

THE STORY OF THE INTEGRATION OF THE INDIAN STATES AUTHORED BY MR. V.P MENON

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As set out in the preface, Menon undertakes the endeavour of writing this book apropos a promise he had made to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, regarding the former's role as a faithful raconteur of the events leading up to India's independence and the subsequent process by which the numerous native states were unified with the erstwhile British provinces. Accordingly, he explains the plan of the book, and uses the first five chapters to establish a background to India's hitherto socio-political scenario, through an engaging narrative spanning since the Mauryan days of yore. He underlines the political heterogeneity of India, despite the geographical unity and contiguity of the subcontinent. In many ways, this foreshadows the problems that are narrated over the course of the book, in relation to the integration of states with extremely heterogeneous manners of operation. In a milieu of historic struggle for supremacy vis-à-vis several competing empires, Menon elucidates how invasive forces of Ghazni and Ghoris made in-roads within our country. The second part of the book expansively deals with a detailed description of how individual regions and states were inveigled to join the Indian Union, sometimes through pecuniary promises, and at other times through the invocation of threats, veiled or otherwise. Finally, the last part of the book (chapters 22-25) deals with the costs of administrative, constitutional and financial changes, before a brief concluding chapter on Menon's own views on the question of integration

It was under the British that for the first time a project of political consolidation was completed. Initially contending for trading opportunities along with the French and the Dutch, eventually the British were able to establish Pax Britannica. This was largely beyond the purview of substantial control from the English Crown, until several landmark legislation like the Act of 1773 and the numerous Charter Acts (1813, 1833, et al.) came to be. But the process of empire-

building continued unabated, largely through administratively expedient measures like the subsidiary alliance and doctrine of lapse. The tyranny of Company rule would have continued unabated, unless the timely Revolt of 1857 had not taken place, which led to the deleterious result of India coming under direct monarchical suzerainty, ostensibly within the rubric of “better governance.” Yet nationalist passions had been invoked and marshalled, and subsequently found articulation through the establishment of the Indian National Congress and the various concessionary measures wrought from the government- The Morley Minto Reforms (1909), The Montagu Chelmsford Reforms (1918), etc.

The wheels of nationalism had turned in earnest by the first quarter of the twentieth century, evinced by the mass popularity of Gandhian movements, be it the Khilafat question, the Non-Cooperation Movement or the Civil Disobedience Movement. Although the political spectrum gained salience in terms of a diversity of opinions (Radicals, Extremists, the Muslim League, etc), there was an unfortunate corollary of communalisation. Further, the Congress largely followed the principle of not intervening in state policies. In fact, the question of State Representation does not arise until the 1935 Government of India Act, which Menon enumerates in the second chapter of his book.

In the initial chapters, Menon looks at how the Deccan and Gujarat states were divided into the northern Baroda and Gujarat states, and the southern Deccan states. Here the main problem was a desire for a Deccan union, which Patel felt would be difficult to put to vote. The Baroda and Gujarat states wanted a union with the Saurashtra states but this too was shot down by Menon, who argued there was greater logic in these states joining Bombay. Chapter 10 looks into the Vindhya Pradesh province, consisting of Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand. Here the logic was a union of both these states along with the inclusion of the province of Rewa. However owing to difficulties in conducting administrative work, it was eventually brought under central control as on January 1st 1950, and placed under the charge of a Lieutenant Governor.

chapters 17, 18, and 19 deal with the tumultuous and complicated process by which the state of Hyderabad acceded to the Indian Union, and as such merits the maximum number of chapters devoted to a state in this book. Three of the predominant issues here were:

- Retrocession of Berar to Hyderabad

- Dominion status to Hyderabad
- Accession to the Indian Union

An offer of referendum had been extended as early as August 21st, 1947. However Kasim Rizvi and other personnel within the state were conducting parallel negotiations with the Pakistan. While the Nizam did sign a Standstill Agreement with India in late November of 1947, he subsequently was found to have taken a loan of rupees twenty crore from Pakistan, besides declaring Indian currency illegal in his territory. Moreover the scope and violence of the razakar forces had increased manifold and State Congress members had been imprisoned.

Chapter 20 onwards, Mr. Menon looks into the integration and turmoil surrounding the accession of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which was under the Regency of Maharaja Hari Singh. The state had concluded a Standstill agreement both with India and with Pakistan. Mid October in 1947, Pakistan broke this agreement by stopping trade of essential commodities. Subsequently, October 22nd 1947 was chosen as D-Day and an all out invasion orchestrated by Pakistan broke out. This forced the Maharaja's hand to sign the accession agreement with India. Jinnah's formative offensive plans were nipped in the bud by Auchinleck's threat to withdraw British troop support to the Royal Pakistani Army. Subsequently, Sheikh Abdullah was invited by Hari Singh to form an interim government, and sadly, the region of Gilgit and Baltistan, which had fallen under Pakistani control, formed a rebel government of its own. The Kashmir war had necessitated UN intervention to conclude a ceasefire and Pandit Nehru had made the promise of a plebiscite, post the normalisation of conditions.

There was no motive for an attenuated centre, since the plan was for a common Legislative, Executive and Judicial organisation of the country. But a number of states like Hyderabad and Mysore failed to set up Constituent Assemblies. In the Final chapter (i.e. Chapter 26), Menon talks about the weakest link in the erstwhile Princely States- which were the small states. He feared these states had the potential to be Balkanized. Hence he explains the expeditious attempts made by him and Sardar Patel to apply the standstill agreements and seek their integration into the Indian Union. Patel was in fact of the opinion that rulers were the co-architects in the building and development of an independent Indian state. Menon also discusses the issue of how the lapse of British paramountcy allowed India to have a clean slate, with which it forged ahead with the accession deals. Yet there were criticisms too; of the accession of "viable" states, of the monumental expenses needed to dole out Privy Purse (which

Menon feels was a quid pro quo arrangement to make up for the rulers surrendering their state and authority to the Indian state), and the thorny question of abolishing the jagirdari system. Newer issues had arisen, regarding the dismemberment of provinces along linguistic lines, despite previous injunctions by Nehru and Sitaramaiyya expressly disapproving of such action for at least a decade. The only acceptable locus for such a plan of linguistic redistribution was in Andhra, according to the writer. The general elections were subsequently held, bringing the Congress into power.

Menon concludes by saying that while integration of states had proceeded, the matter of people's amorphous will still needed consolidation and integration, to which end he quotes Sardar Patel, who said, "it will be folly to ignore realities; facts take their revenge if they are not faced squarely and well." Present day India owes immeasurably to the tactful approach and diplomatic decision-making of both Menon and Patel, although Patel's role has been largely behind the curtain in terms of formal negotiations. Between the framework and groundwork of this duo, the tough nut of Indian integration was bound to crack, and sooner rather than later, as immanent in the rapid time frame of just three years that was required for the integration of all states. While the book expansively deals with many unknown facets of nation-building in its formative year, yet a few points were remiss. For example, Patel's role in making Lakshadweep islands a part of India does not find any mention. Nor does the fate of foreign enclaves like Goa, Daman and Diu, or Chandernagore find any mention, especially vis-à-vis their status in independent India. Moreover not enough clarity is there regarding the specificities and differences between the Part A, B, and C states, which have been mentioned only in passing all through the book.