nehru felt called upon to use all his moving eloquence and undoubted debating skill to carry the Constituent Assembly with him in ratifying the Commonwealth decision. As he said, the document was of great historic significance and that while in London, 'in a sense the future of India for the moment was in my keeping'.

The occasion was indeed a momentous one in the background of all that happened in the sphere of Indo-British relations during the Empire phase of the Commonwealth. It is of course true that in the eyes of its members, the Commonwealth forms a single community, recognizing unity in diversity. It is also a fact that India became involved in the Commonwealth partnership through the instrumentality of her bilateral relationship with Britain. When the time for decision came, the memories of the freedom struggle were bound to be revived. Till freedom came, severance of the British connection had been insisted year after year for seventeen years. With this mandate from the people, Nehru could write in 1936 that there were few 'natural links' between India and England and that 'there is a historical and ever-growing hostility between them'. He also ridiculed the idea that India might develop into 'a free dominion of the British group of nations like Canada and Australia. That seems to be a fantastic idea ....'.

It was left to Nehru himself to recognize the change, indeed a radical transformation of the situation, that had come after India attained freedom. During the debate in the Constituent Assembly on India's decision to remain in the Commonwealth, members quoted Nehru's speeches and writings to show how the Commonwealth connection would not be conducive to India's interests. Maintaining that evil still remained an evil, and that such evil things as imperialism, colonialism and racialism had certainly to be fought,
Mehru asserted that change was the essence of the situation; the world had changed, so had England and India. The change had come basically due to the manner of granting freedom to India. Further, it was not the antiquated form of dominion status as far as India was concerned: the very title of the Indian Independence Act showed that in the changed circumstances, the status India attained in 1947 was in fact independence. As M.S. Rajan put it, 'when the British official attitude to India's demand for freedom changed, Indian nationalist dislike of any continued association with Britain and the Commonwealth was equally transformed into a positive desire to continue that association, partly as a gesture of India’s goodwill towards the former imperial power.' Geoffrey Tyson remarks that absence of any 'grudging reservations' on the British side and lack of any 'vindictiveness' on the Indian side, and indeed, expression of 'much generosity' led to the recognition that 'the close connexion with Britain could be continued in a new form compatible with political independence' on a mutually advantageous basis. To it should be added the actual experience of the working of Indo-British relations after 15 August 1947: the imprisoned leaders of yesterday found on the morrow of independence that a complete reorientation had in fact taken place in Britain's attitude towards India: this was to promote friendly relations between the two countries.

While feelings at the official level were undoubtedly friendly, certain misgivings were there in the popular mind about the nomenclature of the Commonwealth, associated as it was with the colonial and imperial phases of its growth. In order to assuage popular misapprehension, Nehru had to remind the Constituent Assembly that while in the first paragraph of the London Declaration the reference is to the British Commonwealth of Nations, in the
subsequent paragraphs it is referred to only as the Commonwealth
of Nations or simply, the Commonwealth. It was a significant decla-
ration and a meaningful explanation in the background of Winston
Churchill's diatribe, a few months before the London Declaration,
hurled at the so-called 'race of degenerate intellectuals' who
dared to drop the words like 'British', 'Dominion', and 'Empire'
and put instead the words 'My Commonwealth' into the King's Speech
of 26 October 1948. The British statesman in a party spirit declared
from the Opposition Benches that the Conservative Party would
"resist any attempt to destroy the expression 'British Empire' or
to abandon the constitutional term 'Dominion', or to abolish the
word 'British' from our collective designation". Churchill even
charged the Labour Government with encouraging suppression of his
favourite terms for the sake of placating the Irish leader J.A.
Costello and India's Pandit Nehru. Further, he demanded the use of
what he called the comprehensive expression : 'British Empire and
Commonwealth of Nations'. However, it stands to Churchill's credit
that he expressed his pleasure 'that the institution of monarchy
did not become a barrier to the inclusion of India' as a republic
in the Commonwealth, although he took care to point out that he
did not in any way retract or regret the views he had expressed
over so many years. Be that as it might be, it was from the time
of the London Declaration of 1949 that the term Commonwealth had
come to be commonly used in the vocabulary of post-war Commonwealth
relations. Clearly a new Commonwealth was emerging in response to
the challenge of local nationalism.

We have to turn to Nehru's speeches, in the main, for a clear
understanding of the reasons why India had chosen to remain inside
the Commonwealth after she decided to become a republic. Nehru ex-
plained that 'guided and controlled' as he was by all the past
pledges of the national movement, he was 'ultimately guided and controlled' by the Objectives Resolution passed by the Constituent Assembly in 1947 and also by the mandate given to him by the Jaipur resolution of the Congress in 1948.18 The Jaipur resolution meant that the establishment of the Republic of India would give her an enhanced status and as such it held that 'her present association with the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Nations will necessarily have to change'. Further it said: 'India, however, desires to maintain all such links with other countries as do not come in the way of her freedom of action and independence and the Congress would welcome her free association with the independent nations of the Commonwealth for their commonweal and the promotion of world peace'. According to Nehru, the last few lines of this Jaipur resolution are almost identical with the lines of the London Declaration.19

About seven weeks before the London Declaration, Nehru told the Constituent Assembly that it was only in terms of independent nations co-operating together that India's relationship with the Commonwealth could be considered.20 After the London Declaration, he made the following important points in a number of speeches in favour of the Commonwealth link:

(a) It augurs well for the future that the 'old conflict between India and England' has been resolved in this friendly and honourable way.

(b) Apart from what has been set forth in the Declaration, nothing has been done in secret and no commitments of any kind limiting India's sovereignty or her internal or external policy have been made, 'whether in the political or economic or military spheres'. Further, 'apart from certain friendly approaches to one another,
apart from a desire to co-operate, which will always be conditioned by each party deciding on the measure of co-operation and following its own policy, there is no obligation in the nature of commitments.

(c) The keystone of India's foreign policy - peace and friendship with all countries, avoiding alignments with power blocs, freedom for suppressed nationalities and elimination of racial discrimination - still remains. Nehru declared his conviction that the Sovereign Indian Republic in free association with other Commonwealth countries 'will be completely free to follow this policy, perhaps in an even greater measure and with greater influence than before'.

(d) Although the King has been recognized as the symbolic Head of the Commonwealth, the King has no function attached to that status in the Commonwealth. As far as the Republic of India is concerned, she owes no allegiance to the King or any other external authority. India by becoming a Republic 'goes outside the Crown area completely'.

(e) The Commonwealth is neither a super-State nor it could be considered as a superior body. As a sovereign and independent nation, India is not prepared 'even to bring dispute between member nations of the Commonwealth before the Commonwealth body'.

(f) 'It is an agreement by free will, to be terminated by free will'. Nehru said he did not want the link to be broken, but that he was merely stating that the decision did not bind the future down 'in the slightest'.

(g) India joins the Commonwealth for the obvious reason that
it is considered beneficial to her and to certain causes in the world that she wishes to advance.

(h) The Commonwealth does not stand in the way of India's co-operation and friendship with other countries.

(i) There are 'certain entirely practical considerations' for which India joins the Commonwealth. British contact has largely influenced India's educational, legal, military and economic apparatus. India fought against evil contacts, but still many contacts, 'good or bad, irrespective of what they may be, are there'. Further, 'if we break away completely, the result is that without making sufficient provision for carrying on in a different way, we have a period of gap'. In the face of India's many economic difficulties, the Commonwealth connection will be advantageous to India for securing necessary external help.

(j) 'If we dissociate ourselves completely from the Commonwealth, then for the moment we are completely isolated. We cannot remain completely isolated, and so inevitably by stress of circumstances, we have to incline in some direction or other'.

(k) India is joining the Commonwealth because in this strife-torn world it is not advantageous to break up a co-operative association. It is necessary to touch upon the world problems 'in a friendly way and with a touch of healing'. It was India's privilege in the past to have been a meeting place for many cultures. 'It may be her privilege in the present and the future to be a bridge to join warring factions and to help in maintaining that most urgent thing of today and the future - the peace of the world'.

On the basis of concrete experience of the working of India's relationship with the Commonwealth, Nehru could claim another advantage for it in 1955. It was that while India could be
influenced by other countries, she also could influence other countries and had done so to a remarkable extent in the past few years. By the force of example India had opportunities of influencing developments in Asia and Africa. The European character of the Commonwealth already changed with the membership of Asian countries: the likely addition of African countries to change the character of the association still further. Still another advantage was that the Commonwealth connection helped the overseas Indians in the matter of citizenship rights on the basis of reciprocity.25

According to Guy Arnold, the bonds uniting the Commonwealth are: the symbolic position of the Head of the Commonwealth, the close habit of consultation and co-operation, trade, the defence liaison, British law and justice, British parliamentary system and the bonds of language.26 A close analysis of Nehru's justification of the Commonwealth link shows that almost all these elements of Commonwealth relations were stressed with varying emphasis as reasons for India joining the Commonwealth. India joined the Commonwealth because her leaders thought that on the threshold of a new career the Commonwealth link was useful in a very real, material and economic sense and otherwise. Gledhill suggests that 'it was past associations, community of economic and strategic interests, community of political faith, and the fear of isolation which induced India to remain in the Commonwealth, though by doing so she prejudiced the possibility of accommodation with Russia and China, and made her economic development partly dependent on sterling. The other Commonwealth countries felt the need of India's friendship in the struggle against Communism'.27 It is necessary to examine certain of these assertions in the light of India's interests in the issues involved.
On Nehru's own admission fear of diplomatic isolation was an important reason for India's membership of the Commonwealth. At the time of the Republic's membership of the Commonwealth, the 'Cold War' madness was in full swing almost on a cosmic scale and Britain continued as a leading member of the Western bloc. The members of the Western bloc seemed to regard the fight against Communism in the name of democracy as almost a self-evident truth. At home the Government of India during 1948-50 severely dealt with the armed struggle of the Telengana peasantry and suppressed Communist activities in a number of States. All this lent colour to the belief that by associating herself with the Commonwealth, India was joining the Western bloc against 'international Communism'. But this is not a correct appreciation of the situation. As Nehru explained, 'those who think only in terms of Communism and anti-Communism are going hopelessly astray and will never reach any goal. The difficulty is that much of the thinking - not so much here as elsewhere - revolves round these words'. At the same time Nehru made a very categorical statement that 'we do hardly anything without consulting the countries of the Commonwealth', although he said that preserving independence of action, India was also in close touch with the U.S.A. and with other countries. The correct view seems to be that at the time of the Commonwealth decision, India was more inclined to the Western bloc via the Commonwealth of Nations. A scholar has remarked that in associating herself with the Commonwealth, India has shown her complete rejection of 'the Communist bloc's contention that England was one of the leaders of an aggressive bloc of nations'. This only shows that India's reasons for continuing her membership were free from any cold war ideological overtones. In fact, Nehru reasoned that it was easier for India to develop closer relations with other countries while
she remained in the Commonwealth than it might have been otherwise. She did not join the Commonwealth to be utilised for any possible anti-Communist purposes by Commonwealth members interested in the issue. The very flexibility of the Commonwealth association precluded any rigid bloc attitude of power politics. Membership did not mean acceptance of the policies as such of each individual nation in the Commonwealth: even while a Dominion, India fought against the apartheid policies of the South African regime. There is no distinctive Commonwealth policy as such on important issues of world politics. Judged from this standpoint, India's continuation of the membership did not involve any violation of her declared policy of non-alignment. But it is possible to agree with J.D.B. Miller: 'India's membership of the Commonwealth gave her not only access to Washington through the London relay but also easier access to Britain herself than might otherwise have been the case'.

About the community of economic interests, suffice it to say at this stage that Britain's position as the biggest importer of India's products, the highest foreign investor in the Indian market, and the problem of sterling balances called for recognition of the economic necessity of continuing the association with Britain and the Commonwealth.

About the community of political faith, parliamentary democracy which India also had adopted certainly produced certain identity of interests. Aside from this, Nehru had given a very novel interpretation of the influence of the English language. He said that he had no doubt that 'it is the English language more than anything else that ties us to the Anglo-American bloc ... It brings us nearer to their thoughts, their activities, their books, newspapers, cultural standards and so on, whereas we are
cut off from those parts of the world with which we have no linguistic ties.\textsuperscript{33} He expressed the hope that even after the country began using her own language, English would remain after that because it was a great language. Further he made the point that India had decided to keep many ties inherited from the British till the country was able to change them if she so desired.

One such inherited tie was in the field of defence. K.M. Panikkar advanced the thesis that as Britain had major interests in the Indian Ocean area and because India could not by herself undertake defence responsibilities in that area, 'the defence of the Indian Ocean must be a joint effort of India and Britain'.\textsuperscript{34} According to a scholar, India's membership of the Commonwealth has been influenced by the fact that Britain possesses a chain of developed bases in the Indian Ocean which remained a factor for the continental defence of India.\textsuperscript{35} Throughout the period of our study, India depended heavily on British training facilities, equipment, and assistance;\textsuperscript{36} she also enjoyed facilities like the opportunity of carrying out naval manoeuvres with the Royal Navy. When asked in the Lok Sabha in 1952 as to why the Indian Commander-in-Chief should have had to go to London, Nehru asserted that as the Indian Army was built on the British model and India maintained a very big department in London for military stores - sometimes supplies came through the good offices of the British War Office - the Commander-in-Chief was required to go out to look into these things.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, advantages secured in the field of defence certainly constituted a factor influencing India's membership of the Commonwealth.

Defence is a very sensitive field and defence secrets are rarely shared even among the best friends. How then India's national security and independence of action were expected to be reconciled with the defence mechanism of the Commonwealth of
Nations? The answer lies in the fact that the nature of the post-war Commonwealth and the emerging different foreign policies of its member nations do not call for the pursuit of any unified defence policy. Defence liaison is maintained through periodical conferences held at the instance of the British Services at which senior officers from Commonwealth countries meet for the purpose of exchanging views. Further, in appropriate cases, cooperation also takes the form of combined exercises, joint research organisations, the exchange of personnel and training facilities and arrangements for the joint use of geographically suitable areas for training and weapon-testing.38

The foregoing analysis shows that the Republic decided to continue in the Commonwealth for a variety of practical considerations and also for the inherited emotional ties with Britain. Additional advantages39 were expected to be derived from such an association. The advantages were further reinforced by the belief that India would derive no disadvantage at all from such an association. Above everything else, it was the spirit of friendship, mutual goodwill and, be it added, generosity that influenced India's decision in 1950. In the background of past hostility to the Empire, it was a sort of catharsis. As Nicholas Mansergh put it: 'In the last resort, it was the nature of the Commonwealth and more especially of the Indo-British relationship that determined the issue'.40

It proved highly significant that India with her stature, size, population and potential resources should have decided to continue in the Commonwealth. One might as well say that the year 1950 is a turning point in the history of India, of Britain, and of the Commonwealth. There is a remarkable agreement among scholars of Commonwealth studies that republican India's decision to
continue in the Commonwealth influenced the other Asian and African members in the wake of decolonisation to follow the Indian example and thus contribute toward the growth of the new Commonwealth, a multi-racial Commonwealth.

When India was not yet a republic, Nehru pointed out that India was growing into a 'great giant again'. The appearance of India on the stage of world affairs was an event of great historic significance. Despite her military weakness she was destined to play a very important role in international politics. Without arrogating to herself the role of a leader of this or that group, a potentially great nation like India was bound to count in world affairs. Gone was the age when the world was seen through the window of Europe only, gone was also the age of isolationism of the Western Hemisphere. The emergence of Afro-Asia in the world arena brought a new dimension to world politics. How did India acquit herself in her new role? Did republican India, associated as she was with the Commonwealth, merely pursue a British-oriented or, for that matter, a Commonwealth-oriented foreign policy? Beset as she was with major disputes with two Commonwealth countries, Pakistan and South Africa, how did India use her British connection and the Commonwealth link to advance the cause of peace in the world, a professed ideal while justifying the Commonwealth link? How could she provide the bridge of understanding between warring blocs? Did the Commonwealth connection inhibit her from taking the initiative in moments of international crises for helping others to co-operate?

In short, while maintaining the special ties with Britain, what was the world image India had created of herself during the period of our survey? An answer would depend on an examination of the essentials of Indian and British foreign policies and outlooks, and a study of specific issues arising in or having impact on Indo-British relations.