Chapter One

Indian Princes and the British Paramountcy

The "native states" or "princely States", as they were referred to, represented a unique system of polity that had developed in India, partly as a result of policy and partly as a result of historical accident. The princely States of India and their relations with the British Government offer no parallel or analogy to any institution known to history. It was neither feudal nor federal, though in some aspects it showed similarities to both. It was not an international system, though the principal States in India were bound to the British Government by solemn treaties and were spoken of in official documents as allies. Nor would it be correct to consider it a political confederacy in which the major partner had assumed special rights, because it was admitted by all parties that the constituent States had no rights of succession. So a polity so curious and so unique deserves to be studied and analyzed scientifically.

To study the position and nature of the princely States is of special interest. It raises so many questions in regard to the nature of sovereignty, the basis of law, and the position of judiciary in subordinate States, that an examination of the subject in all its aspects would illuminate almost every side of political theory. Nowhere had the division of sovereign attributes been carried to such an extent. The Indian States included among them every variety of political community ranging from "full-powered sovereign States".

Many writers, including Indians, prefer the expression "princely States" to "Native States" of India. A probable reason for this preference is that during the British rule the word "native" was often used as a "smear word" in both the British official and non-official vocabulary.
like Hyderabad or Gwalior, whose rulers enjoyed legally "unrestricted powers" of life and death over their subjects, and who made, promulgated and enforced their laws and maintained their own armies, to small chieftainships who were confined within their own palaces. They varied in size and importance too—from Jammu and Kashmir, which was bigger than France and Hyderabad, and had a population of 12,000,000,\(^3\) to little States in Kathiawad which consisted of a few acres of land. They were scattered all over, from Jammu and Kashmir in the extreme north touching Central Asia and the Pamirs to Travancore in the extreme south. Though the rulers of the bigger States were subordinate to the Government of India, their laws were supreme in their own States, and there was no appeal from their courts even to the Privy Council.\(^4\)

Time and again, at critical junctures, the princes showed themselves as loyal and useful friends of the Raj. In the Revolt of 1857, during the anti-partition agitation of 1905, in the war crisis of 1914 and 1939, and during the Quit India movement of 1942, princely money, princely forces and princely charismatic authority lent vital material and moral support to the imperial cause. Conversely, no other group of Indians was so consistently and generously feted by the British. Their services were recognized with land grants and special honour.

The political relationship between the British and the States had deep roots. From the occasion of its first intervention in Arcot against the French (1750-54), to the battle of Buxar (1764), the British East India Company stood in relation to the Mughal


\(^4\) Lord Chelmsford’s Speech quoted by K.M. Panikkar, *Relations of Indian States with the Government of India*, p. xix.
Empire in position of subordination. With the victory at the battle of Buxar and the consequent fall of Nawab Shuja-u-Daula of Awadh, the Company got the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.\(^5\) From the time of the acquisition of Dewani to the end of Warren Hastings' tenure (1784), it got engaged in a life-and-death struggle, first with Mysore and then with the Marathas with the object of establishing an equality of status with the Indian powers.

When Lord Cornwallis succeeded to the Governor Generalship, the Company had attained the position of equality with the Indian powers. The main States at that time in India were the Marathas of central and western India, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Nawab of Arcot and the Sultan of Mysore. The British maintained relations of a friendly character with the Marathas—who ruled almost whole of central and western India, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the Nawab of Arcot; while with Mysore their relations were merely proper but hardly friendly.

The relative position of the States vis-à-vis the Company continued to be the same until the arrival of the Marquis of Wellesley. But among themselves their power and authority had undergone considerable change. The Nizam was reduced to impotence after the fatal field of Kurdu in 1795, where his army capitulated to the Marathas. In the Maratha Empire itself, the balance of power had altered. The central authority of the Peshwa had weakened. Mysore remained under Tipu, but that redoubtable Sultan's power

\(^5\) Dewani means the right to collect the revenue. The Company after defeating the tripartite alliance of Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh, Shah Alam-II, the fugitive ruler of Mughal Empire, and Mir Qasim of Bengal in the battle of Buxar on 22 October, 1764, got the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Owing to the grant of Dewani and the reorganization of its political administration by the intervention of British Parliament through various Acts, the Company increased in authority and prestige.
was very greatly reduced. Scindia alone remained a power of first class military importance in Western India and the forces of Holkar held Central India.

The East India Company finally defeated Tipu Sultan of Mysore in 1799. The position of Hyderabad state was also made subordinate when the Nizam was made to sign a subsidiary treaty in 1800.\

With the Marquis of Hastings a new period opened in the relations of Indian States with the East India Company. The supremacy of English arms proved itself on every side. The large blocks of vaguely defined territory were broken up. Scores of States were added to the Company's protectorate. Though the Company had won in war, it was necessary for the peace of its own territories that neighboring powers should not fight each other on its borders; it assumed the right to arbitrate in disputes of princely States and deprived them of the right to make war. Rulers now signed treaties with the Company not as equals making arrangements of mutual benefit, but as subordinates who would cooperate with the Company in return for its "protection". This "protection" extended at that time only to the external affairs of the States.

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6 Under the 'subsidiary system', the Company forced on the States a subsidiary force which was to be maintained by the States. The subsidiary force besides demoralizing the administration also provided the Company the opportunity to force the States to give away the portions of their territories to the Company. It was usually postulated that the subsidy (which formed generally about one third of the revenues of the States) should be paid annually. The Company's Government knew well enough that so heavy a demand on the States' revenues could not easily be met with any regularity especially in India, where revenues shrink or expand according to the monsoon. The result was, as the Duke of Wellington foresaw, that the States fell into arrears. This gave the Company opportunity to annex the most valuable portions of the territory of its allies. The principle on which the commutation of subsidy was generally negotiated is put in the following words by the Marquis of Wellesley himself, "In commutation of 40 lakhs a country rated at the annual value of 62 lakhs of rupees was taken away in full sovereignty in the Nizam's case." Wellesley's Despatch to the Secret Committee of the Board of Directors, quoted in C.L. Tupper, Our Indian Protectorate. (London: 1898), pp. 40–1.
When Lord Hastings left India in 1823, the broad outline of what came to be known as princely or Indian India, in contrast to British India, had been defined on British maps. There were three great blocks of what were called native States’ territories. The largest one was the massive conglomeration of Rajput- and Maratha-ruled States, which spread from Gujarat in the west through Rajasthan to Malwa and Rewa in central India. This broad band included the States and estates of Saurashtra; the deserts of Rajasthan with Rajput rulers and large populations of aboriginal tribal groups; northern central India with the small States of Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand; and the Maratha holdings of the northern Deccan. In the east there was Maratha-ruled Nagpur and the Orissan States, constituting the Tributary Mahals of Chota Nagpur. In the south, Hyderabad and Mysore dominated the interior, with Travancore and Cochin on the southwestern coast. There was also the outlying group of smaller States north of Delhi, the Cis-Sutlej States of Punjab and some Rajput-ruled States in the Himalayan foothills. The British were nevertheless anxious to control most coastal tracts, the hinterland of their major entrepots, and economically productive area such as the Gangetic plains.7

The Government of India pursued, in several marked periods of spectacular aggression followed by periods of hesitation and rest, a policy of enlarging the empire by annexing princely States. The Court of Directors in 1841 enunciated the policy of ‘abandoning no just and honourable accession of territory or revenue as may from time to time present.’8 Lord Dalhousie carried this theory into practice with such a determination that ‘he changed the map (of India) with speed and thoroughness no campaign had

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8 Ibid., pp. 145-6.
equaled. With the result, Awadh, Satara, Nagpur, Tanjore and numerous other States were annexed and became part of the territories of the Company. The additions he made to the British territory in India increased its revenue by four millions and a half sterling and its area by districts equal to Russia in Europe.

Thus by the second decade of the nineteenth century virtually all the major ‘country powers’ had been linked to the company by treaties. What is more, the essential elements of British paramountcy—the system of residents at the princely courts, the regulation of successions, and control over the States’ foreign affairs—were all laid down in this period. Indeed, by the 1850s, the only big question that still remained to be settled in regard to the States was how many ought to be left intact. As the British Raj grew more secure, and as the philosophies of evangelicalism and utilitarianism cast their spell, officials who had once cautiously advocated keeping a “ring fence” of friendly States around the company’s territories, now argued forcefully for their extinction on the grounds that native rule—“oriental despotism”—fell short of the “standards of the civilizations” to which the people of India were entitled. If events had not intervened, the remaining States would probably have suffered the same fate as befell Satara, Jhansi, Nagpur, Awadh and the Punjab between 1848-1856—absorbed into the expanding Indian empire. The first of these events and, in retrospect, the critical one, was of course the Revolt of 1857 which compelled a review of every major policy of the British Indian government.

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10 The Company’s Government took over the administration of Mysore in 1831, and between 1832 and 1835 annexed Cachar, Jaintia and Coorg. In February 1856, Lord Dalhousie, the predecessor of Canning in office, annexed Awadh and removed the King, Wajid Ali, from Lucknow to a suburb of Calcutta.
11 Majumdar, *British Paramountcy*, pp. 54-5.
The Revolt shocked the British officialdom with its suddenness, rapid spread and fierceness. However, it was the timely and whole-hearted support of most of the Indian princes which helped the British to carry the day. Indeed one of the significant facts of the Revolt was that the rulers generally aided the British Government, directly or indirectly, to limit and suppress the revolt. Some of the princely States, like Nepal, Hyderabad and Patiala, gave valuable military aid to the Company's Government in 1857-58. Even the passive loyalty of most of the princely rulers—because it limited the area of uprising and military action in the critical months of 1857—proved valuable to the British Government.

Once the initial shock of the revolt had passed and it became clear that the rebellion would not succeed, the Company’s senior men on the spot, such as Governor General, Earl Canning, began to look more deeply and analytically into its causes. Out of this thorough examination emerged the insight that the policy of territorial expansion had turned a number of peaceable rulers into bitter enemies, and thus could be accounted, as the Board of Control President Lord Stanley of Alderley declared in a speech to parliament, a major cause of the revolt.  

Lord Canning, the Governor General wrote, “The safety of our rule is increased, not diminished, by the maintenance of Native Chiefs.” During 1857-58, “these patches of Native government”, like Hyderabad, Gwalior, Rampur and Patiala, had “served as breakwaters to the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave.” The Governor General believed that in times of threat to Britain’s position in India and elsewhere, “one of [their] main-stays [would] be found in these Native States.”

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further extension, but strengthening of British rule in India should be our first care". The Governor General also put forward the economic reasons for abandoning the policy of annexations. Lord Cunning stated his conviction that if the policy of annexing princely States was not abandoned, it would impose on the Government of India the burden of a very big standing army of European troops, intensify the financial crisis produced by the Revolt, and by straining the existing military, administrative and economic resources of the Government, impede efforts to develop the vast territory already under direct British rule.\(^\text{14}\)

So, Lord Canning with his strong views against any aggressive policy towards the States prevailed on the India Office to insert in the Queen’s proclamation of 1\(^\text{st}\) November 1858—issued to mark the transfer of the East India Company’s possessions to the crown— a pledge to ‘respect the rights, dignity and honour of the native princes as our own’.\(^\text{15}\) Thereby he ensured that in an undefined but substantial way, the fate of almost 600 royal houses in India became bound up with the reputation of the crown in England. He also succeeded in sanctioning from the Home authorities an assurance to the princes that their dynasties would not be allowed to lapse for want of natural heirs. The assurance came in the form of adoption sanads—which ‘ensured’ that the princely rule in


\(^{14}\) The Revolt then changed attitudes about the worth of the States as imperial clients; but it also provided, indirectly, a persuasive financial argument against further annexation. While the revolt had been suppressed, the costs had been heavy. In 1858-9 the government’s budget deficit was a whopping 14 million. By 1861, the British Government was driven to introduce income tax in a bid to raise revenue. This was clearly not the time to embark on an aggressive foreign policy which could only lead to new financial burdens on the government. Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire 1917-1947*. (Cambridge: 1999), p.16.

\(^{15}\) The amnesty proclamation, better known as the Queen’s Proclamation, was published throughout India. This proclamation contained two paragraphs addressed to Native Rulers, though the document as a whole was addressed to the Queen’s subjects in India. See, A.B. Keith, *Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy 1750-1921*, (London: 1922), Vol. I, pp. 383-4.
India was safe both from the whims of nature and ambitions of over-zealous officials. Canning proved right. During the ninety odd years between 1858 and the British departure from the subcontinent in 1947, not one princely State lapsed—and none was annexed. While in British India provinces were created and carved up, the borders of the States stayed frozen in their post-mutiny mould. No wonder the princes in later years came to look back upon the Cunningite settlement as their Magna Carta.

The proclamation’s words, ‘we desire no extension of our present territorial possessions’, were most striking. This was so in the context of the Company’s policy since thirties of the 19th century of annexing subordinate rulers on charges of misrule and by application of the Doctrine of Lapse. But what the real meaning of this statement would be, or if it would prove a firm, honest statement of territorial policy, no one could foretell. But one thing is for sure that the disastrous results of the Revolt forced the

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16 To scatter away ‘the clouds of mistrust’, the Government issued Sanads, some 140 in all to each of the principle States in India in 1860, assuring them that in case of failure of natural heirs, their adopted sons would be recognized as their successors. See, K.M. Panikkar, An Introduction to the Study of the Relation of Indian States with the Government of India, (London: 1927), p. 57.

17 On charges of misrule against their rulers, the Company’s Government took over the administration of Mysore in 1831, and between 1832 and 1835 annexed Cachar, Jaintia and Coorg. In February 1856, Lord Dalhousie, the predecessor of Canning in office, annexed Awadh and removed the King, Wajid Ali, from Lucknow to a suburb of Calcutta. One of the largest Native States (24,000 sq. miles), Awadh was the home of the bulk of the sepoys and native officers of the Company’s Bengal Army, which revolted in 1857.

18 Under the Doctrine of Lapse, the Company claimed that on the death of a native ruler having no natural heir to succeed him, his State automatically ‘lapsed’ to the Company, the paramount power, and that such lapsed princely States could be annexed to the territory of the Company. In other words under this doctrine the Company claimed the right to withhold recognition in cases of succession by adoption from a gadi. Though according to the custom and laws of property of the Hindus since ancient times an adopted son is for all purposes of succession as good as a son born in wedlock, the supporters of the Doctrine of Lapse held that the British Government, as the paramount power, need not recognize in cases of succession to chiefships, as distinguished from succession to private property according to English ideas of property, the succession of an adopted son. This doctrine was used to annex Mandavi in 1839, Kolaba and Jalaun in 1840, Surat in 1842, Satara in 1848, Jaipur and Sambalpur in Baghat, a Cis-Sutlej territory, in 1850, Udaipur in central India in 1852, Nagpur in 1853, and Jhansi in 1854. These annexations added about 100,000 sq. miles to the British Empire within a short period of 15 years.
authorities to realize the ‘failure’ of the annexationist policy. After the Revolt, the British finally came to adopt the policy of perpetuating the princely rule.

The policy of the Government of India since the Mutiny was directed at the steady consolidation of economic interests. The period following the Mutiny saw an extraordinary development in the economic life of India. The extension of railways, the sudden demand for Indian cotton owing to the stoppage of supplies from America during the civil war and the consequent rise of Bombay as a leading industrial and commercial centre, the growth of modern banking, posts and telegraphs, etc., led to a steady and irresistible movement towards economic unification. Railways were being pushed into the interior to service the long-distance trade. The States which lay within the operation of these currents began to seem a serious obstacle to progress. The attitude of the British Indian authorities changed and the darbar expectations that the States were about to come into their own were quickly shattered. They surrendered or were forced to surrender their economic independence. In the meanwhile, the Evangelicals launched a scathing attack on the post mutiny settlement. They argued that by issuing the sanads the government had provided the princes the shield which could be used by them to perpetuate the misrule in their States. Was it right, the evangelicals asked, that some of India’s people should prosper while others languished in poverty and ignorance and suffered oppression just because they happened to be the subjects of a dependent prince? Was the British Government not morally obliged to ensure that the rulers who owed their power to the British did not abuse it? By the end of the decade, the British officials, such as Governor-General and his associates felt a need to change their attitude towards the

19 The term Darbar stands for Royal Court.
princely States. The theory of suzerainty was put forward as a uniform principle in relation to all the States for the first time. Lord Mayo, while addressing a gathering of princes of Rajputana at Jaipur in 1870 made it clear to them that, “If we respect your rights and privileges you should also respect the rights and regard the privileges of those who are placed beneath your care. If we support you in your power, we expect in return good government.”

Thus the British Indian Government again started pursuing a forward policy. But this time they followed a different path. One way was to exploit the advent of minors as rulers in the States, and then implement “reforms” directly through British guardian-administrators. Such opportunities were relatively plentiful. Another area where the British could make the forward moves was to compel young princes entering their majority to sign legal documents which bound them to follow the advice of their Residents in all important matters, and to retain ‘reforms’ introduced during the minority period. Yet another way was to make examples of rulers who defied them. In total, some twelve ruling princes were unceremoniously removed from their thrones in the later part of nineteenth century.

20 Writing to a Cabinet Minister in England he said: “Our relations with our Native Feudatory States are on the whole satisfactory, though they are by no means defined. We act on the principle of non-interference, but we must constantly interpose. We allow them to keep armies for the defence of their States, but we cannot permit them to go to war. We encourage them to establish courts of Justice, but we cannot hear of their trying Europeans. We recognize them as separate sovereigns, but we daily issue to them orders which are implicitly obeyed. We depose them when the ruler commits or sanctions a grievous crime; or create an administration for them when the chief misgoverns and worries his subjects. With some we place political agents, with others we do not; with some as with Jaipur, Bhopal and Patiala, we are on terms of intimacy and friendship. Others such as Dholpur and Alwar, we scarcely ever address except to find fault with them for some gross neglect of duty.” See, W.W. Hunter, The Life of the Earl of Mayo. (London: 1876). Vol. II, pp. 207-10.

21 The princely States of Orissa such as; Athgarh, Baramba, Bonai, Kalahandi, Narsinghpur, Nilgiri, tarna. and Talcher, remained under the minority administration for a considerable period of time.

22 Ian Copland, The Princes of India, p. 19.
However, questions were raised from various quarters in regard to the legal aspect of intervention. For example, Sir Owen Tudor-Burne, the Political Secretary in the India Office, thought that the government had effectively given away the right to intervene in the States by conferring adoption *sanads* on the princes in 1860-2. But his and the similar other questions from different quarters were laid to rest by a series of brilliant deductions on the part of a group of senior bureaucrats. In the early 1870s, Aitchison, the Foreign Secretary, came up with the view that the treaties needed to be read with an eye on the circumstances existing when they were drawn up and in the light of the subsequent evolution of the relationship between the States and the Crown.

The theory of suzerainty and the concept of ‘usage’ were also invoked to justify the new policies. In 1877 Lytton advised Lord Salisbury, his superior in London, that “[t]he paramount supremacy of the British Government is a thing of gradual growth; it has been established partly by conquest; partly by treaty; partly by usage.” Thus paramountcy would buttress the British right to confirm all successions to the gaddi in princely States; the extension of British jurisdiction over railway lines that crossed the borders of the States; intervention in struggles between princes and their nobles; and the extension of advice to princes about the need to improve or reform their administrations. T. H. Thornton, the successor of Aitchson, developed the theory of “usage”, which held that any “long-continued course of [governmental] practice acquiesced in by the States could be construed as lawful, since acquiescence implied consent.”

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Warner, the Political Secretary in the Government of Bombay contributed a doctrine which implied that "the treaties with the Native States must be read as a whole and applied equally to all States." These all kinds of declarations reduced the treaties of the princes with the British Government as mere "scraps of paper". Thus armed, the Government of India steadily deprived the princes of what was left of their sovereignty. From 1878-1886 most of the States were compelled to relinquish control over their post and telegraph networks and to integrate them into the imperial system; in 1879 the salt manufacturing States were prohibited from exporting it and from 1877 the States were gradually deprived of civil and criminal jurisdiction over broad-gauge railways passing through their territory. Bit by bit, too, British Indian currency became legal tender right across the subcontinent and by the end of the century almost all the rulers had been pressured into signing away their right to mint silver and copper coins. Again, after 1879, the States lost the automatic right to employ Europeans; while their freedom to import weapons for the use of their police was steadily curtailed.

So it becomes clear that the issuance of the sanads of adoption to the princely States should not be taken as if the British Government ceased to interfere in their internal affairs. It is not that the actual relationship between the British Government and the States did not change, for there had been since the Mutiny a gradual and steady encroachment on the rights of the rulers in their internal affairs. The doctrine of the 'paramount power' had been a flexible, expanding concept which produced a complex and uncodified political 'law'. Under it, the Viceroy could intervene and deal with the

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29 Ian Copland, *The Princes of India*, p. 20.
affairs of any State if he thought such action was necessary for the ‘good of the State’ or for the Government of India.

Like so many other features of British imperialism in India, intervention in the affairs of the States reached its climax in the first decade of the new century during the stormy viceroyalty of Lord Curzon (1898-1905). In July 1900, the rulers were informed that they would in future need the permission of the government to travel overseas. In 1902 Curzon personally browbeat the Nizam into renegotiating the 1860 treaty governing the administration of Berar on more favourable terms. He also overhauled the Imperial Service Troop Scheme which made it more expensive for the concerned States. Also the rulers of Jhalawar, Panna and Indore were deposed during his term. Sixty three States were placed under some form of temporary British control. “The tyranny of Curzon’s rule had been so unbearable to his fellow princes”, narrated Scindia of Gwalior to a British official that “nothing would have induced them to put up with it [much longer]”. According to Ganga Singh of Bikaner, the viceroyalty of Curzon was so painful for some princes that merely talking about the epoch was enough to reduce them to tears. Paradoxically, though, the Curzon’s viceroyalty also marked the moment when, after the decades of indifference, the British once more began to view the Indian States as potentially useful players in the great game of empire.

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30 Under the agreement of 1860, the province of Berar had been placed under a British commissioner and part of its revenues attached to pay-off debts incurred by the British officered Hyderabad Contingent. The new agreement which Curzon wormed out of Osman Ali further integrated the administration of Berar with that of the Central Province, and considerably reduced the amount of the Berar surplus which was returned to the Nizam as ‘rent’. Ibid.

31 Lord Minto to Lord Morley 12 Sept. 1907, Ibid., p. 21.

The second great imperial crisis of the nineteenth century—the challenge of nationalism—arose in the 1890s; but, unlike 1857, it arrived not suddenly but stealthily. Nationalism in the form of a political ideology began to manifest itself in the big Presidency cities around the middle of the century, but its transformation into an all-India phenomenon took another twenty years. The movement gathered the steam and by the beginning of the twentieth century the 'Moderates' were giving way to the younger and more outspoken men such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Rajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh. Some people took to violence and the attacks on British officials became more commonplace.

The government became very concerned with the mass agitation and the revolutionary activities. They sought to find a counterpoise to this nationalist challenge which they found in the policy of cultivating and politicizing for imperial purposes the Indian princes keeping in view the influence and position they enjoyed in the society. The progressive princely States were admired both by their subjects and the open-minded Indians. The nationalists put forward them as an evidence that Indians were really competent to rule themselves. The princely States were considered as “existing specimen[s] of Indian sovereignty.” From almost every angle the princes looked a good bargain.

33 Besides using the princes against the nationalist challenge, the British also tried to marginalize the nationalists by using the card of Muslim friendship.
34 In 1903, Romesh Dutt, Congress President and champion of good government, affirmed that “no part of the subcontinent is better governed to-day than these States, ruled by their own Princes”. Romesh Dutt, India in the Victorian Age, An Economic History of the People, (London: 1904), p. 32.
35 Speech by Satyamurthy to the All-Parties Conference, Calcutta, 1 Jan. 1929, Times of India, 2 Jan. 929, p. 10.
The princes thought on the issue of the nationalist challenge to the British authority in their own way. The challenge gave the princes new hopes and new fears. On the one hand, it is likely that they saw a chance to join in the challenge, or at least to profit by it, and stem and reverse the steady tide of imperial encroachment on their authority. They might have thought they could effectively press for their demands once they collaborate with the British Government. On the other hand, joining the nationalist movement was not a profitable deal for them. By going over to the side of the nationalists, there was everything for them to fear, for the nationalist movement was democratic. Democracy was a threat to their authority, their unregulated privy purse, perhaps to their “dignity”. Probably after considering both the options, they decided to throw their lot with the British.

Finally, the princes were called in to service by the British to deal with the nationalist challenge. Lord Minto issued a circular in 1909 in which he asked the princes to suggest the best ways for dealing with the “sedition”. The princes responded very quickly and positively, and in a true loyalist tune. Most of them banned any public meetings, clamped down on the nationalist newspapers and any sort of anti-imperialist activity was banned in their territories.36

The wholehearted support of the princes against the nationalist forces convinced the British Indian authorities to concede to their long pending demand of internal autonomy.37 On 1 November 1909, Minto delivered a speech at Udaipur, in which the policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the States was announced. Minto said

36 Ramusack, The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire, pp. 36-7.
37 The princely support was not the only reason that made the British to grant them more freedom, but the home authorities were also determined to introduce constitutional reforms in the provinces keeping in view the ruthless criticism the authorities were facing at the hands of the nationalists leaders. So it became a moral obligation for the British to reward their most faithful allies.
that, “I have always been opposed to anything like pressure on Durbars with a view to introducing British methods of administration”. He further stated that, “the reforms should emanate from Durbars themselves and grow up in harmony with the traditions of the States”. Defining the future role of the Residents in the princely States, Minto said that, “it is not the only object to aim at[and] though the encouragement of it must be attractive to keen and able Political Officers and it is not unnatural that the temptation to further it should, for example appeal strongly to those who are temporarily in charge of the administration of a State during a minority...I cannot but think that Political Officers will do wisely to accept the general system of administration to which the Chief and his people have been accustomed.”38 On the basis of this speech, a set of instructions was issued confidentially to all Residents in 1910 in which it was impressed on them to place themselves in the princes’ shoes, try to appreciate their point of view; abstain from offering any unnecessary advice, to uphold the dignity of the Darbars and not to interfere in the internal affairs of the States until an open violation of the “basic laws of the civilization” was made by a prince.39 The political Residents resisted the move as the declaration greatly curtailed their power.

With the declaration of Lord Minto, the whole question of British relations with the princes was reconsidered. The declaration formed the bedrock of the future relationship between the Government of India and the princely States. A corner had been turned and the princes considered it as a new era in relation with the Raj. The princes started demanding for a permanent body through which they could communicate to the

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39 The instruction manual prepared for the Residents in the States came to be known as *Political Department Manual*. Ian Copland, *The Princes of India*, p.31.
Government their opinion regarding the legislations passed by the Government touching their interests. However, the demand was not heeded and the princes had to wait till another crisis—the World-War One—that forced the Government of India to make the structural changes which the princes were demanding.

The princes stood out in their support for the British war effort. The States gave generously of money and munitions. They helped out on the propaganda front too and stood on the Government’s side against the elements opposed to the war on ideological grounds. The princes received the rewards for their help in the war effort in the form of titles and enhancement in their gun-salutes. The war, however, offered an opportunity for them to press their demands more forcefully. The princes’ demands included, among other things, the reformation of the political process in order to change the mental set-up of the officials in the political department and, more importantly, they advocated the setting up of a permanent body for the exchange of opinions and ideas between the States and the British India.

The effects of the World War One on India, particularly in terms of economy, were not so pleasing. This generated discontent among the people. Given the prevailing circumstances, the British had their own compulsions to turn to the princes to face the evident crisis.

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40 Ramusack, Indian Princes in the Twilight of Empire, pp. 38-9.
41 For instance, Nawab Osman Ali of Hyderabad was asked by Lord Hardinge to persuade the Indian Muslims to ignore the fatwa issued by the Ottoman Khalifa calling for a holy war against the Allied side.
42 At the end of the war Nizam of Hyderabad got the title of “Faithful Ally of the British Government” by King George V.
44 The Muslim support which was available during the Bengal anti-partition agitation could not be gathered this time. The entry of Turkey in the war against the British side and the growing anxiety about the holy
After holding the third all India conference of the princes in Delhi in 1916, Lord Chelmsford, the viceroy, wrote to Lord Chamberlain—the Secretary of State—that, "such gatherings...ensure that the Chiefs’ views are adequately put forward...and save[s] Government from the errors resulting from a misconception of their attitudes. These conferences act...as a safety-valve through which minor grievances find a harmless vent...The old practice of ...‘subordinate isolation’... is now, owing to the greater facilities of communication and the spread of education, impossible to maintain, and it is recognized on all hands that the collective goodwill and support of the Ruling Chiefs is an imperial asset of incalculable value. If the growing demand for collective discussion is disregarded, we run the risk of alienating the sympathies of those whose support is most worth having." Chamberlain, who belonged to the conservative thought, did not like the idea of the viceroy. But fortunately for the princes, he had to go in 1917 and was replaced by Edwin Montagu, a liberal, sympathetic to the princely order and to the aspirations of the Indian middle class. In August 1917, ‘Montagu Declaration’ was passed which pledged that, from now, British policy in India would be directed at ‘the gradual development of self-governing institutions.’ The declaration also raised hopes among the princes.

In the wake of the ‘Montagu Declaration’, the States formed a ‘joint committee’ which gave its report on 4 February 1918 in which it was demanded that a Federal

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Islamic places in Palestine had turned the Indian Muslims against the British. So the only reliable option for the Government of India was the Indian princely order.


Chamber of princes be formed which would advise the government regarding the potential impact of any legislation on the States by the Government of India.

The rulers finally got their long-desired council in 1919 when, as a part of its post-war reform package, the British Government announced the establishment of a ‘Chamber of Princes’ to advise the viceroy on all the ‘questions effecting Indian States generally or which [were] of concern to either to the Empire as a whole or to British India and the States in common’. The Chamber was to have 120 seats and was to meet, at least once a year, at the capital. This body of princes was free to have its own elected president or chancellor but under the overall control of the viceroy. It could elect a six-member Standing Committee whose job was to help the chancellor make the princes’ views known to the government.47

The installation ceremony of the Chamber of Princes was held at Red Fort on 9 and 10 February 1921.48 The message of the king George V was read out there by his cousin, the duke Connaught in which the king had declared that “every breath of suspicion or misunderstanding should be dissipated”, and “His Majesty now invites Your Highnesses...to take a larger [role]...in the political development of your Motherland.” Recalling the pledge his grandmother had taken “to maintain unimpaired the privileges, rights and dignities of the Princes of India”, the king-emperor in his message had wrote:

48 However, the Chamber of Princes which was expected to be the representative body of whole princely order could not succeed to bring in to its fold all the princes. Some of the premier States like, Hyderabad, Mysore, Udaipur and Indore did not join the Chamber. The Chamber came to be mainly dominated by the “middle class” States, “whose activities [were] known to be resented and feared by many of the smaller States and to be viewed with dislike by some of the leading princes”. Thus the Chamber did not get its true representative character. A brief composition of the ruling elite of the chamber has been given by Ramausack, The Princes of India, pp. 119-22 and 133-38.
"the Princes may rest assured that this pledge remains inviolate and inviolable." The announcement of the king proved a high-water mark of the relationship between the princes and the British crown. "It may, with some justice, be said", wrote the standing committee of the Chamber of Princes in 1929, "that with the inauguration of the Chamber of Princes a new era has dawned in the relations between the Government of India and the States; that with the frank recognition of the Government...that treaties though declared inviolable and inviolate have often been treated as non-existent or obsolete, the rights of princes stand better chance of recognition. It is true that the Government of India do not now claim...that the interests of the States should give way before the interests of Indian Provinces." 50

The first twenty years of the twentieth century largely proved very fruitful for the princely India. Mere onlookers and a scorned lot in the times of Curzon, they emerged as acknowledged partners by 1920s. However, unlike the first two decades, the third decade did not prove to be so good for the princes. The reasons could be traced again in the changing political environment of the country and abroad.

Though the government gave the princes the concession of forming a representative body of theirs, it soon began to feel uneasy with the behaviour of the members of the Chamber of Princes. The Residents reported that the princes were avoiding them, ignoring their "advice", going over their heads to Delhi. One officer wrote emotionally that if the trend continued he would soon be reduced to a "mere Post Office". 51 Princes started meddling in the politics more than what was good for them, or

49 *The Times of India*, 10 Feb. 1921.
the Government of India. Some of the princes were indeed becoming more assertive. Thus it became clear to the new viceroy, Lord Reading—who personally did not like the aristocratic nature of the Indian princely order—and the Political Department, that the policy of non-intervention which the Government was following in regard to States would have to be drastically changed so that there could be put a check on their powers.

The offensive mood of the Political Department, dealing with the affairs of the princes, became clear to the princes when they brought before it some old issues and made some new demands. The deadlocks between the Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes and the Political Department on the issues of treaty rights and political practice became frequent. The States’ suggestion of exercising civil and criminal jurisdiction over the railways passing through their territories was met with strong opposition by the officials. Similarly the princes’ request for a judicial enquiry into the erosion of their treaty rights was out-rightly rejected by the viceroy. The viceroy also issued orders to the Residents that they should watch the affairs of the States very keenly, and to report regularly on the style of the governance of the rulers.

Lord Reading also came down too hard on some States individually. Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of the Punjab State of Nabha, was forced to leave the State and declare that he will abdicate the throne in favour of his son once he is of age as a penalty for his supporting the anti-British Akali-movement. The next to go was the Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar of Indore in 1925. He was also made to vacate the throne for his son. The issue of Berar, which was considered to be the benchmark of the relations between the

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52 The charges leveled against Tukoji Rao Holkar were that he had ordered to get back his court dancer, Mumtaz, who was living with a rich Muslim merchant of Bombay, Bawla. In the process, Bawla was murdered. The incident provided the British an opportunity to seal his fate by constituting a commission of inquiry against him. Fearing his dismissal, he voluntarily made way for his son.
Government of India and the State of Hyderabad, again came to surface during the viceroyalty of Lord Reading.\textsuperscript{53} When the claim of Osman Ali regarding the restoration of the full autonomy fell to deaf ears, he tried to challenge the validity of the Government's decision of not entertaining his claim. He wrote a letter to the viceroy informing him that the Berar matter could not be treated as a closed chapter. This infuriated the viceroy and in March 1926, he wrote a long letter to the Nizam which has been recognized as the classic statement of the doctrine of unregulated paramountcy. He wrote, "The sovereignty of the British Crown is supreme in India, and therefore no ruler can claim to negotiate with the British Government on an equal footing. Its supremacy is not based only on Treaties and Engagements but exists independently of them, and...it is the right and duty of the British Government...to preserve peace and good order throughout India." The letter, which was released to the Government Gazette for a wide publication so that the other rulers could also see it, further wrote that, "the right of the British Government to intervene in the internal affairs of Indian States is another instance of the consequences necessarily involved in the supremacy of the British Crown... and where imperial interests are concerned, or the general welfare of the State is seriously and grievously affected by the action of its Government, it is with the Paramount Power that the ultimate responsibility of taking remedial action, if necessary, must lie. The varying degrees of internal sovereignty which the rulers enjoy are all subject to the due exercise by the

\textsuperscript{53} In 1860, an agreement had been signed between the Government of India and the States of Hyderabad by which Berar was placed under a British commissioner and part of its revenues were specified to pay-off the debts incurred by the British officered Hyderabad contingent. In 1902, Osman Ali was made to sign a new agreement by which the administration of Berar was further integrated with that of the Central Provinces, and considerably reduced the amount of the Berar surplus which was returned to the Nizam as 'rent'. In 1919, Osman Ali revived his father's claim of complete restoration of the province to the States.
Paramount Power of this responsibility." In July 1926, the Nizam was asked to delegate his executive powers to a council whose members would be under the overall control of the Government of India.

Though the Government succeeded to intimidate these princes, these and other such actions and policies, for instance, fiscal policy, and the management of post offices and mainline railways came under fire from the States. They did not feel cowed down and decided to take a firm stand against these arbitrary actions of the Government.

The princes were also feeling marginalized in decision-making after the reforms were introduced as now the Legislature had elected Indians—the princes were unrepresented—which made policy-making more tilted towards provinces. Thus they decided to take the questions of paramountcy and the constitutional reforms of 1919—which effectively denied them the representation in the Legislature—so that they could safeguard their interests. In November 1926, the Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes called upon the new viceroy Lord Irwin, to hold an Independent Committee of enquiry to review the operation of the paramountcy. Though both the viceroy and the home authorities had reservations about princes’ call, they gave go-ahead for the enquiry. By giving the green signal for an enquiry, the government just wanted to buy time. Thus, a three-man committee under the chairmanship of Sir Harcourt Butler.

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54 Quoted in Government of India, White Paper, Appendix I.
55 In regard to the Government’s fiscal policy, the States argued that the goods imported from the British India were charged imperial customs duty. However, these States were not paid any remuneration for the income they indirectly generated for the Government. The States also felt that they were patronizing the post and railway systems but were not entitled to a return from these imperial services. The States were forced to use these services but they lay outside their control. The Directorate of the Chamber’s Special Organization, The British Crown & the Indian States, pp. 177-80, 183-92, 201-4.
56 Both Lord Irwin and the London officials did not want to change the status quo and believed that enquiry "would most completely allay the princes’ apprehensions ...and hamper very seriously the conduct of
the retired governor of the United Provinces, was appointed to report upon the relationship between the Paramount Power and the Indian States and to inquire into the financial and economic relations between British India and the States.\footnote{Report of the Indian States Committee 1928-1929, (London: 1929) p. 5.}

Butler who presented his report to the parliament in March 1929, had some good points for the princely India but fell short of what the princes had expected. The Butler Committee report made a strong case for the princes by endorsing the rulers' assertion that their relations were with the Crown, not with the Government of India, and could not therefore be transferred, without their consent, to “a new government in British India responsible to an Indian legislature.” However, the Committee refused to define paramountcy. It concluded that “[p]aramountcy must remain paramount; it must fulfill its obligations, defining or adapting itself according to the shifting necessities of time and the progressive development of the States”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 31.} Regarding the princes’ claim that the powers of the paramountcy were defined by the treaties, the report said, “We cannot agree that the usage is in anyway sterile. Usage has shaped and the developed relationship between the Paramount Power and the States from the earliest times... in all the cases usage and sufferance have operated to determine questions on which the treaties, engagements and sanads are silent.” The report further stated that the paramount power had an obligation to protect its clients against attempts to overthrow them, or to substitute another form of government. The report also explained that if, there was “a widespread demand for [constitutional] change” in a State; the latter would be obliged “to current relations with the States.” But they decided to concede to the princes’ demand “merely for the sake of the Princes’ peace of mind”. Ian Copland, The Princes of India, pp. 64-65.
suggest such measures as would satisfy this demand.\(^5\) The Butler report came as a shock to the princes. They had expected some relief from the Government but the report warned them of interference if the reports of the misgovernment were received.

However, soon the princes got another opportunity to plead their case before the Government when the viceroy announced that a Round Table Conference would be held at London in 1930. The main aim of the Conference, the viceroy declared, would be to discuss the constitutional reforms in accordance with the Government’s understanding that Dominion Status was the logical and inevitable goal of the process of devolution begun by the ‘Montagu Declaration’. However, Lord Irwin made it clear to the princes that the questions and issues dealt in the Butler report would not be taken for any consideration at the Round Table Conference.

In the deliberations of the first Round Table Conference which were held at London in November 1930, the representative princes announced that they were ready and willing to join an all India federation occupying “a position of honour and equality in the British Commonwealth of Nations”. “Our desire”, declared Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir, “to co-operate to the best of our ability with all sections of this Conference is a genuine desire; so too is genuine our determination to base our co-operation upon the realities of the present situation.”\(^6\) Sir Muhammad Akbar Hydari, the Hyderabadi Minister spoke more or less in the same tone as did the Maharaja of Kashmir. He emphasized that “the States... can fully sympathize with the aims and ideals of the

\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 24, 28, 31 and 32.
\(^6\) Indian Round Table Conference Proceedings, (Calcutta: 1931), p. 15.
peoples of British India and are ready to work in harmony with them for the Greater and united India".\(^61\)

However, after returning from London, the representative princes found it difficult to rally the fellow princes around the idea of the federation. Gulab Singh of Rewa, Udaibhan Singh of Dholpur and many like-minded rulers did not want to be associated, even marginally, with democracy, and believed that federation would inevitably result in the subordination of the States to "the rule of the united majority from British India, who are republicans at heart".\(^62\) The smaller States had their own apprehensions regarding the proposed federation. They feared that they would have no voice at the centre, and thus would be entirely at the mercy of the big States.

Many conservative British Indian bureaucrats also were not in favour of the federation. They took the view that the devolution was incompatible with the maintenance of Britain’s imperial position in the subcontinent and were in favour of limited reforms.\(^63\)

The Simon Commission Report, the three Round Table Conferences, the publishing of the main constitutional reforms in a White Paper in 1933 followed by a bill

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p.16.

\(^{62}\) Regarding a proposed federation Gulab Singh of Rewa had already made his concerns public. He had opined that the federation would “lead to democratization in the States and [institutionalize] aggression from the young nationalism of British India”. See Ian Copland, *The Princes of India*, p. 87-92.

\(^{63}\) In the meantime there was an unprecedented upheaval in the domestic life of the States: with Jammu and Kashmir, Alwar, Bharatpur, Bhawalpur, Kapurthala and Jind all experiencing major uprisings and bloody communal clashes. These uprisings occasioned, in two cases, heavy-handed exercises of British paramountcy—Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir was made to take on an English ICS officer as his prime minister and the ruler of Alwar was deposed in 1934. These revolts had a great psychological effect on the minds of the rulers, for it made them realize how dependent they had become for their protection on the sheltering umbrella of British paramountcy that would vanish once they entered the federation. For a detailed account of the 1931 uprising in Kashmir, see Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, (Paniket: 2003), pp. 210-58. On the Alwar and Bharatpur risings see I.S. Marwah, *Tabligh Movement Among the Meos of Mewat*, in M.S.A. Rao (ed.), *Social Movements in India*, Vol. II, (Delhi, 1979).
based on the White Paper was introduced in the British Parliament on December 19, 1934 and after months of protracted debates in the Parliament, the Bill finally received the royal assent on August 2, 1935. The Bill came to be known as the Government of India Act 1935. The Act had two main parts; one dealing with the Federation of India and the other with Provincial Autonomy. The Act provided for the establishment of a ‘Federation of India’ consisting of Governors’ Provinces and princely States. Though the Act paved the way for an all-India federation; but it did not bring the federation into being. While it was not necessary that all princely States should join the federation, the federation could not be formed unless the majority of the States signified their adherence to it by signing the Instrument of Accession.

With the passage of the Government of India Act, it seemed to many observers of the Indian political scene that the hard work of constitution-making was over. But it did not prove as smooth as the government had thought. The federal scheme was a non-starter because the princely States did not join the proposed federation, which would have meant the surrender of some of their autocratic powers.

The hesitancy of the rulers to join the all-India federation was greatly influenced by the fast changing political scenario of the country. The stunning rise to power of the Indian National Congress after the 1937 elections$^{64}$ made it to change its hitherto followed policy of *laissez-faire* towards the princely States.$^{65}$ The victory made the

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$^{64}$ The Congress formed the government in five provinces: Madras, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa; in Bombay, Assam and in the North West frontier Province it was the largest party and formed the governments.

$^{65}$ The former policy of the Congress during the 1920s and 1930s was to avoid entanglements in the States, both by prohibiting the setting up of local branches there and by making it clear to its supporters that it believed that the internal governance of the States was a matter for discussion and resolution between the rulers and their subjects. See James Manor, *Political Change in an Indian States: Mysore 1917-1955*. (New
Congress leaders so confident that they now wanted to dominate the federal part of the government as well. To meet that end, they had to change their stance on the princely States.\textsuperscript{66}

In the Haripura session of the Indian National Congress in February 1938, it was decided that the congress workers could participate in the political struggles in the States. In December, Gandhiji admitted in Harijan that he had been mistaken about the political potential of the States' peoples, and pronounced the policy of non-interference inappropriate "in the face of [the] injustice[s] perpetrated in the States" by autocratic darbars.\textsuperscript{67} Nehru accepted the presidency of the All India States’ Peoples Conference in 1939. In the inaugural address he asserted that time had come for the local States' struggles to be integrated with the major struggle against British imperialism\textsuperscript{68} to transform them into "one mighty struggle for India’s independence."\textsuperscript{69} A month later, the Congress leaders endorsed this united front strategy and offered to meet with the Standing Committee of the All India States’ People’s Conference to devise a common programme of agitation.

With the support of the congress workers, the political struggles in the States gathered momentum. In April 1938, in Mysore, at least twenty people were killed in the

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\item Though the Indian national Congress was assured of a healthy representation at the Centre also by the federal provisions of the Government of India Act 1935—the government calculated it could anticipate holding at least 75 percent of General, Scheduled Caste, Labour and Women's seats in the lower and perhaps 80 percent in the upper house—this was not enough, however, to give it an absolute majority. If it wanted to govern in its own right, Congress would have to capture, by one means or the other, some of the princely seats. The Congress would require 63 per cent and 76 per cent of the States' seats in the Council and the Assembly respectively.
\item Ian Copland, The Princes of India, pp. 163-70.
\item Ramusack, The Princes of India, p. 181-2.
\item 'Nehru's Presidential Address at the All-India States' People's Conference Session, Ludhiana, February 1939', Jawaharlal Nehru, Unity of India. (New York: 1942), p. 30.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
agitation which was mainly aimed at demanding the right for the States Congress to fly the national flag.\textsuperscript{70} This and other types of popular agitations in the States, like Mysore, Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir,\textsuperscript{71} raised the hopes and the Congress leaders seriously began to consider the possibility that the monarchical order might be overthrown in advance of the British departure. Had the British not responded to their urgent calls for help, some, if not all, of these darbars would certainly have fallen.

Pressed for the rapid constitutional reforms, the States tried to pass the buck. C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, the Dewan of Travancore—while facing the agitation in his State—observed that it was legally “not possible” for the ruler to grant responsible government “without the concurrence of the British Government”.\textsuperscript{72} This did not have the desired results as the British Indian Government made it clear that “the Paramount Power would certainly not obstruct proposals for constitutional advance” in the States. Linlithgow, the viceroy, clearly remarked that “the great mistake, I am now disposed to think, lay in the change of policy after Curzon’s retirement which led us to relax our control over individual Princes and happenings inside the States...we and the States have now...to pay for 30 years of laissez-faire”.\textsuperscript{73} In 1939, Linlithgow used his annual address...

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\item \textsuperscript{70} Rangaswami, \textit{The Story of Integration}, p. 169.
\item \textsuperscript{71} In the wake of the Haripura decision, there erupted agitations in a number of States. From Orissa States, about 30,000 people took flight to the British India to escape persecution by darbars. In Ramdurg and other southern Deccan States, anti-darbar demonstrations were held. In Rampur, a British political agent was put to death.
\item For a detailed discussion on the trajectory of the Congress policy and of other nationalist organizations towards the states and how the people’s indigenous political movements in the states affiliated with the larger national movement of India, see Suhail R. Lone, \textit{Indian National Movement and the Freedom Struggle of Jammu and Kashmir (1931-47)}. M.Phil dissertation submitted to the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 2013. Though the study deals with the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the writer simultaneously explores the general policy of the Congress, the Muslim League and other political organizations towards the princely states.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Statement to the Travancore Assembly 7 Feb. 1938, cited in Ian Copland, \textit{The Princes of India}, p. 165.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Linlithgow to Zetland 21 Feb. 1939, Cited in Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
to the Chamber of Princes to announce his new policy of constructive engagement. To
the Standing Committee of the Princes he stated that ‘the fact is the older status is gone
forever’. The announcement came as a rude shock to the princes. The announcement,
the princes thought, would have a potential impact on their internal autonomy. For over
two decades the princes had fought to have paramountcy circumscribed, and had
persuaded the British into putting, if not legally, then at least conventional checks on the
exercise of their rights of intervention. Now, Linlithgow was threatening to turn back the
clock to the old days of Lord Curzon.

The absence of the “protection of the treaty rights of the States” in the
Government of India Act 1935, the differences among the princes, the changed attitude
of the Congress towards the States, the political unrest in the States, and the shift in the
governments’ policy finally made the States not to join the federation. The “federal
offer” was finally wrapped up in 1939 when the negotiations between the British Indian
government and the princely States broke down.

To the British officialdom, the virtual abandonment of federation after ten years
of intensive effort was more than just a political setback to their plans, to underwrite the
Raj by building an effective counterpoise to Congressite democracy. It represented a
personal defeat for them. Rightly or wrongly, the British believed they had been betrayed.

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25 Hyderi, the minister of Hyderabad complained that Hoare, the secretary of States had assured the Indian
States Delegation that there would be no objection to the rulers protecting their treaty rights by means of
specific clause in the Instrument of Accession; but the promise was not kept when the Act was finally
drafted. See Ian Copland, The Princes of India, p. 175.
26 The 1938-39 had badly shaken the princely order. The princes were also not happy with the response of
the government to their call for help. The darbars complained that the government helped niggardly and
took long in coming.
The Second World War changed the course of events dramatically world over; so did it in India. The advancing forces of Hitler crossed into Poland on 1 September, 1939. Within two days Britain was at war with Germany. The outbreak of the war provided the princes with the much needed opportunity to repair the damage done to the relationship between the States and the government by the federation debacle. The States generously helped in the British war efforts and altogether, the cost of war materials provided by the States down to 1945 exceeded £5 million. In addition, the States made numerous direct grants of cash and gave generously of their land, buildings and workforces for war purposes. Both Linlithgow and the home authorities praised the darbars' contribution to the war-efforts. As a gesture of good-will, the government instructed the Residents to halt the scheme of constitutional reforms for the time being. In his 'August Offer' of 1940, Linlithgow emphasized the right of the States to stand aside from any Indian union formed as a result of post-war constitutional discussions.

Sir Stafford Cripps, who headed the Cripps Mission to India in March 1942 to persuade the Congress to drop its opposition to the war, told the Standing Committee, "so far as the undertaking of our obligations of defence of the States was concerned... we should stand by our treaties with the States unless they asked us to revoke them." Fitz, the Political Secretary to the Government of India, informed the chancellor of the Chamber of Princes that the fulfillment of the treaty obligations remained "an integral part of His Majesty’s Government’s policy", that there would be ‘no unilateral

denunciation’ of the treaties, and that London had no objection to the States forming subsidiary unions among themselves.\textsuperscript{79}

However, this war-time rapprochement which was strengthened by the Congress rebellion of 1942, did not last long. Taking advantage of the government relaxations, the princes grew more assertive and tried to act as a lobby group making demands on the government. This made the government uncomfortable. This, along with some other factors, such as the victories of the Allied forces in the war, made the British to again turn their attention towards the Indian affairs and to put screws on the princes.

By the end of 1942, the government was convinced that the sweeping reforms were the need of the hour. The first thing Francis Wyle, the new Political Officer—with liberal views—did was to replace many senior Residents who had likely become too partial towards princes.\textsuperscript{80} In the next stern step he tried to ‘redraw the map’ of the princely States by eliminating the small States. This, he thought, would be done by merging them with the larger neighbours. Accordingly in 1943, various small States of Kathiawar and Central India including 300 square miles, inhabited by nearly 1.2 million people, were ‘attached’ by executive order to larger neighbours.\textsuperscript{81} There was a mixed reaction to this development from the bigger princely States.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., vol. II, p. 370.
\textsuperscript{80} Ian Copland, The Princes of India, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{81} Various States challenged the legality of the order in courts. The initial opinion of the courts seemed to be tilted in favour of the States. This made the authorities uncomfortable because they did not want to lose the gains made as a result of the ‘attachment scheme’. They succeeded to bring a Bill in the parliament which was passed by the name of India (Attachment of States) Bill 1944. With the passage of the Act, the process of the transformation of the political map of Central India got accelerated. Ibid., 199.
\textsuperscript{82} The Chamber of Princes got divided over the ‘attachment drive’. Some thought that the rights of the rulers could be removed simply by a mere viceregal notification and they suspected dishonesty in the whole process. The order showed that if their patron, the British crown, was capable of legislating‘sovereign’ States out of existence; where they appeared to stand in the way of India’s advancement. Sooner or later Delhi would try something similar with the larger States. While as others welcomed this decision; though
The next step which the government took was to tighten their control over the economic activities of the States. The States had made great strides during the war years in terms of industrial growth much to the dislike of the government because it threatened to divert its capital from the provinces, where it was badly needed, and the government had also serious reservations with the States’ tax policies. After July 1944, the businesses in the States supplying goods to the government under wartime contracts were forced to accept payment through their head offices in British India, which made such payments liable to provincial taxation. Import and foreign exchange controls were also tightened. Now it became clear that the British policy towards the princely States had been slowly but continuously changing, but the government was not yet prepared to sever its ties with the princes, for they were still contributing to the war efforts and potentially acting as counterweights to the nationalists.

However, by May 1945, the war ended in Europe and within weeks the Congress leaders were released. In July, Britain saw the election of the socialist Labour government, which was committed, at least on paper, to the speedy decolonization of the subcontinent. This dramatic turn of events forced the Chamber of Princes to develop a strategy in order to safeguard their interests. The Chamber under the chancellorship of Nawab Hamidullah of Bhopal designed a strategy to insulate the States from the impact of an early British departure from the subcontinent. The strategy among other things included the acceleration of the internal reforms which would make the States able to

privately. They argued that the continuous tradition of poverty and corruptions in these small States had tarnished the image of the monarchical order. See, Transfer of Power, vol. IV, p. 563.

83 The political department’s Lepel Griffin complained that “the existence of taxation vacua or low pressure taxation areas within the geographical limits of India not only tends to suck...[new] industries out of British India into the States but creates conditions of unequal competition between [established] industries in the two areas”. Griffin to chancellor 28 June 1944. Wavell Coll., Pol. Dept., Special Branch, 78, 30/sb/46, July, 1944, NAI.
front up to the post-war bargaining with the backing of a solid core of 'loyal subjects'.  

The plan of the constitutional reforms produced results. Between a short period of two years—1945 to 1947—the proportion of Chamber States endowed with representative institutions went up from three-quarters to seven-eighths, while the number boasting partly responsible executives rose from 5 to nearly 25 per cent.

Despite having persuaded the fellow princes to introduce speedy constitutional reforms in their States, Hamidullah was still uncertain about the future. He continued to press the British to make a commitment regarding the ties between the princes and the crown, and their constitutional position within the framework of the new India. He wanted them to make their policy public, in order to put an end to the uncertainty. Paul Patrick, the Political Officer assured Hamidullah in private conversation that London acknowledged "the right of States, on the lapse of the Paramountcy, to enter into negotiations with the foreign powers". Though the chancellor got the informal assurance from the government there was the next challenge in the offing: the Cabinet Mission.

The Cabinet Mission left for India in March 1946. After much deliberations and discussions in India, they issued a document which came to be known as the 'Memorandum of 12 May 1946'. The memorandum affirmed that, "when a new fully

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84 The general assumption seemed to be that any devolution of power would be confined to the provinces, and that the imperial links with the States would continue. However as peace started descending on Southeast Asia and the Pacific, the Chamber under the leadership of Bhopal put the final touches to a grand strategy designed to guard the princes and their States from the impact of an early British departure from the subcontinent. This strategy included: the further rebuilding of the Chamber of Princes; accelerated internal reforms; the maintenance of the imperial connection; a tactical alliance with the Muslim League; and a negotiated settlement with the Congress.

85 The Times of India, 6 July 1946.

86 Extract from political advisor's talk with Bhopal 5 June 1946, enclosure in Abell to Turnbull 13 June 1946, Transfer of Power, VII, p. 908.
self-governing or independent government or governments came into being in British India, His Majesty's Government's influence with these governments would not be such as to enable them to carry out the obligations of paramountcy; nor did they contemplate the retention of British troops in India for that purpose. Thus, as a logical sequence, and in view of the desire expressed to them on behalf of the States, His Majesty's Government would cease to exercise the powers of paramountcy. This meant that the rights of the States which flowed from their relationship to the Crown would no longer exist, and that all the rights surrendered by the States to the paramount power would return to them. Political arrangements between the States on the one side and the British Crown and British India on the other would thus be brought to an end. The void would have to be filled by the States entering into a federal relationship with the successor government or governments in British India, or by entering into particular political arrangements". The memorandum also referred to "the desirability of the States, in suitable cases, forming or joining administrative units large enough to enable them to be fitted into the constitutional structure, as also of conducting negotiations with British India in regard to the future regulation of matters of common concern especially in the economic and financial fields."^{87}

The princes welcomed the Cabinet Mission Plan as it appeared that the Plan assured them the independence after the lapse of British paramountcy in India. The Plan also made the provision for an all-India assembly to settle the details of the new constitution. The States were also required to send their delegates to the Constituent Assembly. But the States had reservations about the nature of this proposed Constituent Assembly.

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body. Joining the Assembly, the States thought, would lock them into particular constitutional arrangements which would not be in the best princely interests. So the princes decided to lay down preconditions for the States’ entry into the Constituent Assembly. In regard to the selection of the delegates, the Chamber of Princes rejected the mechanism of popular election; it expected a weighted representation and opposed any proposed constitution with provisions antagonistic to the monarchical form of government. It also stressed that the States be allowed to retain ‘full rights of administration’, subject only to central supervision.

The unity of the purpose however needed unity in the ranks. Both the chancellor and his patrons—the British had realized that the group loyalty and the unity of purpose were essential if the princes hoped for a reasonable settlement with the nationalist centre. Polindia, the Political Secretary to the government of India wrote to the Resident in Jammu and Kashmir: “it is important that at this critical stage the States should maintain a common front for the purpose of negotiating with British India in the Constituent Assembly.” Chancellor opined that, “we must hold together”, but his message went unheard and the princely order could not hold their bond together during the concluding years of the Raj.

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89 Record of Interviews between Cabinet Delegation, Wavell and Bhopal, 9 and 12 May 1946, Transfer of Power, VII, p. 473 and 521.
91 Circular from Chancellor 31 Dec 1946, Pol. Dept., Special Branch, 78, 30/ Sb/46, N.A.I.
92 There are various reasons for why the princely sates could not hold together at this critical juncture. The gap that had already emerged between the large and small States grew much more pronounced during the concluding years as it became clear that there was going to be room for only a minority of the States in the new India. The princely order also got divided on the religious and linguistic lines. Till now the States had remained comparatively free from the communal violence, but as the barriers between the two Indians began to crumble, this syncretic darbari political culture began to wane. However, the most fateful reason that eventually divided the princely camp was not class or ethnicity as such, but ideology. The rulers for
Thus by the spring of 1947, the princely States had for all the practical purposes disintegrated and put themselves exposed to the assaults of their adversaries.

It was during the decisive viceroyalty of Lord Mountbatten when the question of Indian provinces as well as States was "finally solved". He arrived in India on 22 March 1947. In his first speech, he announced that he had come with the mandate from the British Government to transfer power to Indians by June 1948. It was on 3rd June 1947, that Lord Mountbatten came up with his famous plan for the partition of India. According to the plan His Majesty's Government would be prepared to relinquish power to two Governments—India and Pakistan—on the basis of Dominion Status. In regard to the States, the plan laid down that the policy of His majesty's Government towards the Indian States contained in the Cabinet Mission 'Memorandum of 12 May 1946' remained unchanged.

No sooner had Mountbatten announced his 3rd June Plan than the nationalist camp, particularly Congress, rose in opposition to the States' non-participation in the Constituent Assembly. Jawaharlal Nehru of Congress, who had accused the rulers of having a 'shop-keeper mentality', declared that any State which refused to enter the Constituent Assembly would be treated as 'hostile'. He reiterated this line several times publicly and made it clear to the Viceroy that he would 'encourage rebellion in all States that go against us'. This and some other factors raised serious questions regarding the practicality of the provisions, dealing with the States, of the 3rd June Plan. The viceroy

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long had opposed the spread of democracy, but now, as the British departure drew near, some of them began to change their tone.

94 Viceroy was forced to change the policy of his government by some other factors such as: Bhopal, Travancore, Hyderabad and some other States' intentions of asserting independence after the proposed devolution of power. Mountbatten also thought that in the negotiated settlement with the Congress, the
was ‘forced’ to think for a via-media. Mountbatten, after much deliberations with a cross-section of leaders, finally reached to the conclusion that, “As soon as I turned my attention to the problem of the States, it became evident to me that their [aspirations to] independence...would not be worth a moment’s purchase unless they had the support of one or other of the Dominions.” With the problem redefined in this way, the solution became obvious to him—the accession of the States to either of the two Governments. The solution was made easy by V.P. Menon, the Reforms Commissioner. He proposed that the States should be asked to accede only in respect of defence, foreign affairs and communications—areas over which they had long ceased to exercise jurisdiction. So it became clear that the viceroy’s policy towards the princes had changed. He made it clear to the rulers that the only way they could stay in the commonwealth was to join up with India or Pakistan. In this way the plans of the princes for the formation of States’ unions were shelved. The plan attracted vehement protests from the princes and severe criticism from a section of the British officials. The government was accused of ‘a gross breach of faith’. But all kinds of protests were in vain.

Mountbatten gave go-ahead to the establishment of a new central department under Sardar Patel to oversee ‘matters of common concern’ with the States. The three-subject accession plan was formally unveiled to the rulers and ministers at a meeting of the Chamber of Princes on 25 July 1947. The Instrument of Accession, prepared by the Political Department, made it clear that acceding States were not bound, ‘in any way’. to

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States probably held the key. With this end in view, in conversations with the various Congress leaders, he made it clear that he had set his face against any continuing relationship between the United Kingdom and the non-acceding States.

95 Mountbatten to Listowel, 8 August 1947, Transfer of Power, XII, p. 585.
96 Menon. The Story of Integration, pp. 65-84.
the future constitution of India. It also stated that in all areas except defence, foreign
affairs and communications, sovereignty would continue to lie with their rulers. They
were also assured that their extra-territorial rights would be respected and they would be
allowed to democratize slowly.

Accession was facilitated by persuasion, pressure, blackmailing and warnings
from time to time. Thus the States were left with no option but to accede either with
India or Pakistan. Most of them simply accepted their fate and signed the Instruments of
Accession.

However, the Mountbatten’s scheme of accession did not address the concerns of
the Congress and others about the viability of the States and the future of the monarchical
system. It was then left to V.P. Menon and Vallabhbhai Patel to ‘finally settle’ the
‘problem’ of the States. No sooner had the States signed the Instruments of Accession,
than Patel and Menon began to plot their downfall. This ‘project’ which took about two
years, involved the amalgamation of the States into larger administrative units and
merger with the erstwhile provinces, their rapid democratization, and their total
subordination to the federal centre. Merger and democratization together brought the
States into line with the rest of the country as regards the manner of their governance; but
the States in their relations continued to remain protected by the Instruments of
Accession, which restricted the control of the Indian union in the States. The Congress

88 Mountbatten reminded them that the powers in these three areas were already being exercised de facto on
their behalf by the Delhi government.
90 Mountbatten in his speech to the Chamber of Princes impressed upon the princes that the offer of 25
July might not last; so the rulers should not think twice. Mountbatten under the influence of Patel issued
Hamdullah of Bhopal and Ramaswamy Aiyer of Travancore with dire warnings about what might happen if
they did not place themselves under the umbrella of the government of India. See, Alan Campbell-Johnson,
leaders assumed that the Instruments of Accession would have to be renegotiated eventually in the ‘interests’ of nation and ‘social justice’. Thus the States were made to sign new Instruments of Accession ceding to the union the power to pass laws in respect of all matters falling within the federal and concurrent legislative lists. In this way the princely India and its age-old monarchical system, effectively disappeared down the trapdoor of history.

Conclusion:

Clearly, the princely states which covered one-third of the total area of India represented a unique system of polity that had developed in India, partly as a result of policy and partly as a result of historical accident. The Government of India pursued, in several marked periods of spectacular aggression followed by periods of hesitation and rest, a policy of enlarging the empire by annexing princely States. By the second decade of the nineteenth century virtually all the major ‘country powers’ had been linked to the company by treaty. What is more, the essential elements of British paramountcy—the system of Residents at the princely courts, the regulation of successions, and control over the States’ foreign affairs—were all laid down in this period. However, after the Revolt of 1857, the policy of annexation was abandoned by the British Indian Government. It was the theory of paramountcy and the concept of ‘usage’ which was put forward as a uniform principle in relation to the princely states. This gave the British ample opportunities to intervene in the internal affairs of the States which reached its climax during the viceroyalty of Curzon. It was the challenge of nationalism, which took the shape of mass agitation with the dawn of the twentieth century, that the government
decided to follow the policy of cultivating and politicizing the Indian princes to counterpoise this challenge. In 1909, in lieu of their support the policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the States was announced by Lord Minto. The Residents were asked to put themselves in the princes' shoes. With the declaration of Lord Minto, the whole question of British relations with the princes was reconsidered. The long standing demand of Indian princes for the establishment of a permanent body representing them was finally met in 1919 when the British Indian Government, as a part of its post-war reform package, announced the establishment of the Chamber of Princes.

However, unlike the first two decades of the twentieth century, the third decade did not prove to be so good for the princes. The government tightened the noose around the princes. The report of the Butler Committee, which was appointed by the British Government on the request of the princely states to review the operation of the paramountcy, came as a shock to the princes. The report warned the princes of interference if reports of misgovernment were received.

In the wake of the strong nationalist upsurge in India, the British Government decided to take up the question of constitutional reforms for India. The Simon Commission Report, the three Round Table Conferences and the publishing of the main constitutional reforms in a White Paper culminated in the passage of the Government of India Act 1935. The Act provided for the establishment of a 'Federation of India' which could not be formed unless the majority of the States signified their adherence to it. However, the absence of the 'protection of the treaty rights of the States' in the Government of India Act 1935, the differences among the princes, the changed attitude of
the Congress towards the States, the political unrest in the States, and the shift in the governments’ policy made the States not to join the federation.

The damage done to the relationship between the states and the Government of India by the Federation debacle, the pressure on the princely states to introduce sweeping reforms and the government’s decision to ‘redraw the map’ of the of the princely States by eliminating the smaller States made it clear that the British policy towards the princely States had been slowly but continuously changing; but the government was not yet prepared to sever its ties with the princes, for they were still contributing to the war efforts and potentially acting as counterweights to the nationalists.

The fast-changing political scenario in India and abroad after Second World War and the princes’ failure to introduce the much needed reforms, the active support of the Indian National Congress for the peoples’ movements in the princely states, the absence of unity in the ranks and files of the princely order and finally the speedy decolonization of the Indian subcontinent put the final nail in the coffins of the princely India. In this way the princely India and its age-old monarchical system effectively disappeared down the trapdoor of history.

It is in view of this broader context that an attempt would be made in the following chapters to study the relationship between the British Indian paramount power and the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.