Apples in the Basket

> The Indian States are governed by treaties . . . The Indian States, if they do not join this Union, will remain in exactly the same situation as they are today.
>
> sir Stafford Cripps, British politician, 1942

> We shall have to come out in the open with [the] Princes sooner or later. We are at present being dishonest in pretending we can maintain all these small States, knowing full well in practice we shall be unable to.
>
> Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India, 1943

I

Few men have been so concerned about how history would portray them as Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy and governor general of India. As a veteran journalist once remarked, Mountbatten appeared to act as 'his own Public Relations Officer'.[1] An aide of Mountbatten was more blunt, calling his boss 'the vainest man alive'. The viceroy always instructed photographers to shoot him from six inches above the eyeline because his friend, the actor Cary Grant, had told him that this way the wrinkles didn't show. When Field Marshal Montgomery visited India, and the press clamoured for photos of the two together, Mountbatten was dismayed to find that Monty wore more medals than himself.[2]

Altogether, Mountbatten had a personality that was in marked contrast to that of his predecessor, Lord Wavell. A civil servant who worked under Wavell noticed that 'vanity, pomposity and other such weaknesses never touched him', another way of saying that he did not look to, or care about, how history would judge him.[3] Yet it is Wavell who should get most of the credit for initiating the end of British rule in India. While sceptical of the political class, he was, despite the reserve which he displayed to them, deeply sympathetic to Indian aspirations.[4] It was he who set in motion the discussions and negotiations at the

end of the war, and it was he who pressed for a clear timetable for withdrawal. But it was left to his flamboyant successor to make the last dramatic gestures that announced the birth of the two newnations.

After Mountbatten left India he worked hard to present the best possible spin on his tenure as viceroy. He commissioned or influenced a whole array of books that sought to magnify his successes and gloss his failures. These books project an impression of Mountbatten as a wise umpire successfully mediating between squabbling school boys, whether India and Pakistan, the Congress and the Muslim League, Mahatma Gandhi and M. A. Jinnah, or Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel.[5] His credit claims are taken at face value, sometimes absurdly so, as in the suggestion that Nehru would not have included Patel in his Cabinet had it not been for Mountbatten's recommendation.[6]

Curiously, Mountbatten's real contribution to India and Indians has been rather underplayed by his hagiographers. This was his part in solving a geopolitical problem the like of which no newly independent state had ever faced (or is likely to face in the future). For when the British departed the subcontinent they left behind more than 500 distinct pieces of territory. Two of these were the newly created nations of India and Pakistan; the others comprised the assorted chiefdoms and states that made up what was known as 'princely India'. The dissolution of these units is a story of extraordinary interest, told from a partisan point of view half a century ago in V. P. Menon's *Integration of the Indian* States, but not else where or since.[7]

II

The princely states were so many that there was even disagreement as to their number. One historian puts it at 521; another at 565. They were more than 500, by any count, and they varied very widely in terms of size and status. At one end of the scale were the massive states of Kashmir and Hyderabad, each the size of a large European country; at the other end, tiny fiefdoms or *jagirs* of a dozen or less villages.

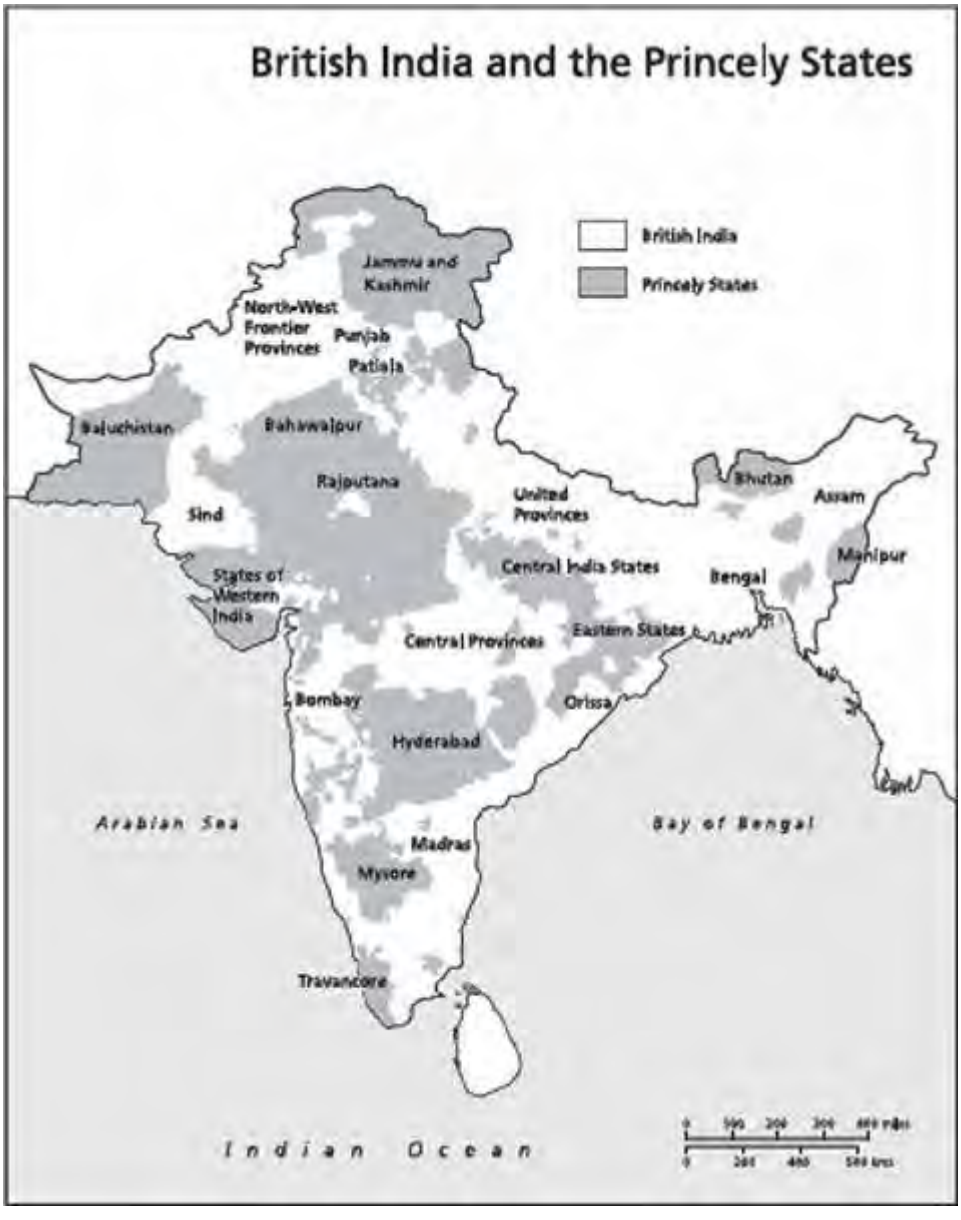
The larger princely states were the product of the *longue durée* of Indian history as much as of British policy. Some states made much of having resisted the waves of Muslim invaders who swept through north India between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. Others owed their very history to association with these invaders, as for instance the Asaf Jah dynasty of Hyderabad, which began life in the early eighteenth century as a vassal state of the great Mughal

Empire. Yet other states, such as Cooch Behar in the east and Garhwal in the Himalayan north, were scarcely touched by Islamic influence at all.

Whatever their past history, these states owed their mid-twentieth-century shape and powers – or lack thereof – to the British. Starting as a firm of traders, the East India Company gradually moved towards a position of overlordship. They were helped here by the decline of the Mughals after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. Indian rulers were seen by the Company as strategic allies, useful in checking the ambitions of their common enemy, the French. The Company forced treaties on these states, which recognized it as the 'paramount power'. Thus, while legally the territories the various Nawabs and Maharajas ruled over were their own, the British retained to themselves the right to appoint ministers and control succession, and to extract a large subsidy for the provision of administrative and military support. In many cases the treaties also transferred valuable areas from the Indian states to the British. It was no accident that, except for the states comprising Kathia-war and two chiefdoms in the south, no Indian state had a coastline. The political dependence was made more acute by economic dependence, with the states relying on British India for raw materials, industrial goods, and employment opportunities.[8]

The larger native states had their own railway, currency and stamps, vanities allowed them by the Crown. Few had any modern industry; fewer still modern forms of education. A British observer wrote in the early twentieth century that, taken as a whole, the states were 'sinks of reaction and incompetence and unrestrained autocratic power sometimes exercised by vicious and deranged individuals'.[9] This, roughly, was also the view of the main nationalist party, the Congress. From the 1920s they pressed the state rulers to at least match the British in allowing a modicum of political representation. Under the Congress umbrella rested the All-India States Peoples Conference, to which in turn were affiliated the individual *praja mandals* (or peoples' societies) of the states.

Even in their heyday the princes got a bad press. They were generally viewed as feckless and dissolute, over-fond of racehorses and other men's wives and holidays in Europe. Both the Congress and the Raj thought that they cared too little for mundane matters of administration. This was mostly true, but there were exceptions. The maharajas of Mysore and Baroda both endowed fine universities, worked against caste prejudice and promoted modern enterprises. Other maharajas kept going the great traditions of Indian classical music.



Good or bad, profligate or caring, autocratic or part-democratic, by the 1940s all the princes now found themselves facing a common problem: their future in a free India. In the first part of 1946 British India had a definitive series of elections, but these left untouched the princely states. As a consequence there was a 'growing antipathy towards princely governments'.[10] Their constitutional status, however, remained ambiguous. The Cabinet Mis-

sion of 1946 focused on the Hindu–Muslim or United India versus Pakistan question; it barely spoke of the states at all. Likewise the statement of 20 February 1947, formally announcing that the Raj was to end, also finessed the question. On 3 June the British announced both the date of their final withdrawal and the creation of two dominions – but this statement also did not make clear the position of the states. Some rulers began now 'to luxuriate in wild dreams of independent power in an India of many partitions'.[11]

Now, just in time, came the wake-up calls.

III

In 1946–7 the president of the All-India States Peoples Conference was Jawaharlal Nehru. His biographer notes that Nehru 'held strong views on this subject of the States. He detested the feudal autocracy and total suppression of popular feeling, and the prospect of these puppet princes . . . setting themselves up as independent monarchs drove him into intense exasperation.'[12] The prospect was encouraged by the officials of the Political Department, who led the princes to believe that once the British had left they could, if they so wished, stake their claims to independence.

On their part, the princes disliked and even feared Nehru. Fortunately the Congress had assigned the problem of the states to the pragmatic administrator Vallabhbhai Patel. Through the spring of 1947 Patel threw a series of lunch parties, where he urged his princely guests to help the Congress in framing a new constitution for India. This they could do by sending delegates to the Constituent Assembly, whose deliberations had begun in Delhi in December 1946. At the same time Patel wrote to the more influential *dewans* (chief ministers), urging them to ask their rulers to come to terms with the party which would now rule India.[13]

One of the first princes to come over to Patel's side was the Maharaja of Bikaner. His *dewan* was K. M. Pannikar, awidely respected historian who, more clearly than otherpeople, could see that the 'Vasco da Gama epoch of Asian history'[14] was swiftly coming to an end. The forces of nationalism were irresistible; if one did not compromise with them, one would be swept away. Accordingly, in the first week of April 1947 Bikaner issued a public appeal to his fellow princes to join the Constituent Assembly. Their entry into the Assembly, he said, would 'make quite clear to everyone that the Indian

Princes are not only workingfor the good of their States and for their mother country but are above all patriotic and worthy sons of India'.[15]

The first chiefdom to join the Constituent Assembly, back in February, had in fact been the state of Baroda. After Bikaner's appeal a dozen more states joined, many of them from Rajasthan. Pannikar and Bikaner had 'led the Rajput princes in a fresh act of traditional obeisance to Delhi, where in place of Mogul or British, a Pandit now rules. They have made acompact with Congress – probably, from their point of view, rightly.'[16]

Several states in Rajasthan,Bikaner included, would share aborder withPakistan; this, and ancient memories of battles withMuslim kings, predisposed them to an early compromise with Congress. But other states in the hinterland were less sure how far Delhi's writ would run after the British left. Might not the situation revert tothat of the eighteenth century, when the peninsula wasdivided up among dozens of more-or-less sovereign states?

On 27 June a newStates Department was set up by the government of India. This replaced the old Political Department, whose pro-princes, anti-Congress tenor had caused so much mischief.[17] Patel wouldbethe minister in charge. As hissecretary he chose V. P. Menon, asmall, alert and ferociously intelligent Malayali from Malabar. Unusually for a man in his position, Menon had come from the ranks.Far from being a member of the elite Indian Civil Service – as other secretaries to government were – he had joined the government of India asaclerk and steadily worked hisway up. He had been reforms commissioner and constitutional adviser to successive viceroys, and had played a key role in drafting the Indian Independence Bill.

His peers in the ICS derisively called him 'babu Menon', in reference to his lowly origins. In fact, as British Raj gave way to Congress Raj, there could have been no better man to supervise this most tricky aspect of the transition. Menon's first act was to urge the British government not to support fanciful claims to independence. 'Even an inkling that H.M.G. would accord independent recognition', he told London, 'would make infinitely difficult all attempts to bring the States and the new Dominions together on all vital matters of common concern.'[18]

Menon was also ideally placed to mediate between his old boss, Mountbatten, and his new boss, Vallabhbhai Patel. Between them they worked on a draft Instrument of Accession whereby the states would agree to transfer control of defence, foreign affairs and communications to the Congress government. On 5 July Patel issued a statement appealing to the princes to accede to the Indian Union on these three subjects and join the Constituent Assembly. As he put it, the 'alternative to co-operation in the general interest' was 'an-

archy and chaos'. Patel appealed to the princes' patriotism, asking for their assistance in raising 'this sacred land to its proper place among the nations of the world'.[19]

On 9 July Patel and Nehru both met the viceroy, and asked him 'what he was going to do to help India in connection with her most pressing problem – relations with the [princely] States'. Mountbatten agreed to make this matter 'his primary consideration'. Later that same day Gandhi came to meet Mountbatten. As the viceroy recorded, the Mahatma 'asked me to do everything in my power to ensure that the British did not leave a legacy of Balkanisation and disruption on the 15th August by encouraging the States to declare their independence . . . '[20]

Mountbatten was being urged by the Congress trinity to bat for them against the states. This he did most effectively, notably in a speech to the Chamber of Princes delivered on 25 July, for which the viceroy had decked out in all his finery, rows of military medals pinned upon his chest. He was, recalled an adoring assistant, 'in full uniform, with an array of orders and decorations calculated to astonish even these practitioners in Princely pomp'.[21]

Mountbatten began by telling the princes that the Indian Independence Act had released 'the States from all their obligations to the Crown'. They were now technically independent, or, put another way, rudderless, on their own. The old links were broken, but 'if nothing can be put in its place, only chaos can result' – a chaos that 'will hit the States first'. He advised them to forge relations with the new nation closest to them. As he brutally put it, 'you cannot run away from the Dominion Government which is your neighbour any more than you can run away from the subjects for whose welfare you are responsible'.

The Instrument of Accession the princes were being asked to sign would cede away defence – but in any case, said Mountbatten, the states would, by themselves, 'be cut off from any source of supplies of up-to-date arms or weapons'. It would cede away external affairs, but the princes could 'hardly want to go to the expense of having ambassadors or ministers or consuls in all these foreign countries'. And it would also cede away communications, but this was 'really a means of maintaining the life-blood of the whole sub-continent'. The Congress offer, said the viceroy, left the rulers 'with great internal authority' while divesting them of matters they could not deal with on their own.[22]

Mountbatten's talk to the Chamber of Princes was a *tour de force*. In my opinion it ranks as the most significant of all his acts in India. It finally per-

suaded the princes that the British would no longer protect or patronize them, and that independence for them was a mirage.

Mountbatten had prefaced his speech with personal letters to the more important princes. Afterwards he continued to press them to sign the Instrument of Accession. If they did so before 15 August, said the viceroy, he might be able to get them decent terms with the Congress. But if they did not listen, then they might face an 'explosive situation' after Independence, when the full might of nationalist wrath would turn against them.[23]

By 15 August virtually all the states had signed the Instrument of Accession. Meanwhile the British had departed, never to return. Now the Congress went back on the undertaking that if the princes signed up on the three specified subjects, 'in other matters we would scrupulously respect their autonomous existence'.[24] The *praja mandals* grew active once more. In Mysore a movement was launched for 'full democratic government' in the state. Three thousand people courted arrest.[25] In some states in Kathiawar and Orissa, protesters took possession of government offices, courts and prisons.[26]

Vallabhbhai Patel and the Congress Party cleverly used the threat of popular protest to make the princes fall in line. They had already *acceded;* now they were being asked to *integrate*, that is to dissolve their states as independent entities and merge with the Union of India. In exchange they would be allowed to retain their titles and offered an annual allowance in perpetuity. If they desisted from complying, they faced the threat of uncontrolled (and possibly uncontrollable) agitation by subjects whose suppressed emotions had been released by the advent of Independence.[27]

Through the latter part of 1947 V. P. Menon toured India, cajoling the princes one by one. His progress, wrote the *New York Times* correspondent in New Delhi,

> could be measured from the ensuing series of modest newspaper items, each series running about like this:
>
> First, a small headline, 'Mr V. P. Menon Visits Stateof Chhota Hazri';
>
> Then, in the Governor-General's daily Court Circular, a brief notice, 'H. H. the Maharajah of Chhota Hazri has arrived';
>
> And soon, a banner headline, 'CHHOTA HAZRI MERGED'.[28]

As this account makes clear, the groundwork was done by Patel and V. P. Menon; but the finishing touch was applied by Mountbatten, a final interview

with whom was sometimes a necessary concession to princely vanity. The governor general also visited the more important chiefdoms, where he saluted their ‘most wise and Statesmanlike decision’ to link up with India.[29]

Mountbatten dealt with the symbolism of the princes’ integration with India; V. P. Menon with the substance. In his book, Menon describes in some detail the tortuous negotiations with the rulers. The process of give and take involved much massaging of egos: one ruler claimed descent from Lord Rama, another from Sri Krishna, while a third said his lineage was immortal, as it had been blessed by the Sikh Gurus.

In exchange for their land each ruler was offered a ‘privy purse’, its size determined by the revenue earned by the state. The bigger, more strategically placed states had to be given better deals, but relevant too were such factors as the antiquity of the ruling dynasty, the religious halo which might surround it, and their martial traditions. Apart from an annual purse, the rulers were allowed to retain their palaces and other personal properties and, as significantly, their titles. The Maharaja of Chhota Hazri would still be the Maharaja of Chhota Hazri, and he could pass on the title to his son as well.[30]

To reassure the princes, Patel sought to include a constitutional guarantee with regard to the privy purses. But, as V. P. Menon pointed out, the pay-off had been trifling compared to the gains. In addition to securing the political consolidation of India, the integration of the states was, in economic terms, a veritable steal. By Menon’s calculation, while the government would pay out some Rs150 million to the princes, in ten years’ time the revenue from their states would amount to at least ten times as much.[31]

Acquiring the territory of the States was followed by the scarcely less difficult job of administrative integration. In most states, the land revenue and judicial systems were archaic, and there was no popular representation of any kind. The Ministry of States transferred officials trained in British India to put the new systems in place. It also oversaw the swearing-in of interim ministries prior to the holding of full-fledged elections.

Patel and Menon took more than one leaf out of the British book. They played ‘divide-and-rule’, bringing some princes on side early, unsettling the rest. They played on the childlike vanities of the maharajas, allowing them to retain their titles and sometimes giving them new ones. (Thus several maharajas were appointed governors of provinces.) But, like the British in the eighteenth century, they kept their eye firmly on the main chance: material advantage. For, as Patel told the officials of the states ministry, ‘we do not want their women and their jewellery – we want their land’.[32]

In a mere two years, over 500 autonomous and sometimes ancient chiefdoms had been dissolved into fourteen new administrative units of India. This, by any reckoning, was a stupendous achievement. It had been brought about by wisdom, foresight, hard work and not a little intrigue.

IV

When Vallabhbhai Patel had first discussed the states problem with Mountbatten, he had asked him to bring in ‘a full basket of apples’ by the date of Independence. Would he be satisfied with a bag of 560 instead of the full 565, wondered the viceroy. The Congress strongman nodded his assent.[33] As it turned out, only three states gave trouble before 15 August, and three more afterthat date.

Travancore was the first state to question the right of the Congress to succeed the British as the paramount power. The state was strategically placed, at the extreme southern tip of the subcontinent. It had the most highly educated populace in India, a thriving maritime trade, and newly discovered reserves of monazite, from which is extracted thorium, used in the production of atomic energy and atomic bombs. The *dewan* of Travancore was Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, a brilliant and ambitious lawyer who had been in his post for sixteen years. It was commonly believed that he was the real ruler of the state, whose maharaja and maharani were like putty in his hands.

As early as February 1946 Sir C. P. had made clear his belief that, when the British left, Travancore would become a ‘perfectly independent unit’, as it had been before 1795, when it first signed a treaty with the East India Company. In the summer of 1947 he held a series of press conferences seeking the co-operation of the people of Travancore in his bid for independence. He reminded them of the antiquity of their ruling dynasty and of Travancore’s sinking of a Dutch fleet back in the year 1741 (this apparently the only naval defeat ever inflicted by an Asian state on a European power). This appeal to a past redolent in regional glory was meant to counter the pan-Indian nationalism of the present. For the Congress had a strong presence in the state, as did the Communist Party of India. Still, the *dewan* insisted that from 15 August 1947 ‘Travancore will become an independent country’. ‘There was no particular reason’, he defiantly added, ‘why she should be in a worse position than Denmark, Switzerland, and Siam.’

Interestingly, Travancore's bid for independence was welcomed by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. On 20 June he sent Sir C. P. a wire indicating that Pakistan was 'ready to establish relationship with Travancore which will be of mutual advantage'. Three weeks later the *dewan* wrote to the Madras government informing them that Travancore was taking steps to 'maintain herself as an independent entity'. It was, however, ready to sign a treaty between the 'independent Sovereign State' of Travancore and the 'Dominion Governments' of both India and Pakistan.

On 21 July the *dewan* of Travancore had an appointment to meet the viceroy in Delhi. The previous evening he met a senior British diplomat and told him that he hoped to get recognition from his government. If India refused to supply Travancore with textiles, he asked, would the United Kingdom step in? Sir C. P. had, it seems, been encouraged in his ambitions by politicians in London, who saw an independent Travancore as a source of a material crucial to the coming Cold War. In fact, the Travancore government had already signed an agreement with the UK government for the supply of monazite. In London, the minister of supply advised his government to avoid making any statement that would 'give the Indian Dominions leverage in combating Travancore's claim for independence'. Since the state had the 'richest known deposit of monazite sand', said the minister, from the British point of view 'it would be an advantage if Travancore retained political and economic independence, at least for the time being.'

On the 21st Sir C. P. had his scheduled interview with Mountbatten. They were together for more than two hours, which time the *dewan* used to launch an excoriating attack on Gandhi, Nehru and the Congress. After he 'had worked off his emotional upset', the viceroy 'let him go and sent V. P. Menon to work on him'. Menon urged him to sign the Instrument of Accession, but the *dewan* said he would prefer to negotiate a treaty with India instead.

Sir C. P. returned to Travancore, his mind still apparently firm on Independence. Then, while on his way to a music concert on 25 July, he was attacked by a man in military shorts, knifed in the face and body and taken off for emergency surgery. (The would-be assassin turned out to be a member of the Kerala Socialist Party.) The consequences were immediate, and from the Indian point of view, most gratifying. As the viceroy put it in his weekly report to London, 'The States Peoples organisation turned the heat on and Travancore immediately gave in'. From his hospital bed Sir C. P. advised his maharaja to 'follow the path of conciliation and compromise' which he,'being auto-

cratic and over-decisive', had not himself followed. On 30 July the maharaja wired the viceroy of his decision to accede to the Indian Union.[34]

A second state that wavered on the question of accession was Bhopal. This lay in central India, and had the not unusual combination of a mostly Hindu population and a Muslim ruler. Since 1944 the Nawab of Bhopal had served as chancellor of the Chamber of Princes. He was known to be a bitter opponent of the Congress, and correspondingly close to Jinnah and the Muslim League. When, after the war, the British made clear their intention to leave India, the prospect filled the Nawab with despair. He saw this as 'one of the greatest, if not the greatest, tragedies that has ever befallen mankind'. For now the 'States, the Moslems, and the entire mass of people who relied on British justice . . . suddenly find themselves totally helpless, unorganised and unsupported'. The only course left to the Nawab now was to 'die in the cause of the Moslems of the world'.

These lines are from a letter of November 1946, written to the political adviser to Lord Wavell. Four months later Wavell was replaced as viceroy by Mountbatten, who, as it happens, was an old polo-playing buddy of the Nawab of Bhopal. Their friendship went back twenty-five years; Mountbatten once claimed that the Nawab was his 'second-best friend in India'.[35] But it was soon clear that they now stood in different camps. In mid-July 1947 Mountbatten wrote to Bhopal, as he had to all other princes, advising him to accede to India. He got along and self-confessedly 'sentimental' letter in reply. This began by professing 'unbroken and loyal friendship' with the Crown of England; a link now being broken by the unilateral action of HMG. And to whom had they delivered Bhopal and his colleagues? The hated party of Gandhi and Nehru. 'Are we', asked Bhopal angrily, 'to write out a blank cheque and leave it to the leaders of the Congress Party to fill in the amount?'

From accusations of betrayal the letter then issued a warning. In India, said the Nawab, the main bulwarks against the 'rising tide of Communism' were men of property. The Congress had already stated their intention to liquidate landlords. To that party's left stood the Communist Party of India, which controlled the unions of transport workers; if they so chose, the communists could paralyse and starve the subcontinent. 'I tell you straight', said Bhopal to his friend, 'that unless you and His Majesty's Government support the States and prevent them from disappearing from the Indian political map, you will very shortly have an India dominated by Communists . . . If the United Nations one day find themselves with 450 million extra people under the heel of Communist domination they will be quite justified in blaming Great

Britain for this disaster, and I naturally would not like your name associated with it.'

Bhopal hinted that he, like Travancore, would declare his independence; in any case he would not attend the meeting of the Chamber of Princes scheduled for 25 July. On the 31st Mountbatten wrote back to Bhopal inviting him once more to sign the Instrument of Accession. He reminded him of what he had said in the speech: that no ruler could 'run away' from the dominion closest to him. And he shrewdly turned the argument about communism on its head. Yes, he told Bhopal, there was indeed a Red threat, but it would be best met if the Congress and the princes joined hands. For men like Patel were 'as frightened of communism as you yourself are. If only they had support from all other stable influences such as that of the Princely Order, it might be possible for them to ward off the communist danger.'[36]

By this time Bhopal had received reports of the meeting of 25 July. He had heard of the terrific impression his old friend had made, and also of the increasing tide of accessions by his fellow princes. And so he capitulated, asking only for a small sop to his pride. Would the viceroy press Patel to extend the deadline by ten days, so that his accession would be announced *after* 15 August instead of before? That, said Bhopal, 'would enable me to sign our death warrant with a clear conscience'. (In the event, Patel said he could not make any exceptions; instead Mount-batten offered to Bhopal that if he would sign the Instrument of Accession on 14 August, he would keep it under lock and key and hand it over to Patel only after the 25th.)[37]

A case more curious still was that of Jodhpur, an old and large state with a Hindu king as well as a largely Hindu population. At a lunch hosted by Mountbatten in mid-July, the young Maharaja of Jodhpur had joined the other Raj put princes in indicating his willingness to accede to India. But soon afterwards someone – it is not clear who – planted the idea in his head that since his state bordered Pakistan, he might get better terms from that dominion. Possibly at Bhopal's initiative, a meeting was arranged between him and Jinnah. At this meeting the Muslim League leader offered Jodhpur full port facilities in Karachi, unrestricted import of arms and supply of grain from Sindh to his own famine-stricken districts. In one version, Jinnah is said to have handed the maharaja a blank sheet and a fountain pen and said, 'You can fill in all your conditions.'

If Jodhpur had defected to Pakistan, this would have opened up the possibility that states contiguous to it – such as Jaipur and Udaipur – would do likewise. However, K. M. Pannikar got wind of the plan and asked Vallabhbhai Patel to intervene. Patel contacted Jodhpur and promised him free im-

port of arms too, as well as adequate grain. Meanwhile, his own nobles and village headmen had told the maharaja that he could not really expect them to be at ease in a Muslim state. The ruler of an adjoining state, Jaisalmer, also asked him what would happen if he joined Pakistan and a riot broke out between Hindus and Muslims. Whose side would he then take?

And so the Maharaja of Jodhpur also came round, but not before a last-minute theatrical show of defiance. When presented with the Instrument of Accession in the anteroom of the viceroy's office, Jodhpur took out a revolver and held it to the secretary's head, saying, 'I will not accept your dictation.' But in a few minutes he cooled down and signed on the line.[38]

V

Among the states that had not signed up by 15 August was Junagadh, which lay in the peninsula of Kathiawarin western India. This, like Bhopal, had a Muslim Nawab ruling over a chiefly Hindu population. On three sides Junagadh was surrounded by Hindu states or by India, but on the fourth – and this distinguished it from Bhopal – it had a long coastline. Its main port, Veraval, was 325 nautical miles from the Pakistani port city (and national capital) of Karachi. Junagadh's ruler in 1947, Mohabat Khan, had one abiding passion: dogs. His menagerie included 2,000 pedigree canines, including sixteen hounds specially deputed to guard the palace. When two of his favourite hounds mated, the Nawab announced a public holiday. On their 'marriage' he expended three lakh (300,000) rupees, or roughly a thousand times the average annual income of one of his subjects.

Within the borders of Junagadh lay the Hindu holy shrine of Somnath, as well as Girnar, a hill top with magnificent marble temples built by, and for, the Jains. Both Somnath and Girnar attracted thousands of pilgrims from other parts of India. The forests of Junagadh were also the last refuge of the Asiatic lion. These had been protected by Mohabat Khan and his forebears, who discouraged even high British officials from hunting them.[39]

In the summer of 1947 the Nawab of Junagadh was on holiday in Europe. While he was away, the existing *dewan* was replaced by Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto, a leading Muslim League politician from Sindh who had close ties to Jinnah.[40] After the Nawab returned, Bhutt opressed him to stay out of the Indian Union. On 14 August, the day of the transfer of power, Junagadh announced that it would accede to Pakistan. This it was legally allowed to do,

although geographically it made little sense. It also flew in the face of Jinnah's 'two-nation' theory, since 82 per cent of Junagadh's population was Hindu.

Pakistan sat on the Nawab's request for a few weeks, but on 13 September it accepted the accession. It seems to have done this in the belief that it could then use Junagadh as a bargaining counter to secure Jammu and Kashmir. That state too had not acceded to either dominion by 15 August. It had a Hindu maharaja and a majority Muslim population: in structural terms, it was a Junagadh in reverse.

The acceptance by Pakistan of Junagadh's accession enraged the Indian leaders. Touched in a particularly 'tender spot' was Vallabhbhai Patel, who came from the same region and spoke the same language (Gujarati) as the residents of Junagadh.[41] His first response was to secure the accession of two of Junagadh's tributary states, Mangrol and Babariawad. Their Hindu chiefs claimed that they had the right to join India; the Nawab of Junagadh denied this, claiming that as his vassals they had to seek his consent first. The Indian government went with the vassals, and sent in a small military force to support them.

In the middle of September V. P. Menon went to Junagadh to negotiate with the Nawab, but the ruler would not see him, feigning illness. Menon had to make do with meeting the *dewan* instead. He told Sir Shah Nawaz that from both cultural and geographical points of view Junagadh really should join India. Sir Shah Nawaz did not dispute this, but complained that local feelings had been inflamed by the 'virulent writings in the Gujarati Press'. He said that he personally would favour the issue being decided by a referendum.[42]

Meanwhile, a 'provisional government of Junagadh' was set up in Bombay. This was led by Samaldas Gandhi, a nephew of the Mahatma, and a native of the kingdom. This 'government' became the vehicle of popular agitation within Junagadh. In panic, the Nawab fled to Karachi, taking a dozen of his favourite dogs with him. The *dewan* was left holding the baby. On 27 October Sir Shah Nawaz wrote to Jinnah that, while 'immediately after accession [to Pakistan], His Highness and myself received hundreds of messages chiefly from Muslims congratulating us on the decision, today our brethren are indifferent and cold. Muslims of Kathiawar seem to have lost all their enthusiasm for Pakistan.'

Ten days later Sir Shah Nawaz informed the Indian government that he would like to hand over the administration of Junagadh. The formal transfer took place on 9 November. Back in Delhi, however, Mount-batten was cross that he had not been consulted before the territory was taken over. Partly to placate him, but also to establish its own legitimacy, the Indians then organ-

ized a plebiscite. A referendum held on 20 February 1948 resulted in 91 per cent of the electorate voting for accession to India.[43]

VI

The state of Hyderabad also had a Muslim ruler and a mostly Hindu population; but it was a prize greater by far than Bhopal or Junagadh. The state ran right across the Deccan plateau, in the centre of the subcontinent. Its area was in excess of 80,000 square miles, and its population more than 16 million, these distributed among three linguistic zones: Telugu, Kannada and Marathi. Hyderabad was surrounded by Central Provinces in the north, by Bombay in the west, and by Madras in the south and east. Although landlocked, it was self-sufficient in food, cotton, oilseed, coal and cement. Petrol and salt, however, had to be imported from British India.

Hyderabad began life as a Mughal vassal state in 1713. Its ruler was conventionally known as the Nizam. Eighty-five per cent of its population was Hindu, but Muslims dominated the army, police and civil service. The Nizam himself owned about 10 per cent of the land of the state; much of the rest was controlled by large landowners. From his holdings the ruler earned Rs25 million a year in rent, while another Rs5 million were granted him from the state treasury. There were some very rich nobles, but the bulk of the Muslims, like the bulk of the Hindus, worked as factory hands, artisans, labourers and peasants.[44]

In power in 1946–7 was the seventh Nizam, Mir Usman Ali, who had ascended to the throne as far back as 1911. He was one of the richest men in the world, but also one of the most miserly. He rarely wore new clothes, his preferred mode of dress being an un-ironed pyjama and shirt and a faded fez. He ‘generally drove in an old, rattling, tin-pot of a car, a 1918 model; he never offered any kind of hospitality to a visitor’.[45]

This Nizam was determined to hang on to more than his personal wealth. What he wanted for his state, when the British left, was independence, with relations forged directly between him and the Crown. To help him with his case he had employed Sir Walter Monckton, a King’s Counsel and one of the most highly regarded lawyers in England. (Among Monckton’s previous clients was King Edward VIII, whom he had advised during his abdication.) For the Englishman’s services the Nizam was prepared to pay a packet: as much as 90,000 guineas a year, it was rumoured. In a meeting with the viceroy, Mon-

ckton ‘emphasized that His Exalted Highness would have great difficulty in taking any course likely to compromise his independent sovereignty’. When Mountbatten suggested that Hyderabad should join the Constituent Assembly, the Nizam’s lawyer answered that if India pressed too hard his client might ‘seriously consider the alternative of joining Pakistan’.[46]

The Nizam’s ambitions, if realized, would virtually cut off the north of India from the south. And, as the constitutional expert Reginald Coupland pointed out, ‘India could live if its Moslem limbs in the northwest and northeast were amputated, but could it live without its midriff?’ Sardar Patel put it more directly, saying that an independent Hyderabad constituted a ‘cancer in the belly of India’.[47]

In this face-off between the Nizam and the government of India, each side had a proxy of its own. The Indians had the Hyderabad State Congress, formed in 1938, which pressed hard for representative government with in the state. The Nizam had the Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen, which wished to safeguard the position of Muslims in administration and politics. Another important actor was the Communist Party of India, which had a strong presence in the Telengana region of the state.

In 1946–7 all three voices grew more strident. The State Congress demanded that Hyderabad fall into line with the rest of India. Its leaders organized street protests, and courted arrest. Simultaneously, the Ittihad was being radicalized by its new leader, Kasim Razvi, an Aligarh-trained lawyer and a passionate believer in the idea of ‘Muslim pride’. Under Razvi the Ittihad had promoted a paramilitary body called the ‘Razakars’, whose members marched up and down the roads of Hyderabad, carrying swords and guns.[48]

In the countryside, meanwhile, there was a rural uprising led and directed by the communists. Across Telengana large estates were confiscated and redistributed to land-hungry peasants. The insurrectionists first seized all holdings in excess of 500 acres, bringing the limit down successively to 200 and then 100 acres. They also abolished the institution of forced labour. In the districts of Nalgonda, Warangal and Karimnagar the communists ran what amounted to aparallel government. More than 1,000 villages were ‘practically freed from the Nizam’s rule’.[49]

On 15 August the national flag was hoisted by Congress workers in different parts of Hyderabad state. The offenders were arrested and taken off to jail.[50] On the other side the Razakars grew more truculent. They affirmed their support for the Nizam’s declaration of independence, and printed and distributed handbills which proclaimed: ‘Free Hyderabad for Hyderabadis’ and ‘No pact with the Indian Union’.[51]

The Nizam's ambitions were encouraged by the Conservative Party in Britain. Sir Walter Monckton was himself a prominent Tory and he had written to his party leaders to support his client's case. Monckton claimed the Congress practised a kind of 'power politics' that was an 'exact replica of those in which Hitler and Mussolini indulged'. Since Mountbatten was hand-in-glove with Nehru and Patel, it was up to the Tories to 'see to it that if this shameful betrayal of our old friends and allies cannot be prevented, at least it does not go uncastigated before the conscience of the world'.[52]

To see the Nizam's Hyderabad as Poland and the Congress as the equivalent to Hitler's Nazis boggles the imagination. Even Winston Churchill allowed himself to be persuaded of the analogy, perhaps because he had along standing dislike for Mahatma Gandhi. Speaking in the House of Commons, Churchill argued that the British had a 'personal obligation . . . not to allow a state, which they had declared a sovereign state, to be strangled, starved out or actually overborne by violence'. The party's rising star, R. A. Butler, weighed in on Churchill's side, saying that Britain should press for the 'just claims of Hyderabad to remain independent'.[53]

The Nizam, and more so the Razakars, also drew sustenance from the support to their cause from Pakistan. Jinnah had gone so far as to tell Lord Mountbatten that if the Congress 'attempted to exert any pressure on Hyderabad, every Muslim throughout the whole of India, yes, all the hundred million Muslims, would rise as one man to defend the oldest Muslim dynasty in India'.[54]

The Nizam now said he would sign a treaty with India, but not an Instrument of Accession. In late November 1947 he agreed to sign a 'Stand still Agreement', under which the arrangements forged between Hyderabad and the British Raj would be continued with its successor government. This bought both parties time; the Nizam to reconsider his bid for independence, the Indians to find better ways of persuading him to accede.

Under this agreement, the Nizam and the Indian government deputed agents to each other's territory. The Indian agent was K. M. Munshi, a trusted ally of Vallabhbhai Patel. In November the Nizam had appointed a new *dewan*, Mir Laik Ali, who was a wealthy businessman and a known Pakistan sympathizer. Laik Ali offered some Hindu representation in his government, but it was seen by the State Congress as a case of too little, too late. In any case, by now the real power had passed on to the Razakars and its leader, Kasim Razvi. By March 1948 the membership of the Ittihad had reached a million, with a tenth of these being trained in arms. Every Razakar had taken

avow in the name of Allah to 'fight to the last to maintain the supremacy of Muslim power in the Deccan'.[55]

In April 1948 a correspondent of *The Times* of London visited Hyderabad. He interviewed Kasim Razvi, and found him to be a 'fanatical demagogue with great gifts of organization. As a "rabble-rouser" he is formidable, and even in a *tête-à-tête* he is compelling.'[56] Razvi saw himself as a prospective leader of a Muslim state, a sort of Jinnah for the Hyderabadis, albeit amore militant one. He had a portrait of the Pakistan leader prominently displayed in his room. Razvi told an Indian journalist that he greatly admired Jinnah, adding that 'whenever I am in doubt I go to him for counsel which he never grudges giving me'.

Pictures of Razvi show him with a luxuriant beard. He looked 'rather like an oriental Mephistopheles'.[57] His most striking feature was his flashing eyes, 'from which the fire of fanaticism exudes'. He had contempt for the Congress, saying 'we do not want Brahmin or Bania rule here'. Asked which side they would take if Pakistan and India clashed, Razvi answered that Pakistan could take care of itself, but added: 'Wherever Muslim interests are affected, our interest and sympathy will go out. This applies of course to Palestine as well. Even if Muslim interests are affected in hell, our heart will go out in sympathy.'[58]

The Razakars saw the Delhi-Hyderabad battle in Hindu–Muslim terms. The Congress, on the other hand, saw it as a clash between democracy and autocracy. In truth, it was a bit of both. Caught in the cross-fire were the citizens of Hyderabad, for whom the months after August 1947 were a time of deep insecurity.[59] Some Hindus began fleeing to the adjoining districts of Madras. Meanwhile, Muslims from the Central Provinces were flocking to Hyderabad. Mostly illiterate, these Muslims had heard fearful reports of attacks on their co-religionists in Bengal and Punjab. But they did not seem to realize that in Hyderabad too they would be a minority. Perhaps, as an independent observer put it, 'these emigrating Muslims have more trust in the Nizam's troops and Arabs to protect them than in the Union provincial administration'. In turn, these CP Muslims were said to have thrown out Hindus from their houses in Hyderabad, aided by the Nizam's men. It was even claimed that there was a plan to make Muslims a majority in the state: apparently, Hindu localities of cities such as Aurangabad, Bidar and Hyderabad had come to 'present a deserted appearance'.[60]

Through the spring and summer of 1948 the tension grew. There were allegations of gun-running from Pakistan to Hyderabad – in planes flown by British mercenaries – and of the import of arms from eastern Europe. The

prime minister of Madras wrote to Patel saying he found it difficult to cope with the flood of refugees from Hyderabad. K. M. Munshi sent lurid reports of the Nizam's perfidy, of his 'fixed idea' of independence, of his referring to the government of India as 'the scoundrels of Delhi', of 'the venomous propaganda being carried out day and night through speeches, Nizam's radio, newspapers, dramas etc., against the Indian Union'.[61]

For the moment, the Indians temporized. In June 1948 V. P. Menon and Laik Ali held a series of meetings in Delhi. Menon asked that the state introduce representative government, and promise a plebiscite on accession. Various exceptions were proposed to protect the Nizam's dignity; these included the retention of troops. None was found acceptable. Meanwhile, the respected former *dewan* of Hyderabad, Sir Mirza Ismail, attempted to mediate. He advised the Nizam not to take the Hyderabad case to the United Nations (which Laik Ali had threatened to do), to get himself out of the clutches of the Razakars and to accede to India. Hyderabad, he told His Exalted Highness, 'must realize the weakness of its own position'.[62]

On 21 June 1948 Lord Mountbatten resigned from office of governor general. Three days previously he had written to the Nizam urging him to compromise, and go down in history 'as the peace-maker of South India and as the Saviour of your State, your dynasty, and your people'. If he stuck to his stand, however, he would 'incur the universal condemnation of thinking people'.[63] The Nizam chose not to listen. But, with Mountbatten gone, it became easier for Patel to take decisive action. On 13 September a contingent of Indian troops was sent into Hyderabad. In less than four days they had full control of the state. Those killed in the fighting included forty-two Indian soldiers and two thousand-odd Razakars.

On the night of the 17th, the Nizam spoke on the radio, his speech very likely written for him by K. M. Munshi. He announced a ban on the Razakars and advised his subjects to 'live in peace and harmony with the rest of the people in India'. Six days later he made another broadcast, where he said that Razvi and his men had taken 'possession of the state' by 'Hitlerite' methods and 'spread terror'. He was, he claimed, 'anxious to come to an honourable settlement with India but this group . . . got me to reject the offers made by the government of India from time to time . . . '[64]

Whether by accident or design, the Indian action against Hyderabad took place two days after the death of Pakistan's governor general. Jinnah had predicted that a hundred million Muslims would rise if the Nizam's state was threatened. That didn't happen, but in parts of Pakistan feelings ran high. In Karachi a crowd of 5,000 marched in protest to the Indian High Commission.

The high commissioner, an old Gandhi an, came out on the street to try to pacify them. ‘You cowards,’ they shouted back, ‘you have attacked us just when our Father has died.’[65]

Back in June, a senior Congress leader had told the Nizam that if he made peace with the Union, His Exalted Highness of Hyderabad might even become ‘His Excellency the Ambassador of the whole of India at Moscow or Washington’.[66] In the event that offer was not made, perhaps because his dress, or his style of entertainment, or both, did not be hove a diplomatic mission. But he was rewarded for his final submission by being made rajpramukh, or governor, of the new Indian state of Hyderabad.

Two years after the end of the *ancien régime*, the Bombay journalist K. A. Abbas visited Hyderabad. He found that in the window of the hundred-year-old photo studio of Raja Deendayal, pictures of the city’s ‘liberator’, Colonel J. N. Chaudhuri of the Indian Army, had eclipsed portraits of the Nizam. Now, in Hyderabad, the white Congress cap was ‘the head-gear of the new ruling class, and inspire[d]the same awe as the conical Asafjahi dastaar (ready-to-wear turban) did before the police action’.[67]

VII

In August 1947 an experienced British official who had served in the subcontinent published an article with the portentous title ‘India and the Future’. British India had just been divided into two new nations, but, the writer asked, ‘will the division stop there?’ Or would the subcontinent break up ‘into innumerable, small, warring States’? Pakistan seemed inherently unstable; there was every chance of its north-western parts becoming an independent ‘Pathanistan''.Nor was India necessarily more stable. Thus ‘many competent observers believe that [the province of] Madras will ultimately secede into virtual independence'. As for the princely states, the smaller and more vulnerable ones would have no option but to join India. But ‘the big States of the South, however, notably Hyderabad, Mysore and Travancore – are in an altogether different position. They could, if necessary, preserve an independent existence, and the recent threats of the Congress Party are not likely to deter them from deciding this matter solely on consideration of their own advantage.’

The ‘ultimate pattern of India’, concluded this prophet, ‘is likely to consist of three or four countries in place of British India, together with a Feder-

ation of South Indian States. This will be, approximately speaking, are turn to the pattern of sixteenth century India . . .'[68]

Given the odds, and the opposition, the integration of these numerous and disparate states was indeed a staggering achievement. The job was so smoothly and comprehensively done that Indians quite quickly forgot that this was once not one country but 500. In 1947 and 1948 the threat of disintegration was very real, what with 'honey-combs of intrigue' such as Bhopal and Travancore and 'strategic points of assault' such as Hyderabad. But a mere five years after the last maharaja had signed away his land, Indians had 'come to take integrated India so much for granted that it requires amental effort today even to imagine that it could be different'.[69]

The position of the Indian princes in the Indian polity 'afforded no parallel to or analogy with any institution known in history'. Yet, through 'peaceful and cordial negotiations' the chiefdoms had dissolved themselves, and become 'hardly distinguishable from the other democratic units comprising the [Indian] Union'.

The words are from a booklet issued by the government of India in 1950. The self-congratulation was merited. Whereas the British-directed partition of India had exacted such a heavy toll, these 500 'centres of feudal autocracy' had, with little loss of life, been 'converted into free and democratic units of the Indian Union'. The 'yellow dots on the map' that marked these chiefdoms had now 'disappeared. Sovereignty and power have been transferred to the people'.'For the first time', the booklet went on, 'millions of people, accustomed to living in narrow, secluded groups in the States, became part of the larger life of India. They could now breathe the air of freedom and democracy pervading the whole nation.'

This being an official booklet, the credit for the job was naturally given to the man in charge. 'What the British pro-consuls failed to achieve after two centuries of ceaseless efforts', wrote the publicists, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel accomplished through his persuasive appeal to the nobler feelings of the Princely Order.'[70]

Patel's guiding hand was indeed wise and sure; another Congress politician, even (or especially) Nehru, might not have supervised the princes' extinction with such patience and foresight. But he could scarcely have done the job without V. P. Menon, who made hundreds of trips to the chiefdoms, chipping away at their rulers. In turn, Menon could have done little without the officials who effected the actual transition, creating the conditions for financial and social integration with the rest of India.

In truth, both politicians and bureaucrats had as their indispensable allies the most faceless of all humans: the people. For some decades, the people of the princely states had been clamouring in numbers for the rights granted to the citizens of British India. Many states had vigorous and active *praja mandak*. The princes were deeply sensible of this; indeed, without the threat of popular protest from below, they would not have ceded power so easily to the Indian government.

In the unification of India Vallabhbhai Patel had plenty of helpers. Most of them are now unknown and unhonoured. One who is not completely forgotten is V. P. Menon, who was both the chief draughtsman of princely integration as well as its first chronicler. Let us listen now to the lesson he drew from the process:

> To have dissolved 554 States by integrating them into the pattern of the Republic; to have brought order out of the nightmare of chaos whence we started, and to have democratized the administration in all the erstwhile States, should steel us to the attainment of equal success in other spheres.[71]

We shall, in time, turn our attention to those ‘other spheres’ of nation-building. But we have first to investigate the case of the princely state that gave the Indian Union the most trouble of all. This particular apple stayed perilously placed on the rim of the basket; never in it, but never out of it either.