CHAPTER II

THE WAR: INITIAL INDO-U.S. INTERACTIONS

The outbreak of Second World War in Europe gripped India's attention. Indian problem became a part of the world problem. Neither could be considered fully or understood apart from the other. Whether the war or out of it, India's future depended on its outcome.

What happened in India, therefore, naturally attracted attention in the United States. Jawaharlal Nehru in an article in the Atlantic Monthly, "India's Demand and England's Answer" clearly pointed out "their great material resources and dominating position in the world, have cast this burden on them today, but even more so has this responsibility been cast upon them because of their leadership of the forces of Democracy. If in the words of President Roosevelt, the American people are going to keep ablaze the flames of human liberty, reason, democracy and fair play, they will have to throw their weight on the side of liberty and democracy in other parts of the world also, so that out of present day chaos and violence real peace and freedom may emerge".

1Nehru, Jawaharlal, "India's Demand and England's Answer", The Atlantic Monthly, April 4, 1940, pp. 449-455.
The United States' critical attitude towards British relations with India derived not from India herself but from the very pattern of American nationalism. Besides idealistic and moralistic consideration, United States could perceive that doing nothing could have unfavourable repercussions, both on the general war effort and on Americans.

The United States became aware that India afforded the only base for offensive action by land against the Japanese. Both India's Western and Eastern sea boards had fine harbours from which the Middle East and the Far East were each equidistant from their main land and could be easily reached by ocean-going ships. India was placed in the position of being able to despatch reinforcements, supplies and stores to various strategic points, or to theatres of war situated either to East or to West. She could act as a supply centre from Egypt to Malaya, she

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Bajpai, Girja S., "India and Invasion", Roosevelt Papers, June 3rd, 1942, pp.177-178.
could take the supply of raw materials and manufactured articles alike throughout the Indian Ocean and Red Sea littorals, setting free Britain's resources, especially shipping for use in other vital directions.\textsuperscript{5}

In the First World War, India had despatched to the various fronts equipment and stores to the value of some £80,000,000 sterling in addition to vast quantities of raw and semi-manufactured articles, since then her output of raw products and semi-manufactured articles had greatly expanded.\textsuperscript{6}

India had a standing army of 1,50,000 but this could be multiplied indefinitely from the warlike sections. India had one of the greatest iron-ore fields in the world, with conservatively estimated reserves of more than 3,000,000 tons, averaging more than 60 per cent of the iron content. Her coal resources ranged from thirty-six billion to seventy-seven billion tons. She possessed large quantities of bauxite, manganese, chromite, mica and other minerals and crude elements upon which industry depended. Her potential hydroelectrical power was second only to that of United States, though she used only 3 per cent of it. She was the

\textsuperscript{5} Indian Review, Vol. X, No.4, April, 1940, p.241.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
world's second largest cotton producer. India had almost a monopoly of jute production. She once grew the most tobacco, could rival the world in the production of sugar cane, had vast forests and wheat and rice fields, tea, linseed, rubber, coffee, indigo, maize, barley, castor seed. She was leading producer of hides and skins, tanning materials, turpentine and bamboo pulp. It was estimated that before the war, under imperial preference tariffs, 7.2 per cent of the United Kingdom exports went to India, and 34 per cent of India's exports with far less favourable tariffs went in the turn to the United Kingdom. 7

Some of the Indians suspected the United States of having not a purely military interest in India. An important section representing big interest mainly concentrated in Wall Street seemed to be stirred by new dreams and new ambitions. They saw the British Empire on the decline, "What is more natural than that America should share some of the plums England could not longer keep in her basket?" Their statesman spoke in great prophetic tones, "The mantle of responsibility has descended on our shoulders and we must assume it as our supreme duty". 8

The United States lived too much in the present not to realise that such empires had no place in the world of tomorrow, but they dreamt of an empire of finance and commerce. The British dominions were being drawn more and more into the United States economic orbit. Henry Grady's visit to India to include her in the Eastern Economic Plan of United States seemed to be important, but not surprising in view of the increasing dependence of England on American co-operation in the East. The probable use of the British Eastern bases by United States was also a matter to be considered.\(^9\)

Under the circumstances it was natural that the United States should be sensitive to all the implications of aid to Britain, her war aims, her present policies and commitments, her past follies. United States could well understand the paradox India found herself in. She was plunged into war to defend a democracy, which she herself had not achieved. Indians had been thoroughly disillusioned with British promises.

Mahatma Gandhi asked for a clear statement of British war aims in relation to democracy and imperialism: \(^9\)

\[\text{Gandhiji said,} \text{"The question is will Great Britain have an unwilling India dragged into war, or a willing ally co-}\]

\(^9\text{Ibid.}\)
operating with her in the prosecution of the defence of true democracy".  

The National Congress, committed to independent dominion status, governed eight of the eleven Indian provinces and exercised a widening influence among the smaller states. A resolution of the Indian National Congress demanding a definition of British war aims precipitated the spreading crisis. 

The Congress Working Committee in its Allahabad meeting of November 19, 1939 came to the conclusion that the war, like the World War of 1914-18, was being carried on for imperialistic ends and British imperialism was to remain entrenched in India. With such a war and with such a policy the Congress could not associate itself. It could not countenance the exploitation of India's resources to this end. The raising of the communal issue and that of the States by British Government was irrelevant to the main issue.  

10 The New York Times, September 17, 1939, p. 44.  
Instead of making a generous gesture designed to win Indian support, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, responded with the view that Dominion Status would be considered only after the war. On the question of general British war aims, the Viceroy could only offer the feeble comment that His Majesty's Government had not "themselves defined their objectives in the prosecution of the war".\textsuperscript{13}

Linlithgow highlighted the communal differences as being a hindrance to any settlement. He declared that he had had discussions with Gandhi, with the President and Members of the Congress Working Committee, with M.A. Jinnah, with representative members of the Muslim League Organization, and with the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes. As was to be expected, conversation with representatives of different sections revealed marked differences of outlook, markedly different demands, and marked different solutions for the problems that lay before them. Reservations or demands for special protection on one side had tended to be balanced by proposals for still more constitutional changes on the other.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} All India Congress Committee Papers, File No.46, Serial No.29, 1939, pp.3-6. (Unpublished Documents, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, Delhi).

\textsuperscript{14} All India Congress Committee Papers, File No.46, Serial No.29, 1939, pp.1-2, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, Delhi.
Gandhiji vainly sought for weeks some sign from the British Government which would assure his "humanitarian" heart that the allies were fighting to defend democracy—a democracy that would embrace even India. Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out that the British Government was shifting public attention from the political to the communal. The problem which had assumed importance since the war was a purely political one—the freedom of India and the right of her people to frame their constitution. The British Government, however, sought shelter in communal difficulties and made the agreement of certain reactionary communal groups and minorities a prerequisite for any further consideration of the political problem.

However, speaking in the House of Lords, the Marquess of Zetland, Secretary of State for India, was even more blunt: "It is really not practicable, nor do I believe it would be in the true interest of the Indian people themselves, at a time when we are all labouring under the strain and stresses of a life and death struggle, to embark upon a task of immense complexity and one which would inevitably give rise to no little controversy in India.

15 Shridharani, K., "Is This India's Chance", The New Republic, Vol.101, November 15, 1939, pp.110-111.
He then asked the Indians to strive after agreement among themselves before appealing for independence. The effect of this statement on the moderate Gandhi indicates the depth to which the barb penetrated. He characterized the declaration as a manifestation of the traditional British policy of divide and rule, and asserted that it showed clearly that there would be no democracy for India if Britain could prevent it.\(^1\)

Jinnah encouraged by the British attitude invited Gandhi to a private conference to discuss the partition of India into Muslim and Hindu states. In an interview Jinnah declared that it was useless to criticize Great Britain for being slow in granting independence to India if the leaders of the different Indian movements did not present logical and practical plans. "I am anxious to meet Gandhji soon and discuss plans for two India's - Muslim and Hindu - which are as unlike as Germany and France. They are even more unlike because of the different peoples, religions and social order."\(^1\)

\(^1\)The Nation, October 28, 1939, p. 457.

\(^1\)Brailsford, H.N., "India in the War", The New Republic, November 22, 1939, pp.133-135.

\(^1\)The New York Times, April 1, 1940, p. 12.
In the United States, India drew the sympathy of the Americans. In an article in the Nation, "Trouble ahead in India", it was clearly stated "American public opinion is on the side of Great Britain, but there is little sympathy here for Britain's Indian policy". The New Republic spoke for India in the following words. "It was not that their sympathies were divided. Their passion is to win full democratic freedom. They have no inclination to fascism in any form. They have the best reasons for hating the Nazi doctrine of race, besides, their nationalism, rendered them peculiarly sympathetic to Poland. They wished to give their unstinted support to the western democracies in their struggle against an evil principle. But their self respect had been touched. Unfree themselves were they to fight at England's bidding to win freedom for others.".

Meanwhile the National Congress Ministries governing eight of the eleven provinces of British India resigned in protest against Great Britain's unilateral dragging of India in the war.

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20 The Nation, October 28, 1939, p. 457.

Criticism of the British attitude towards India broke out in the United States. A section of the political minded people kept up the constant cry "What about India?" Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru won great admiration from the public. Nehru's autobiography weighed the scales heavily in India's favour. In the United States impression gained ground that a movement headed by such leaders must surely be responsible and popular.22

The New Republic exclaimed the present policy of the British Government seems unstatesmanlike to the last degree. At a moment when Britain's chance of winning the war appears smaller than ever in the past, when she desperately needs the good opinion of neutral nations and specially the United States, she seemingly goes out of her way to demonstrate that this is not a war for democracy but for empire.23 Sir Hugh O'Neill sounded as though he was deliberately trying to tell the world, that England can win without India, America or any body else.23

The American public largely believed that the Indians unitedly sought independence, entirely deserved it, and that Britain for her own commercial and other purposes

22The New Republic, April 29, 1940, p. 564.

23Ibid.
was withholding independence from them. The role of India in American opinion compared in character though far less in degree with the role of Ireland three decades ago.\textsuperscript{24}

Even President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull were convinced that the Indians would co-operate better with the British if assured of independence, at least after the war. The United States, however, felt weary of speaking directly on the issue. Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, in his memoirs states the reason: "We also knew that the British Government, and the Prime Minister Churchill in particular, considered India their own problem, and that an attempt by the United States to bring pressure to solve it might give rise to controversy between our two governments and people."\textsuperscript{25}

Indians, however, continued to plead for United States support. Articles written by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru asking for American support appeared in American journals. In an article in the Atlantic Monthly, Nehru wrote: "India is far from America, but more and more our thoughts to go to


\textsuperscript{25}Hull, Cordell, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, 1948, p.1482.
this great democratic country which seems almost alone to keep the torch of democratic freedom alight, in a world given over to imperialism and fascism, violence and aggression and oppression of the worst type".26

In a letter to Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru urged that they should do something about American opinion regarding India. People who are sent to America should have some sense, so that they could make arrangement for future work on an efficient basis. "America is full of goodwill for us and I have many friends there among the Americans who write to me repeatedly that something should be done. My own view is that we should not have any formal or official representation in America, but at the same time we might have close unofficial contacts with some group who could work efficiently and responsibly".27

Even China stood for great United States involvement in the Indian movement. Madame Chiang Kai-Shek in a letter to Nehru wrote: "What a great pity it is that America does not seem to realise what a potent force for good she


could be, if she were courageous enough to cease from running away from the opportunities history, environment and circumstances have placed before her. She could be the greatest liberator of mankind, the most progressive exponent of civilization, if only she were not so afraid of involving herself in world affairs."

The British Government finally came to the conclusion that interest in India was not spasmodic and could not be easily brushed aside with superficial arguments. From Duff Cooper to Lord Halifax, from Sir Walter Citron to Col. Wedgewood to aristocracy and Labour alike India became a headache. Britain was well aware of the reactions it could have on the world. The Secretary of State for India in his memorandum to the War Cabinet stated that "They will find themselves faced with a steadily increasing volume of agitation culminating in strikes, attempts at sabotage and civil disobedience possibly on a large scale. Troops would be required to suppress lawlessness and bitterness will steadily grow". Most of this would be made in neutral countries and


particularly in the United States of America, where the difficulties due to communal divisions in India were not properly understood and consequently ignored.  

London newspapers, The Times stated, "The present unsatisfactory situation should not be allowed to crystalize."  

In a broadcast to America and Canada, Secretary of State for India, Leopold S. Amery defended the declaration of war and asserted that the Indians supported the British Empire. "He stated that India was from the first and is today behind the British Government in its struggle against Nazi tyranny and aggression."  

A special office was established in New York City whose sole purpose was to mark American opinion on India. Week after week month after month the barometer kept rising. The need for new remedies were felt. Let Indians to present the British point of view. Sir Feroz Khan Noon, spokesman of the Muslim League was foisted on the American public as a bona fide Indian leader to speak for the two communities of India.  

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31 Reported in the Times of India, Bombay, May 5, 1941, p. 7.  
32 The Times of India, Bombay, October 1, 1941, p. 7.  
The Secretary of State urged the Government to define its aims. He argued, "If we were faced with active opposition by the Congress in India, which would of necessity have to be met by repressive measures, we should find it difficult to justify our position before public whether at home or abroad, if we had failed to clarify our intentions as I have suggested."34

The British Government ultimately defined its objectives in the so-called August offer of 1940. In this offer, the British accepted (a) inclusion of certain "representative Indians" in the Viceroy's Executive Council; (b) formation of a War Advisory Council including delegates chosen from the native princes; (c) reiteration of the promise of Dominion Status and a new constitution after the war.35 Since the representatives were to be viceregal stooges handpicked by Lord Linlithgow, and since the War Advisory Council was to have no power over the Imperial General Staff, India virtually gained nothing.

Britain, however, declared that a great notable step forward had been taken. In present circumstances, the assurance given by the Government could hardly have been more

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explicit. United States, Britain hoped would now be convinced of their generosity to give India freedom at the earliest. The British weekly, The Sunday Times, declared, "Mr. Amery's pronouncement will be generally taken as proof of our serious resolve to make India an integral part of the free world." The Times stated that the pronouncement made by Mr. Amery is a "substantial advance on the policy of previous government". The Daily Express remarked, "Dominion status has been offered before, but Mr. Amery is a man who keeps his promises." The Daily Telegraph emphasized that the White Paper conceded the main Congress demands that a new constitution should be framed by Indians. India's right of self-determination was acknowledged while India's security was guarantee. The Daily Mail felt that the move was of great importance in that it was "an attempt to fuse the warring elements in Indian political life into a body charged with prosecuting harmoniously the greater war which threatens them all."


37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.
The American reaction appeared to be one of approval and recognition of the difficulties of British administration in India, tempered by cynicism regarding Britain's past promises and anomaly of autocratic India in a democratic war. The *New York Times* in its editorial, "India as a Partner," stated that the Indians deserved the "Free and equal partnership" in the Commonwealth, which Amery had promised. In setting a fairly definite time for the framing of a new Dominion constitution "after the conclusion of the war with the least possible delay," the Viceroy's latest assurance was an improvement over the vague promises of the past. The *New York Sun* contained a similar editorial expressing appreciation of British difficulties and Indian restraint.

The *New York Herald Tribune* stated "To reconcile congress may well prove an impossible task. The St. Louis Post Dispatch said "Britain's intention to give India free and equal partnership in the Empire after the war, must be appraised, in terms of past promises and the present extremity". The *Boston Herald* said, "The offer is an effort to persuade Gandhi and his followers to want a British

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40 Reported in *The Times of India*, Bombay, August 12, 1940, p. 11.
victory. The Indian problem is one of the most complicated
the British have ever faced... Their gesture towards
India will be applauded in the United States, regardless of
the urgency or the occasion for it.\footnote{The Oakland Tribune of San Francisco wrote "how
much freedom is implied only the British and the Indian
nationalists know. To Britain it is clear that she must not
lose India now and it should be equally clear to Indian
nationalists that no matter how just their democratic cause,
they cannot break off from Britain in this war year, if
they hope to retain even their present degree of independence.\footnote{Indians were disappointed with the British offer
and the Congress President stated that he found "no scope
for further discussion" in the British offer.\footnote{Gandhiji
declared the viceregal pronouncement to be deeply distasteful.
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N.M.M.L., Delhi, pp. 247-253.\footnote{Indian White Paper, War Cabinet Papers, 1, August 8, 1940,
pp. 247-253. N.M.M.L., Delhi.}
stand for justice, if she fails to be just to India. India's
disease is too deep to yield to any make-belief or half-
hearted measures.

The Congress Working Committee in its meeting at
Wardha of August 18,1940 asserted that the Viceroy's
declaration showed that the present autocratic and irres-
ponsible system of government must continue, so long as any
group of people or the princes as distinguished from the
people of the states or perhaps even the foreign vested
interests, raised objections to any constitution by the
elected representative of the people of India. Such an
assertion was a direct encouragement and incitement to civil
disorder and strife and amounted to a fatal blow to all
willingness to compromise and adjustment of claims.45

Rajgopalachari speaking as a leader of the Congress
majority group reiterated the Congress Party's demand for an
unequivocal declaration by Britain of India's right to
complete political independence. "The present executive
council is wholly unfit for the task of defence."46

45The Times of India, Bombay, August 15, 1940, p.7.
46Sitaramayya, Pattabhi, History of the Indian National
46The Times of India, Bombay, August 9, 1940, p.9.
Pandit Nehru before being sentenced to jail made a statement against the British authorities. "It was monstrous that any individual or group of individuals deriving no authority from the Indian people and not responsible to them in any way, should impose their will upon them and thrust the hundreds of millions of Indians without any reference to them or their representatives in a mighty war which was none of their seeking ... unless the war has a revolutionary aim of ending the present order and substituting something based on freedom and cooperation, it will lead to a continuation of wars and violence and uttermost distraction."\textsuperscript{47}

Indians were highly disappointed with the United States reaction. They expected greater support and sympathy from United States Government and people than was forthcoming. This was, however, only the beginning, with the United States entry into World War II, she would become more involved in the Indian affair than ever before.

\textsuperscript{47} Venkataramani, M.S. & Shrivastava, B.K., Quit India: The American Response to the 1942 Struggle, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1947, p. 28.