The transfer of Jodhpur railways, 1947-48: Denials, delays and divisions

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The Transfer of Jodhpur Railways, 1947–48
Denials, Delays and Divisions

The process of partition between India and Pakistan, that is, dividing up material assets, remains an under-written subject, barring its border-building aspects. While the old scholarship offered an adversarial account of this exercise, the recent attempts revise this narrative by stressing upon the cooperation evinced by the two sides. Where the former found antagonism, the latter has sought to locate some mutually agreed method in the madness. Focusing on Jodhpur, a princely state, which has not found a place in this matrix, this paper brings together a slice of history from the integration of the princely states with the history of partition, a connection not usually made. Delineating a facet of early interdominion relations on the division of asset of a princely state, it questions the “two peas in a pod” seeking-consensus approach to early India–Pakistan relations that puts two unequal entities together on an equal plane.

Seventy years on, the shadow of partition of British India remains “long” and “great” with its “deadly legacy” in perpetual “flux” (Zamindar 2007; Khan 2007; Gould et al 2013; Hajari 2015). From history-writing in academe (Pandey 2001), to public politicking (Singh 2010), to increasing documentation¹ and memorialising,² the “savage” crop of 1947 is literally being harvested around us all the time (Sarna 2013). While the “high politics” leading up to that cataclysmic event was the flavour for the longest time (Moore 1983; Jalal 1985; Roy 1990; Chatterji 1994), the historical flair has since shifted to counting its considerable divisions, dissonances and spoils (Hasan 1997; Sikand 2004; Talbot 2006, 2011; Chatterji 2007); in other words, from the eclipse of empire and making the new commonwealth (Moore 1987; Low 1991) to borders and boundaries (Menon and Bhasin 1998), refugees and citizens (Jayal 2013) and the making of “partitioned lives” in “exile” from their “homelands” in postcolonial India and Pakistan (Chakraborty et al 2007; Nair 2011; Roy 2012; Bhavnani 2014).

A vital, perhaps the fundamental, aspect of partition was the division of assets of British India between its succeeding dominions. From pins to planes and typewriters to trains, the Partition Council and its subcommittees distributed these in varying permutations and combinations. The emerging scholarship on this carving up of material by men, thin as it is (Samaddar 1999; Yong and Kudaisya 2000, 2007), can be grouped into two schools of thought: one asserting the adversarial and contentious nature of this exercise (McLeod 2008), while the other, more recent attempt(s), countering the pragmatic cooperation evinced by the two sides and, thus, complicating the conflictual process (Sengupta 2014; Raghavan 2016). While the former has found antagonism in ideological and theological foundations manifesting “in a conflict of self and other with both states questioning the legitimacy of the other,” the latter has probe if in “the actual process of dividing the country, there was some method in the madness” and has found “cooperation, mutual trust, order, an air of certainty and decisions through discussions and deliberations.”

Following these trends, but focusing on a region, a princely state, which has not found a place in these, this paper brings together a slice of history from the integration of the princely states with the history of partition; a link not often established. Concerned with the old Marwar capital of Jodhpur from the Rajputana region (currently the Indian state of Rajasthan) and viewing an episode of its interaction with the governments of Pakistan and India, it examines the myriad ways and multiple

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levels through which the sentiments of partition affected the subcontinent. At the heart of that episode was the fate of the Jodhpur railway and this paper, by tracing it, throws yet more light on the nature of the early postcolonial state in India and Pakistan. In doing so, it first questions the narrative of a Nehruvian elite consensus in the former, and second, complicates the understanding of a consolidated colonial “official mind.” Third, given that the crux of the matter was the question of ownership of a railway line, this also reflects upon its impact on the movement of refugees. Here, it contrasts the legal position of the problem, emphasised by some, with the human approach to it taken by others.

Thus, delineating another facet of the deterioration of early interdominion relations on a rather small issue made significant, this paper wonders whether the new alternative history of India–Pakistan relations (Chatterji 2012) stressing cooperation and coexistence puts two unequal entities together on an equal plane. This “two peas in a pod” approach that sees both needing each other to assert distinction so as to function as viable entities against each other “risks pharisaism, given their respective starting-points, not to speak of the responsibility of the stronger in doing its best to sabotage the weaker from the outset” (Anderson 2013: 145). Highlighting the happenings in Jodhpur through 1947–48, this study shows that, contrary to this recent revisionism in the literature, it was indeed the “policy of paramountcy of self-preservation” (Raghavan 2012: 15) that held sway in the ultimate analysis and action—notwithstanding the intention—between the dominions and princely states. There was certainly “negotiation and exchange,” but it was between two sides, two governments that were just not starting from the same point.

While Pakistan emerged in August 1947, India inherited the “successor status to the Raj, its seat at the un, control of the capital, three-quarters of the territory and population of British India, 14/20 armoured regiments, 40/48 artillery regiments, 21/29 infantry regiments, larger part of the air force and navy and 137,000/160,000 tonnes of ordinance” (Cohen 1984: 7; Talbot 1998: 99; Anderson 2013: 67).

Even if one underplays the religious emotionalism, nationalist irrationalism and a predisposition towards vengeful conflict, as urged by the revisionist scholarship, how can one write about a “mutual aim,” when the meaning of “closure to the process of partition” was not reciprocal (Raghavan 2012: 10–11)? Nothing encapsulates the evasive and contradictory character of the revisionist take better than the following quotation:

Whether it was the case of a territorial dispute or property or people, the approach that both governments took in forming their bilateral positions were very consistent. What both the governments agreed to do was to conduct relations on an edgy precipice, where the possibility of compromises of various kinds was always present and tangible. (Raghavan 2012: 19)

In fact, as this study shows, little remained “uncertain, tenuous, fragmented and flexible” in the early interdominion and princely states’ approach towards each other (Raghavan 2012: 15), which progressively hardened. Restricting itself to the issue of movement of minorities, on which this particular episode—gleaned from File No 27 (40)/48 of the Prime Minister’s secretariat branch of the Government of India collection in the National Archives of India (New Delhi), and the Subject File Serial No 35 of the v Instalment of the Sri Prakasa Papers in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi)—directly impinging, one finds a confident, substantial, total and rigid way in which Jodhpur, New Delhi, and, to the extent it could, Karachi behaved during “partitioned times” (Deschamines and Ivkovic 2003).

**A Nehruvian Elite Consensus**

In June 1948, one year from the partition plan of British India, the metre gauge railway in the now Pakistani province of Sind was still being managed by the Jodhpur government. This had been the case since 1924, following an agreement between the then secretary of state and Jodhpur princely state. All rolling stock, machinery, plant and stores, whether required for the Jodhpur section or the Sind section were provided by the Jodhpur government. In the Partition Council (July–August 1947), it was decided to terminate this arrangement, anomalous after Sind went to Pakistan and Jodhpur acceded to India, and the responsibility for working this railway line was to pass on to the Pakistan government latest by 31 July 1948.

The 1924 agreement had made a provision for a separation of the two sections. The then secretary of state had agreed to take over “on payment” a share of the rolling stock, machinery, plant and stores. Herein, lay the nub of the dispute: did “on payment” mean “prepayment” as insisted by Jodhpur railway authorities, from March to November 1948, the duration of the dispute? Or, as expressed by the Pakistani officials, was this insistence for “pre-payment” by the Jodhpur government at variance with the established practice, while carrying the likelihood of mutual suspicion and argument?

Interestingly, it was Karachi that asked for the Government of India’s intervention in this tussle and not Jodhpur. If anything, the latter was rather reluctant for New Delhi to be involved. In the summer of 1948, Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, Pakistan’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, complained to then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, “that the Government of Jodhpur is creating a dead-lock in regard to the transfer of Pakistan section of Jodhpur railway.” Veheemtly denying this charge, Jai Narain Vyas, Jodhpur’s premier, claimed to Nehru in a demi-official letter written on 21 June 1948 (No 186/Jul 1948) that “both the Government of Pakistan and the Jodhpur Government had agreed that the Pakistan Government should make an advance payment for the stock they take.” Asserting that Pakistan had gone back on its word, Vyas added that “it is they who did not like the idea and the transfer of this section was postponed from the 1 June to the 31 July, 1948.” Giving into hosting a conference of the representatives of the governments of Pakistan, Jodhpur and India in early-July 1948, Vyas asked Nehru for “a gist of what has passed between Sir Zafarullah and yourself.”

The said meeting was held at Jodhpur on 1 and 2 July 1948 and was presided over by I S Puri, the then financial commissioner.
of the Indian Railways. No agreement, however, could be reached as regards the time of payment by Pakistan government of the value of rolling stock, plant, machinery and stores, which were to be transferred from Jodhpur. Pakistan representatives offered to pay 90% of the value on 1 August 1948 after the stock had been handed over, while Jodhpur representatives insisted on the amount being deposited before 16 July 1948 with the Reserve Bank of India, as an “irrevocable credit” in favour of Jodhpur, they also wanted to be able to make withdrawals from this deposit. The total value of the assets in question was estimated at ₹56 lakh. There was no agreement reached at on the question of acceptance by Pakistan of their liability for the proportionate share of gratuity and leave salary of the staff or for their share of compensation claims arising out of traffic carried before the separation, but to be paid after the 31 July 1948. Further, Indian Railways were suddenly stopped. Since end-February 1947, Payments were regularly made till July 1947, working of the British (that is Sind) section, the Secretary of 16(a) of the agreement were: “In the event of separation of the transfer of rolling stock while Pakistan said they would pay after receipt of rolling stocks. The relevant words of Clause transfers of railways from Jodhpur to Pakistan that “the prob-
lems arose of transfer of rolling stock by Jodhpur and payment for the same by Pakistan.” Jodhpur had interpreted the 1924 agreement to mean that payment will be made before the transfer of rolling stock while Pakistan said they would pay after receipt of rolling stocks. The relevant words of Clause 16(a) of the agreement were: “In the event of separation of the working of the British (that is Sind) section, the Secretary of State (now Government of Pakistan) agrees to take over on payment of the proportionate book value.” While the legal officers in New Delhi were inclined to uphold Jodhpur’s interpretation, Sri Prakasa sensibly said that “in ordinary transactions, very often goods are delivered [first] … stringent interpretations are seldom sought after,” and wistfully wondered “if the draftsmen of the original agreement had any idea of such difficulties ever arising between the Secretary of State and the Jodhpur Darbar.” In the climate vitiated by the vicissitudes of partition, “mutual suspicions had taken strong root, Jodhpur refused to part with rolling stock before Pakistan paid up, while Pakistan wanted the rolling stock before paying.” Moreover, to Sri Prakasa it seemed that Pakistan had a “legitimate reason for suspicion because [of] their net earnings being withheld since August 1947, which roughly amounted to over ₹2 lakh per month.”

Away from all this, on the ground and along the railway line between Jodhpur and Sind, charges and countercharges started to flow. Pakistan claimed Jodhpur was sabotaging the whole railway by depriving it of stores, weighing machines, turntables, etc, while Jodhpur charged Pakistan with taking illegal possession of rolling stock and tampering with controls, etc. Matters came to a head when Jodhpur cancelled the 9 Up-Sind Mail train between Luni (Jodhpur) and Hyderabad (Sind) on 26 July 1948, without any prior information on the plea, as was later claimed in a summary prepared by the railway ministry on 5 October 1948 that there were only five–six passengers travelling on it.

Pakistan cancelled the corresponding 10 Down mail train as also the refugee train claiming that Jodhpur’s action was with the intention to deprive the Sind section of that promised railway stock and fearing that if they allowed trains to go to Jodhpur, “these also would be frozen.” Thus, on 15 August 1948, the only train link between Pakistan and India in the Rajputana–Sind sector had been cut off for three weeks, with hundreds of refugees stranded on both sides.

Sri Prakasa’s “deep concern” did not end here though. In view of so many unresolved differences, he had suggested that these be referred to arbitration, but was surprised when Karachi opted to favour “settlement by mutual consultation.” Sri Prakasa had also visited Jodhpur in the last week of July to find that the Imperial Bank at Jodhpur had received an advice from the Imperial Bank, Karachi that a sum of ₹50 lakh had been deposited by the Pakistan government in the Karachi branch “in connection with the purchase of the British section of the Jodhpur Railway.” Vyas and Puri, however, had disappointed him by refusing to interpret this gesture as one of goodwill, let alone that of payment to Jodhpur as “the conditions of payment [were only to] be advised later.” Not just that, the Jodhpur authorities hid from Sri Prakasa that they had stopped the Sind Mail first, complaining instead that Pakistan had stopped all trains; as Sri Prakasa had felt, Jodhpur and Pakistan “both feared” that the other would freeze the train traffic and thus proceeded to pre-empt the other. By 30 July 1948, as the above-mentioned railway ministry summary recounted, both sides “had taken forcible possession of the Control Office[s] and cut off connection through control wires.” The Pakistan government now demanded their share of net earnings of the Sind section stopped since August 1947, while Jodhpur government demanded the ability to withdraw unconditionally from the money deposited in the Imperial Bank.
Understanding a Colonial ‘Official Mind’

As August 1948 approached and the two dominions started preparations for their first Independence Day celebrations, the position of this case was that now New Delhi had taken the lead, and the detaining of the train by Pakistan had become the bigger bone of contention. The Ministry of Railways demanded that before the transfer of any rolling stock from Jodhpur, Karachi must make “immediate payment of ₹16 lakh representing value of rolling stock detained by them.” If the latter desired to have the rest of the rolling stock, under the 1924 agreement, “they must make pre-payment.” Only after this was done, New Delhi could commit the delivery of stock from Jodhpur to Hyderabad (Sind). Unmoved by the plight of refugees, New Delhi offered a population exchange/transfer at the border: the only way of refugees being moved by rail from Sind to India and vice versa was for both Jodhpur and Pakistan trains being brought to the border and Hindu refugees being transhipped into Jodhpur trains and Muslim refugees being transhipped into Pakistan trains.” Faced with this intransigence, Karachi was the first to blink. In a telegram dated 4 August 1948 (S No 48), Sri Prakasa reported that Pakistani government had instructed the Imperial Bank to release ₹10 lakh “immediately to the Jodhpur Railway for stock held here [Sind].” In return, they sought Jodhpur “to release valuation papers for rolling stock detained [there], which were prepared by Pakistan and Jodhpur officers working jointly at Jodhpur.”

Regarding the resumption of railway services, given that its present stock scarcely sufficed for Pakistan’s internal services, Karachi desired for the “timetable to be so arranged that one train from that side and one train from this side should cross near the border, so that each Dominion will have one rake of the other in its possession as guarantee of good faith.”

Next day, Jodhpur authorities confirmed that ₹10 lakh was credited on the afternoon of 5 August (S No 52), but pointed out that the value of stock detained by the Pakistani government was about ₹17 lakh. Five days later, on 10 August (S No 55) Sri Prakasa again reported Pakistan’s “undertaking that if Jodhpur runs a special up to border of Sind with Muslim refugees … the same train could carry Hindu refugees back to Jodhpur.” Next day, Pakistan authorities told him that the ₹10 lakh paid was approximately the price of the rolling stock in their possession and promised the remaining payment on receipt of rolling stock, as Sri Prakasa informed New Delhi on 11 August (S No 56). None of this was enough for the railway authorities in New Delhi. They asserted that the ₹10 lakh paid did not cover the value of the stock detained, which was over ₹17 lakh, and the remaining ₹7 lakh should first be paid for. With respect to the overall stock transfer, they bluntly directed Sri Prakasa on 14 August (S No 57) that “prepayment was an essential condition for delivery ... no stock will cross the border which had not been paid for.” Regarding refugee trains, the ministry’s reply was remarkable in its calculativeness:

We understand that the number of Hindu refugees at Hyderabad is far in excess of capacity of one train, whereas Muslim refugees in Jodhpur not many. If [Pakistan’s] undertaking means that [they] will run refugee specials to the border only till Muslim refugees have been evacuated from Jodhpur, it falls far short of requirements. Government of India propose that Pakistan should run specials to the border till all Hindu refugees at Hyderabad and between Hyderabad and Khokhrapar have been cleared. Jodhpur should run specials to the border and the Hindu refugees brought there in Pakistan specials should be transhipped. Jodhpur specials will carry Muslim refugees to the border so long as there are any; otherwise will run empty to that place.

This attitude was in stark contrast to the one evinced by Sri Prakasa. In his response, dated 16 August (S No 64), he began from the beginning and reminded New Delhi that the main point of difference was that “Jodhpur interpreted original agreement to mean that payment will be made before transfer of rolling stock while Pakistan said they would pay after receipt of rolling stock.” Remarking that “in situation as it is some half way house can alone meet difficulty,” reflecting that “mutual distrust is so great that neither we accept their guarantee nor they accept our guarantee,” ruminating that “someone must show the way and I wish our government could do that when Pakistan does not,” Sri Prakasa reaffirmed that “Jodhpur need have no fears because Pakistan has placed ₹50 lakh in the Imperial Bank of India, Jodhpur, to the extent of ₹40 lakh over ₹10 lakh already transferred.” He also revealed that though the value of the stock detained by Pakistan may have been more than ₹10 lakh, as claimed by Indian Railways, he had agreed to this sum “in order that the vicious circle may be broken and confidence restored.”

Writing again four days later, on 20 August (S No 66), Sri Prakasa let New Delhi know that Jodhpur was “very bitter for having made the payment of ₹10 lakh” for basically nothing in return. But, given their straitened circumstances, Pakistan authorities were even “willing to go to Jodhpur and pay on the nail as stock was delivered and earnestly suggested simultaneous handing of stock and payment.” Sri Prakasa ended by pointing out once again that “any proposal for prepayment or, for that matter pre-delivery, was impracticable now.” In the face of such an impassioned plea by their own representative in Karachi, the Government of India, in this case the Ministry of Railways and the ministry without portfolio assisting with refugees and rehabilitation, met, discussed and incredibly hardened their position. Their telegram to Sri Prakasa of 24 August (S No 67) elaborated that

Pakistan should place an irrevocable credit of ₹40 lakh in the branch of the Imperial Bank of Jodhpur ... cheques should be issued for the book value of the rolling stock handed over by Jodhpur to Pakistan ... first charge on the irrevocable credit should be the difference between the book value of stock [held by Pakistan] and the sum of ₹10 lakh already paid by Pakistan ... There was no objection to [Pakistan authorities] proceeding to Jodhpur and paying on the nail for stock to be delivered thereafter if Pakistan should prefer this solution.

Even more remarkable is the feeling entertained by them that “these proposals were made mainly with a view to satisfy our high-commissioner, who felt that he had made certain commitments and his honour would be involved if the stand taken by us was not modified to some extent.” To Sri Prakasa, these proposals appeared as far from doing anything of this sort. A close friend of Nehru since the late 1910s, an anguished and hurt high commissioner now decided to write directly to the
Prime Minister. On 16 August 1948, he sent two letters to Nehru: one, an official account that was copied to Nehru's influential private secretary M O Mathai as well as the additional secretary (commonwealth relations) Subimal Dutt, the other, “strictly personal and confidential,” for Nehru only.

Sri Prakasa began by giving voice to his fear that his “intervention lately (has become) unwelcome, for, to my regret, I could not see eye to eye with our officers and advised them on many points in a manner which they did not approve.” Then, he informed Nehru that, “when matters came to a head and a deadlock,” he had insisted upon the communications ministry of Pakistan, “on the distinct instructions of Mr I S Puri that at least payment should be made for the amount of stock in possession of Pakistan.” On the lookout for a reciprocal confidence-building measure, Sri Prakasa had proceeded to give the Pakistani authorities “guarantees on behalf of Government of India that they would get their stock if they started paying on strength of Puri’s telegram.” It was this that had led to Karachi placing ₹10 lakh in the Imperial Bank, as the Pakistani authorities made a rough calculation of the value of stock in their possession, which they thought was one-fifth of the total stock due and so, “to satisfy” Sri Prakasa, they had paid “1/5th of the total value of ₹50 lakh, that is, ₹10 lakh” to the Imperial Bank for transfer to Jodhpur Railways.

Elaborating upon this rough calculation, Sri Prakasa wrote that Karachi already held four big engines and two shunting engines, 30 big passenger bogeys and 14 smaller bogeys and 200 goods wagons, while the total rolling stock that should come to them, as agreed under the 1924 agreement, consisted of 28 engines, 166 passenger bogeys and 773 goods wagons. Recounting Pakistan's further proposal that they would instruct Imperial Bank “to go on paying as they got more stock,” Sri Prakasa regretted that the mandarins in the Ministry of Railways in New Delhi “show continuing distrust but suggests no other method except complete payment.” He reminded Nehru that “suspicion exists on both sides and blame also at-

In these circumstances, I feel that it may not be right for me to continue in this office as the persons concerned in the Pakistan Government are feeling—and they are making no secret of it—that I let them down and got this payment made without any idea of fulfilling the rest of the bargain. They obviously feel that we do not propose to give them any rolling stock and propose to keep all the net earnings of the whole year and the ₹10 lakh that they have now transferred. Even if they may not feel so, they can have no doubt that we do not propose to give them any rolling stock and would stop their railway. I fear I can be regarded as a party to these suspicions and I certainly do not feel that I enjoy [the] confidence of our ministry concerned in carrying on these negotiations properly ... There need be no embarrassment to you for you know I am not anxious to continue ... This however becomes a matter of honour and I depend upon you to help me to maintain it.

Taking a liberty that only old and close personal equations allow, Sri Prakasa concluded by advising Nehru to order [return] by Jodhpur Government of ₹10 lakh already paid [by Pakistan] if government feels [that] they must have whole or nothing. Then mutual negotiations, if any, can [then] start afresh on status quo ante.

He was sorrowful, for “despite the best of intentions and closest of thoughts,” he now realised that “state matters cannot go by good intentions [but] only by good results.”

\section*{Question of Ownership of the Railway Line}

Two days after Mohammad Ali Jinnah passed away on 11 September 1948, Sri Prakasa learnt that Pakistan government “was prepared to put ₹40 lakh to [Jodhpur’s] irrevocable credit but [was] adamant that the difference between the book value of stock already taken over [₹17 lakh] and the sum of ₹10 lakh already paid should be the last and not first charge against this credit” and accordingly informed New Delhi. If this seemed like the makings of a breakthrough, hopes were snuffed out soon as the Ministry of Railways continued to insist that “₹7 lakh being the difference between the value of the stock already with Pakistan and ₹10 lakh should be the first charge against the irrevocable credit.” When this reached him, Sri Prakasa once again put up resistance and got minor modifications.

The Ministry of Railways wrote to the high commissioner on 29 September 1948 (S No 77) that it had decided that instead of insisting on making an immediate payment of ₹7 lakh, “to break the deadlock more material of substantial value will be arranged to be supplied to the Pakistan Government, who should agree to pay the value of the material so supplied plus the balance which is still due from them as the first release from the irrevocable credit.” The Ministry of Railways felt that this was “as far as [it could go] in meeting the wishes of the Pakistan Government for honouring the commitments which [Sri Prakasa] had made to them.” And, this feeling was accompanied by a complaint, namely, that their desire that “Pakistan should run enough refugee trains to enable all Hindu refugees in returning to India” had not been met with favour. Not realising that the boot on this matter was actually on the other foot the Ministry of Railways hoped that this gesture leading to “the agreement practically reached regarding rolling stock will evoke now a favourable attitude from Pakistan.”
What they got instead was a missive from their own Prime Minister. Twelve months from when the said file had embarked upon its three-way journey between Jodhpur, Karachi and New Delhi, the continuing impasse finally evoked a response from Nehru. On 3 October 1948 (PM 1386), he wrote at length to the new Railways Minister N G Ayyangar as well as Refugee and Rehabilitation Minister M L Saksena. In his characteristic tone, Nehru began by mentioning that he “was troubled about the Jodhpur Railway Affair.” He was leaving for the United Nations (un) session at Paris in two days’ time but had called a conference on the matter before that as, “otherwise I shall have little peace of mind.” While he admitted that he did “not know of the intricate details,” having read the intergovernmental correspondence and having discussed the matter with various people since Sri Prakasa’s personal note to him in August, there had been “a growing feeling in [him] that we have been mismanaging this, indeed that we have not acted quite straight about it.” And, then he made an amazing admission:

On several occasions I expressed my earnest desire that the matter should be settled, but nothing came of it. Where the obstruction lay, I could not quite make out, whether in the Ministry of Refugee and Rehabilitation or in the Railway Ministry, or in Jodhpur. I have a powerful sensation that no serious attempt has been made on our part to come to a settlement and that probably no settlement was desired.

This was “bad enough” then for the Indian Prime Minister and reads poorly now, all these years later. But, what was “really painful” to him was “the complete ignoring of the human factor.” Large numbers of our people are stranded in Sind and are suffering great hardships because the railway line has ceased to work. Considerable numbers have tried to walk the seven miles gap through very inhospitable country, infested by robbers and dacoits. They have been looted and deprived of their goods, their women have been raped, and they lie in crowds at small wayside stations where even water is lacking. The amount of misery caused has been tremendous. I wonder if people sitting in our offices drafting telegrams or letters pay heed to this human element and misery.

Lest he be misunderstood, he made it clear that “if some high principle was involved or some great advantage to our country, we have to put up with suffering,” but he was unable to see either “principle or advantage in this business.” All that he saw was “an extremely narrow-minded approach … almost inhuman and sometimes … even worse than that, in fact that it has not been quite straight and above board.” As for the legal eagles, he knew that “all this might be justified by some legalistic interpretation,” but for him that was “not good enough.” And, then, his old friend Sri Prakasa had “felt very strongly on this issue and even offered his resignation.” Once again, to Nehru, it was “immaterial” whether Sri Prakasa was “right or wrong,” but the fact that India’s representative in Pakistan had “felt this way after going fully into the matter” indicated “at least that our case is not a strong one.” If, in addition to all this, one thought of “the suffering of innumerable human beings,” then it passed the Prime Minister’s “comprehension how our government can act in the way it has done;” and, how could he even begin to set right the matter when he did not even know “who [was] responsible for this.” Ending on an angry and even threatening note, Nehru wanted to know because, “even apart from this particular unfortunate incident, it [threw] light on the way government departments function[ed].”

I do not fit into this picture at all and my mind rebels against this method of approach … I should like you to inform the people concerned in the ministry how I view this matter and I should like their full justification for what they have done.

Two days later, on 5 October 1948, Nehru presided over a meeting on the matter. It was attended by Ayyangar, Saksena, Sri Prakasa, Vyas and a number of key officials. Opening the meeting, Nehru emphasised the primary “need for repatriating Hindus who were in Pakistan that should be taken into consideration in dealing with the case instead of legalistic grounds.” Sri Prakasa explained Pakistan’s point of view of the case, while Vyas and the general manager of Jodhpur State Railway put forward Jodhpur’s counters. Vyas was not cowed down by the Prime Minister’s presence and stated preference, and combatively probed whether, in the first place, under the 1924 agreement there was any obligation on Jodhpur to sell the railway stock to Pakistan. He stated this especially in view of the fact that replacing the rolling stock, to be given to Pakistan, would cost around Rs 2.5 crore—much more than the book value on which Pakistan was paying for them.

Transfer of Rolling Stock

Ayyangar sensibly deflected this by pointing that this was altogether “a new aspect of the case and negotiations had been proceeding on the basis of transfer of rolling stock at their book value, even before the Government of India came into the picture.” A joint committee of Jodhpur and Pakistan officials had already prepared lists of rolling stock to be transferred and their value. Vyas then changed his track and raised the question of the payment of gratuity to the railway staff affected by this transfer. He wanted Pakistan to agree to this payment in principle before he allowed any transfer of rolling stock. Once again, Ayyangar sobered him down by reminding him that, in August, the Government of India had “separated the question into three issues [rolling stock, net earnings and gratuity/pension], each [to] be dealt with separately and not mixed up.” It was reiterated that the question regarding the transfer of rolling stock had to be settled independently of the other issues.

To break the deadlock, “it was agreed that the first step should be a deposit by Pakistan of an irrevocable credit of Rs 40 lakh in the Imperial Bank of India, Jodhpur.” Up next was the question of checking by Pakistan officials of the book value of the rolling stock to be transferred to Pakistan. Sri Prakasa then asked as to what should be considered as a substantial amount of rolling stock to be transferred as the first installment. It was decided that this “would depend upon the availability, but every effort would be made to give as much as could be made immediately available.” It was further decided that Sri Prakasa might, if necessary, agree to the balance of the value of rolling stock already detained by Pakistan, that is, Rs 7 lakh being paid in four equal installments, each installment with each of the first four deliveries. It was hoped that these proposals would allay Pakistan’s apprehensions as regards the
delivery of rolling stock to them by the Jodhpur government. The vital change in the Indian attitude now from before was the provision of “payment of the price of the stock in cheque simultaneously with the delivery of material.” The High Commission in Karachi was directed to assure the Pakistan government that “the Government of India will be satisfied if payment is made at the border of Jodhpur simultaneously with the delivery of the stock to Pakistan.”

Impact on the Refugee Movement

Even as decks were seemingly being cleared in New Delhi, a telegram came from Karachi indicating that the Pakistan government was digging its heels now. On 9 October 1948, the Indian High Commission reported that first, the Pakistan government insisted on payment being made only when the train crosses into Pakistani territory, that is, the delivery will be completed only when the stock crosses the borders. They agreed to take charge of the stock at the nearest border station on the Jodhpur side. Second, while the Indian side had proposed that the check and valuation of the transferred stock by Pakistan authorities was to take place after the irrevocable credit was placed with the Imperial Bank of India, Jodhpur, the Pakistan government wanted to place the credit on completion of the valuation. On the main point, namely, simultaneous delivery of stock and payment within Jodhpur territory, as informed to Dutt on 13 October 1948, the Ministry of Railways was in no mood to compromise and wanted the Indian High Commission to persuade the Pakistan authorities in this regard. The argument of the Pakistan authorities that “it was difficult for them to take charge of the stock at Jodhpur as their running staffs was unfamiliar with the track and the operating conditions on the Jodhpur Railway” was brushed aside by them.

On the second point, New Delhi agreed on the sequence of valuation to be followed by placing of the irrevocable credit in favour of Jodhpur at the Imperial Bank of India. Similarly, the Pakistan government wanted to be assured that the first instalment of the locomotives and rolling stock released was at least 50% of the total number and the delivery would be completed in four instalments. New Delhi had no objection, but was unsure whether as much as 50% could be sent with the first instalment, given the uncertain availability of stock once the valuation was done. Still, it assured Karachi that, as far as possible, it would try to meet their point. In turn, Karachi agreed to the payment of the balance of the value of the detained stock, ₹7 lakh, in four instalments alongside the fourfold payment of material under the new arrangements. It all now depended on Karachi agreeing on “the fundamental issue of payment at the time of delivery,” with other details being capable of adjustment. It took almost another month, but Karachi did so. On 19 November 1948, Vyas telephoned Mathai with the following message for Nehru:

“We have received ₹40 lakh from Pakistan four days ago in addition to ₹10 lakh which we had already received some months ago as irrevocable credit. We are despatching a special train today to Pakistan. In three weeks’ time, the handing over of rolling stock to Pakistan will be completed.

As has been recently argued, “material implications of Partition, except for the process of border making, have largely escaped scholarly attention” and “the process of dividing assets” that led to these implications was managed by a “multifaceted bureaucratic apparatus [with] its complications” (Sengupta 2014: 530–1; also see Chatterji 1999; Schendel 2004; Chester 2009). From here, though, it is difficult to agree with the accompanying assertion that this bureaucracy was “surprisingly restrained and cooperative towards one another” in performing this exercise. As was acknowledged by Nehru, they could be and were rather immoderate and disobliging. The reality of partition did not make them accommodating or amenable. When the uncertainty before could not make people willing...

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and yielding, why should the certainty after necessarily bend and move them? A “common [colonial] statecraft” might have been produced in the summer of 1947 in the subcontinent (Chatterji 2013), but it was not in service of a common post-colonial state, but of competing, contrary and calcitrant “state-nations.”

It is also argued that senior politicians and bureaucrats existing and operating “from a somewhat external position [remained] sanitised from the larger social climate of the subcontinent” (Sengupta 2014: 540–41). As we saw above, men like Vyas and Puri were rather stubborn and tiresome, and to the extent that they disappointed Nehru, and were even disobedient. They can hardly be described as Nehruvian elite “dispersed thinly but crucially throughout the government,” while being removed from the “vernacular everyday discourses” of aggressive nationalism (Manor 1991: 85, 90). This binary between the benevolent higher, elite, sophisticated, cosmopolitan planners and the bitter lower, everyman, crude, nationalist executors is hardly tenable given the vagaries of the subcontinent.

Finally, they might have been “pragmatic, rational and methodical” (Sengupta 2014: 540–41), but not so as to be forthcoming, reasonable and mutual; that they were not chaotic in their minds does not mean they were compassionate. The “process of Partition” certainly had “multiple logics” (Sengupta 2014: 546–47), but these did not always or automatically lead to consensus. At times, consensus was neither desired nor pursued. There were contests, which, while being internally complicated, remained externally uneven clashes between two, in this case two and a half, unequal state-nations.

The episode of Jodhpur Railways illuminates the process of “Long Partition” (Zamindar 2007). One colonial state apparatus, with the lapse of paramountcy, transitioned through a zone of tricky tripartite engagement at this time, with each coming to terms with the other. The newly acquired technologies of modern statecraft in the subcontinent started to overwhelm old modes of transactions and persuasions, as personified by Sri Prakasa and his style of interventions based on personal connections, and by Nehru and his urgings based on humane considerations. Instead, state affiliations started to be steadily ascendent to recreate political institutions and national interests, and as their gatekeepers, in the world of independent dominions and acceded princely states, the “official mind” wielded considerable influence over individual intentions, even if these were of the Prime Minister’s. As this particular case shows, the latter’s power and influence were located within this matrix of the machinery of modern statehood and to that extent limited by its structures, especially during the liminal “partitioned times.”

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