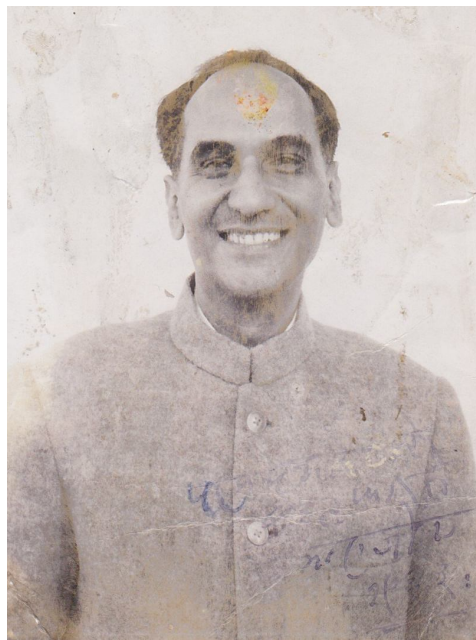


BILASPUR

A PEOPLE BETRAYED

Author



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INTRODUCTORY

This is a story of people, people no more than 130,000 amongst millions of Indians who at the a time when history was in the making and the British were withdrawing from the Indian sub-continent after more than 150 years of uninterrupted rule, chose to fight in order to maintain their identity in the new India that was emerging and in spite of heavy odds succeeded in their mission!

It is in fact the story of people of the tiny Indian state of Bilaspur, lying at the foothill of the Himalaya's to whom it became an obsession to carve out a separate entity for themselves in the new union of India! It was a seemingly impossible task when Indian states very much larger and more effective were to give way under the weight of rapidly changing circumstances but in their success the people of Bilaspur demonstrated in practice what the new government of the dominion of India was preaching in theory, that it was after all the will of the people of the princely states of India that was to decide their future and it is a salute both to the people of Bilaspur and the then minister of states, Sardar Patel, that this story has become possible.

But like all other stories it had its pitfall and as the ensuing pages will reveal, although the dominion government signed an agreement on 15th August 1948 (India's independence day) with the then ruler of Bilaspur agreement to administer Bilaspur as a separate unit, once Sardar Patel was no longer there (his death actually took place in December 1950) the agreement was thrown over-board and by an act of parliament

passed in 1954 the tiny state of Bilaspur was united with the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh despite the united will of practically all its inhabitants. It is on this score that I call this essay an act of betrayal of the people of Bilaspur and leave it to the reader to judge, after going through the epistle, if my title is correct.

So on with the tale and the facts as they presented themselves to the author who had the high honour of being the ruler of Bilaspur at the turning point of its un-interrupted hereditary personal rule lasting over twelve centuries.

THE INDIAN STATES AND THE STATE OF BILASPUR

Often derided and frequently ridiculed, the Indian or the princely states as they were called had a definite place in the Indian polity and some of them had an unbroken tradition of the personal hereditary rule lasting from the first century AD. (The state of Chamba in the Punjab hill states. now a district of the state of Himachal Pradesh) some of course were more recent and created by British to consolidate their power in the early nineteenth century. Yet others like the state of Hyderabad were an outcome of the disintegration of Mughal rule and the declaration by its governor as the Nizam or independent ruler of the principality. Then there was the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir, in which by the larger portion of Kashmir was added to Jammu by the then maharaja Sir Gulab Singh paying of the indemnity asked by the British from the Sikh rulers of the Punjab after the latter had been defeated in the first war of 1846! Thus in actuality Kashmir was purchased by the ruler of Jammu as an addition to his principality and even in the new India it maintains a distance entity in view of the great fighting that took place there immediately following independence and the vacillating attitude of its ruler, who could not up till the 25th of October 1948 make up his mind whether he was to accede to India or Pakistan: the final decision to cast his lot with India was prompted when Pakistani army with the help of rebel Afghans actually invaded the Kashmir valley and Sir Hari Singh found his small army absolutely helpless in with holding the attack.

One thing however was common to all the princely states; that they were under the hereditary personal rule of an individual

called a ruler or a prince and the on the death of the reigning prince the title passed on to his eldest son or in case of there being no son, to the nearest collateral as the next rajah or Maharajah. Even here the British had made a differentiation. The rulers of bigger states like Hyderabad, Kashmir, Gwalior, Baroda, etc. were addressed as Maharaja while the smaller princes like Bilaspur had to be content with the title of a mere rajah. There was yet another distinction, the order of precedence. This was very often determined by the status and salute of guns which a particular of Hyderabad to 9 guns in the case of small states like Sangli, in Maharashtra. Bilaspur with a salute of 11 guns held the first place amongst the Indian states of the Punjab hills, a no mean title to enjoy in those days.

Then there was the chamber of princes, founded by the British crown after First World War as a consultative body of all the princes of India the membership of which was limited to only the full powered and saluted states, the meaning of full power conveyed the power of passing to the death crown! Originally started with 109 members, who actually fulfilled the criteria cited above, the chambers of princes had its strength raised to 140 with the admittance of 31 more states as its members in their own right in 1938 when a special committee called the criteria committee recommended to the chamber that the 31 new entrants fulfilled the condition of membership. The chamber was presided over by the viceroy, the representative of his majesty the king of England, emperor of India but in actual fact the role of the viceroy and the governor-General of British India was fulfilled by the same individual as any duplicity would have meant clash of interests of the Indian states and the British province, directly ruled by the governor- general in

council, though the latter was in first instance wholly packed by nomination of the governor-general. Once every year therefore, the princes were summoned to Delhi by the viceroy to attend the chamber of princes which was under his chairmanship and here they elected a chancellor, a pro-chancellor and a standing committee, the strength of which in the later years was raised from 11 to 31 to give representation to all groups and interests that had developed in the Indian independence movement which was just round the corner. It is with some pride therefore that the author can say that he had an unbroken innings as a member of the standing committee of the chamber of princes from 1937 to 1948 (March) when the chamber of princes was itself dissolved in view of the changed circumstances in India!

As the states varied in size and importance so did the system of government prevailing in each. The larger ones often had partly elected legislatures though elected ministers came into vogue only in the early years of 1946 when it thought that this move may stall the new dominion government which was in offing, through its constituent assembly to which the Indian states were allotted 93 seats under the plan of the cabinet mission but about this more later on.

Having given a brief outline of the system it is time now to turn back to Bilaspur and see how it was administered in the critical years of the decade starting from 1938. At the apex stood the ruler but a sincere effort had been made to rehaul the administration and immediately below the ruler were three ministers, the ministers of revenue, home and development. There was however no chief minister as in small state like Bilaspur this was thought to be redundant. Followed by the

ministers were 12 secretaries who directly controlled the various departments into which the administration was divided, the important ones being the secretaries for foreign & political, home, education, health, development, supplies, forests & public work. The secretaries in case the work load was heavy were assisted by under secretaries with whom they shared power. Here the nomenclature of a foreign & political secretary would raise the eye-brows of an observant reader as the Indian states could not have any relations with foreign powers, but in the actual fact the foreign & political secretary was merely a channel of correspondence between the ruler and the representative of the crown, who under the control of the viceroy & the Indian foreign & political department, had the nomenclature of a resident for the larger states and a political agent for the smaller ones. In some case like Hyderabad and Jammu & Kashmir a resident was wholly assigned to the one state where he had his headquarters but in other like the group of the Punjab states the resident having his headquarters at Lahore (now in Pakistan) corresponded and had political links on behalf of the viceroy with the whole of the Indian states of the Punjab, including Bilaspur.

To Once each year the Honourable the Resident for Punjab States or his Assistant the Political Agent Punjab Hill States, would visit every State in the Punjab, Bilaspur included, and these visits were always marked by a certain amount of formality for which the Code had been laid by the Foreign & Political Dept. of India time to time. In the case of Bilaspur for example, should the Honourable the Resident be visiting it then the Ruler along with his important Officials had to proceed to a distance of one mile from Guest House, where important State Guest

were always lodged, and no sooner the Resident arrived at this point by Car he was duly received and introduced to the retinue by the Ruler.

Thereafter the Resident with the Ruler would sit in the first car so however that the Resident was always to the right side of the Ruler and the retinue as well as the Resident's Assistant, the Political Agent etc followed in another car or cars. On reaching the Guest House the State Unit of the Armed Forces would form the Guard of Honor while a Salute of 13 guns would be fired by the solitary saluting gun the State possessed, in honors of the Guest.

The Band would play 'God Save the King' and the union Jack would be unfurled in the compound of the building on a long pole already put up for the purpose. Henceforth the area was the domain of the Paramount Power, like an Embassy on Foreign Soil. The Resident would then inspect the Guard of honors and say a few polite words to the Commandant, as is usual on such occasions. Thereafter the Ruler would himself conduct the Resident to the latter's quarters where both would exchange pleasantries for some time and also finalize the programmes of the Visit for the next two three days that the Resident was expected to stay in the State. These programmes invariably smacked of a conducted tour to various places in the Town as well as the Countryside which it was considered worthwhile to show to the honorable Guest and seldom, if ever, was an opportunity given to the subjects of the Ruler to come into touch with the Resident ; in some cases however they were able to smuggle through a petition listing the ill treatment, real or imaginary, they might have received at the

hands of the Rajah but such petition or petitions were, in the case of Bilaspur, few and far between and the author as the then Ruler always took care to see that the legitimate grievances of the people were suitably redressed; As at the time of arrival so at the time of his departure as well, the Resident was seen off by the Ruler and his retinue and the Guard of Honors as well as the firing of the Salute were there but with this difference that now the Ruler only went to the State Guest House to bid good-bye to his honorable guest and a Senior Minister accompanied the Honorable the Resident up to the boundary of the State, in this case about 40 or so miles towards the town of Roop Nagar in the Punjab. If the Political Agent were to visit the State alone the only difference in these pleasantries was that he was received by the Ruler only at the Guest House and although the Guard of Honors was there, the number of Salutes to be fired was 11 instead of 13 for the resident having explained the working of the State Govt. and its relationship with the Crown I feel that it would be a good thing to give a brief Geographical & Historical sketch of Bilaspur so that the reader may be informed on this score. Lying in the foothills of the Himalayas Bilaspur State was situated between 31°-12' 30" & 31°-35'45" North Latitude and between 76°-23'45" & 76°-55'40". It had a superficial area of 453 square miles and a population of nearly 130,000 as per the Census of 1941. Hills and vales were a common feature of the territory which rising from a height of over 800 feet above the mean sea level at the village of Majari touching the Punjab Province, rose at Bahadurpur to a height of nearly 6200 feet above sea level, the highest point in the State. Bahadurpur, which had an old Fort of the same name, touched the Hill State

of Baghal, which was towards Shimla, and had a very cool climate throughout the year. Bilaspur Town itself was situated pat on the banks of the Sutlej River, which divided the State into two almost equal halves, and had a height of 1600 ft above sea level. It was a typical Hill Town with slated or thatched houses and the Main Bazaar, with shops in a row on both sides of a narrow winding road, consisted of a population of no more than 3,000 souls by the 1941 Census figures. The State was interspersed by Hills & dales as already stat and these Hills, seven in number were called 'Dhars' in the local dialects. Hence the title of Rajah of the Seven Dhars by which the Ruler was sometimes called. To name they were the Hill or Dhars of 1.Jhanjjar 2.Tiun3.Screewan 4.Kot 5.Shri Nainadevi6.Rattanpur; and 7.Bahadurpur.

The valleys which were fertile and thickly populated lay between these ranges and there were important tributaries of the Sutlej which flowed between these valleys. Known as the "Khud (streams) of Gambha, Ghamrola, Seer, Sukkar, & Sariali, these khads were quite often in floods during the monsoon and presented a hazard in crossing, the water discharge in some cases, increasing at the alarming rate of a few thousand cusecs in less than an hour!

Having described the States geographical features, a word about its inhabitants would not be out of place. The Brahmins were the largest in numbers followed by Rajput and Kunaits, the latter being somewhat inferior to the Rajput because they recognized widow remarriage and often cultivated the land along with their womenfolk, a thing the high cast Chandla Rajput would abhor in those days. These three castes within

themselves accounted for nearly 90,000 of the total inhabitants and after then came the "Chamar" (The low caste) with some 16,000 as their number. The "Julaha" (weaver) and the "koli- a non-untouchable who were later raised to Rajput-hood by the author numbered about 8,000 and 3,500 respectively. This would take our total to about 120,000. The remainder ten thousand or so consisted of various castes, scheduled and others like the Bania and the Bazigar. Amongst the Brahmins, most belonged to the SASANI cast while the others were Dharebars. The Rajputs were invariably Chandels or Chandlas, off-shoots of the younger brother of a Ruler, who became numerous as the dynasty, which was founded in 697 AD multiplied;

A few words about its History and we will move on to other things Bilaspur (Kehloor as it was called in olden days) was found by Raja Bir Chand in 697 AD when his father Raja Harihar Chand, on his way to Jwalamukhi in Kangra from the ancestral home at Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh, was killed by treachery by the then Raja of Kangra and Bir Chand as the eldest of the four brothers decided not to go back home. He established a small fort at Kot-Kahloor in the low lying area immediately below the peak of Shri Naina Devi's "Dhar" and cleared the dense forest with which it was called "Hathawat" in those days because "Hathis" (elephants) used to roam about there and it must have been a very uphill task for Bir Chand to settle down in such a difficult terrain. He persisted however and with the divine help of Mata Shri Naina Devi (Goddess Durga) who's Temple he erected on top of the Hill of the same name just above his Fort of Kot-Kehloor, he began to expand his territories. He was a brave warrior and by the time he died

in 730AD, he had brought virtually under his control practically all the and which till 1948 was called the State of Bilaspur and which today comprises of the District of the same name in the State of Himachal Pradesh.

Bir Chand was succeeded by a host of Raja's notable amongst whom are Deep Chand (1653-1657AD) the founder of Bilaspur Town, Bhim Chand (1665-1692AD) who was born fighter and brought the 12 thakurais, small principalities, of the Shimla Hills under his suzerainty, Maha Chand (1778-1824AD) who had the unique distinction of having lost practically the whole of his patrimony to the Skin Rulers of the Punjab on the one and the Rajah of Hindoor (Nalagarh) on the other, and thereafter having regained the control thereof with the help of the Gurkhas who first came to the Punjab foothills at his beck & call in 1812 and left as soon as the Treaty of Kathmandu was signed by them with the British in 1814. It was also in Maha Chand's time that direct contact with the British was established through General Ochterlony and a Sannad confirming the Agreement which the Ruler had made with the General was bestowed upon him by the then British Governor - General, the Earl of Moira or Lotd Hastings in 1815 ! After Maha Chand there was Heera Chand (1850-1882AD) who was the Ruler at the time of the Sepoy war of 1857 and by his to the British was able to regain his lost territories of Baseh & Bachhre too and also the confidence of the British Power in India. Heera Chand the Rulership of Bilaspur and it might be just as well to close this account with him, further history, should anyone be interested in going through it may be found in the Author other Book entitled "Bilaspur, Past, Present & Future" published in 1954.

This then was the background and the system of administration as it functioned in Bilaspur just as the 2nd World War plunged the World into destruction in September, 1939!

The 2nd World War and its impact on India and its States

When Hitler was gaining supremacy as the Nazi in Germany and Mussolini was brandishing his sword in Italy little did the Democratic powers of Europe, including Great Britain, or America realize what the eventual result of this resurrection was going to be. As Hitler went on tearing the commitments of the Versailles Treaty of 1919 page by page and entered Austria and then Czechoslovakia to bring them under German Rule, the British at least realized that the Dictator was really meaning to bring at whole of Poland would be attack on Britain itself. Hitler however was with power and when he invaded Poland on September 1939 never though Great Britain would go to War against him, including France whose fortunes were close; by allied with it. Britain did however take a firm stand and on its declaration of War against Germany, it did not ponder to withdraw the declaration even when after a few days fighting the 'Blitzkrieg' had finished Poland as a separate entity and made it a part of the German Empire. It is not the object of this Essay to detail the War's many happenings, including the entry into it of Japan and the USA but rather to show how it changed the course of history in India and the Indian states.

The start of World War 2 had hardly any impact upon India as events happening in Europe were so far away and the Jet age had not yet dawned over the World. Sketchy news on rather out-dated Radio receivers did give but these were cautiously worded and not very seriously relied upon. In India's political arena the Viceroy & Governor-General had made an appeal to all political parties, especially the Congress & the Muslim League in British India, as well the Rulers of Indian States to

help the War effort and although there was ready response from the Rulers both in men (as recruits in the Indian Army) and money the political parties of British India stood sullenly along. Their contention was that it was not India's War and they were not prepared to co-operate unless they were given a direct hand in the management of India's affairs, proposition the Governor-General was hardly in a position to accept.

With entry of Japan into the conflict in late 1941 however the Indian scene rapidly began to undergo a dramatic change. The success of the Japanese Fleet at Pearl Harbor, although achieved under the guise of treachery, and its subsequent successes in gaining complete mastery of the seas from Singapore to Tokyo convinced the Indian political Leaders that the British were tottering and that their total defeat was only a matter of time. In meanwhile the Indian National Army (INA) had been formed at Singapore under the Leadership of Subash Chandra Bose, with Japanese aid, and its units

With the Imperial Japanese forces reaching Manipur on the eastern borders of India from where they were repulsed by the British after a savage struggle. It was under these circumstances that Mahatma Gandhi gave his call for total revolution in August 1942 and his slogan of 'Do or Die' echoed around the Indian political scene doing much harm to the Allied cause. The British Govt. in India finally decided to round up all Congress Leaders, who were to be put behind bars in Yervada Jail of Poona in the modern State of Maharashtra till the very end of the War!

But the entry of the United States into the World conflict was now beginning to tell and with heroic resistance and scorch

had changed the situation so much by 1943 that the Allied cause was beginning to look rosy. In the meantime the British Govt. of the Day had not been deaf to India political sentiments and in 1942 had sent Sir Stratford Cripps to the New Delhi to work out an arrangement with the Congress. The Mahatma however, called the Cripps proposals a post dated cheque on a crashing Bank and wanted the Congress to have nothing to do with them while the Muslim League spurred on by its sole Leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah now began to talk about the carving out of a separate State of Pakistan in the India Sub-continent consisting of the Muslim majority areas of Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, North Western Frontiers Province & Bengal. To this of course was to be added the Muslim Majority State of Kashmir as and when the time came, so much for British India. As far as the Princely States were concerned the War effort was complete in men and resources the Rulers helped the allied cause to the hilt. Another outcome of the War was the closer links that were henceforth to be established between the Indian States & the Adjoining British Provinces on the economic front because in the War effort the economy of both was very closely linked. So British India was no longer isolated from the Indian States and henceforth what happened in one had its repercussions on the other!

In their relations with the Paramount Power also the Rulers began to sense a welcome change. The attitude of the Political Department and its off-shoots, the Residents & Political Agents, began to soften and as the Rulers put in more and more into the war effort their value as a factor of political stability in the Indian Sub-Continent began to be realized and depended upon. It was in this context that sensing the impending changes in

British India which were due to come in the aftermath of the War, The Viceroy in one of his rare outspoken addresses to the Chamber of Princes advocated the Policy of merger of Smaller States either into each other to form sizable Units or into one of the larger States adjoining them. This new advocacy ran into difficulties however firstly because the Rulers however small, deeply cherished their individual powers and secondly nobody could really define what a sizable Unit could be in terms of population etc. Later on a new formula was put up by the Crown which said that 1) Political Stability, 2) Economic viability and 3) Association of the governed with the administration were the three factors which should be there in order to hasten the process of merger. This formulae though very sound in itself floundered over the very first criteria of Political Stability because political conditions varied from State to State and even in the two biggest of them viz. Hyderabad and Jammu & Kashmir there was the paradox of a Muslim Ruler ruling a Hindu Majority area in Hyderabad while in Kashmir there was the Hindu Ruler who was the arbiter of a vast majority of his Muslim subjects. Of course the difficulties were not insurmountable and in case the then Rulers had agreed to a complete surrender of their powers to their subjects at that time in 1939-40, a lot of misery caused after Indian Independence could have been avoided but then in those years nobody dreamed of the British abandoning India to the Congress & the Muslim League and at best everyone believed a formulae would be evolved under which the British remained in India as the ultimate arbiter between the warring political group Perhaps even the British in India thought this as a reasonable way out of the political impasse and did not go fully

ahead with the Scheme of the Political Grouping of States. There were however a few exceptions notable amongst which were the Eastern States (later merged into Orissa) who formed a workable Union with a common High Court, a Common Police Force and a common Legislature of sorts! This was emulated by the Punjab Hill States also who formed a Union of the own but Bilaspur chose to stay apart and succeeded in persuading the Political Officers of the day that it was the best course for it to adopt. In its War effort Bilaspur went full steam ahead and there were over 3,000 people from this tiny State who were recruited into the Dogra Regiments of the India Army during the War. Also they earned a name for themselves in Bhandari Ram winning the highest award of the Victoria Cross & Kirpa Ram winning the George Cross posthumously! In terms of monies also the State aided the Viceroy's War fund and also purchased the War Bonds. In-side the State also experiment to associate the people with the War effort was launched and named as the Home Guards, twelve Units, on each of the twelve Parganas (political & administrative divisions of the State were recruited, trained and activated in which not less than about 6,000 people of the State were involved. These were to render valuable service at the time of the coming political changes,

As in its war effort, so also in its efforts to bring the administration of the state on to a modern basis, Bilaspur did not lag behind. The system of ministers and secretaries had already been established by the time that 2nd world war began and this was followed by the appointment of two important committees called the 1) education/committee and the 2) health/committee the halqua and pergana's representation

committee. These committees were charged by the ruler to report on 1) the establishment of better and modern educational & health system in the state and 2) to see how elected representative of the people could be associated with the government at the Halqua and Pergana levels. By the time the report of both these committees were placed before the state govt. 1939 the Bilaspur municipal committee and the Shri Naina Deviji's municipal committee in both of the important townships of the state bearing these names had been elected and started functioning under acts of the same name and on the adoption of the reporters of the two committees elected education & health committees began to look after the education & health needs of people in the rural areas and elections was held to the Halqua and Pergana committees on the basis of adult suffer the halqua to give the reader its true meaning was a further sub-division of the pergana and although the latter were 12 in number since years the new halquas in them numbered 56 and were formed by the merger of several village into one entity on the basis of geographical and culture grounds. Thus a rough and elementary system of self government began to function in the state by the year 1940 and henceforth it was the considered policy of the ruler to see that this developed into complete self- govt. as time advanced.

Political stability having been achieved and association of the government with the governed established it was now the turn of the state govt. To see how the third factor of economic self sufficiency could be achieved! This indeed was the main hurdle a Bilaspur was a poor state and dependent almost wholly on agriculture with no industries to boast of its income which was about 3 lacs per annum in 1933 had risen to only about rupees 9

lacks by 1940, a very poor figure on which future hope for the welfare of the people could be built up. At this hour of dismay however there suddenly came into the picture a project which was to completely change not only the economic but also the geographic picture of Bilaspur after lying dormant for a period of nearly 22 years the Bhakra dam scheme suddenly became alive and the unionist government of the Punjab sent its emissaries to Bilaspur to find out whether the state govt. Was ready and willing to enter into negotiations with the Punjab on this project.

BHAKRA COMES INTO THE PICTURE

To put it briefly, the Bhakra project as it was called consisted of putting up a high level dam across the Sutlej in a deep narrow gorge where it left the hills and emerged into the plains at the village of Bhakra in Bilaspur. On one side of the gorge was the Shri Naina Devi range while on the other was the range of in Kotlehr estate of the Punjab. The height the proposed dam was to be about 600 feet above the water level Bhakra making it the second height of its kind in the world and flooding the fertile valley behind it would submerge about 250 villages in Bilaspur effecting nearly 16,000 of its inhabitants, the remainder of the lake was to submerge equally large areas of the Punjab.

The concept was to store the extra water of the river Sutleg, which plea waste into the Arabian Sea during the monsoon, in the manmade reservoir of Bhakra and then release them during the months of the winter for sowing of crops in the desert and arid areas of Rohtak and Hissar district of the Punjab. The Bhakra scheme was first visualised in the years of 1915-1919 by a British engineer and then put into cold storage because of the high cost involved and more because of the human suffering it would cause in the uproot ment of thousands of farmers both in Bilaspur and in the Punjab. With the unionist ministry in the power in the Punjab, in which Chaudhari Sir Chhotu ram of the Rohtak district was then the revenue minister, the scheme was brought back to life and negotiations started with Bilaspur state to bring it to a speedy and successful conclusion!

In case of Bilaspur the revival of the scheme was a win the state govt. was hoping for because it would give that extra money and other amenities which the state then limited finances were

unable to supply. On top of this it would place Bilaspur on the map of not only India but the whole world and give it a pride of place. Therefore when the negotiations were first meted by Chaudhari Sir Chhotu ram's visit to Bhakra in 1938 where the ruler also met him, it began in a series of meetings between the rulers on the one hand and Shri AN Khosla the chief engineer of the Punjab on the other. Sometimes at these mutual discussions the political agent of the time was also present as under the existing protocol no agreement could be entered into by an Indian state with a British province without the approval of the paramount power!

The first few months of the negotiations proved to be the most difficult and at one time it was felt that there was no meeting ground between the parties! The state govt. Insisted in the height of the dam at Bhakra being limited to RL580, which would keep the waters of the reservoir 20 feet below the level of Bilaspur town and the famous "Sandoo" Maidan where the palaces, temples and other historical buildings of state were located. The "Maidan" or open ground as it meant in English, was a huge open area about 1+ miles in circumference and more or less flat and grass All Round it were housed the state buildings and at the back "chhota" (small) bazaar with a few score shops, away from the main market, a part of which would have to go under water even if the RL were to be limited 580! The Punjab on the other hand wanted full freedom of action in keeping the height of the dam well over RL 680 which would completely submerge the whole of Bilaspur town but give quite a few million acres free of water to the Punjab as a consequence of the increased height of the dam! That the wishes of the Punjab were to be ultimately granted under the

new Indian govt. is a point which would be commented upon when its turn comes at the proper time in this essay!

Slowly but steadily the state govt. however won its point of view and the first draft agreement which emerged as a result of the negotiations contained the express provision that the height of the dam at Bhakra would be limited to 580! This draft was prepared under the meticulous care of Shri AN Khosla an able engineer and a humane man who later rose to be the secretary of the ministry of irrigation and power in the dominion govt. And was promoted from there to the governorship of the state of Orissa from which latter post he retired. After retirement even he continued to look after the schemes he had promulgated, the in the putting up of high dams on various rivers of the sub-continent; to carry on the story however,

Although the first draft was prepared in 1938 the 2nd world war intervened and it was not till the year 1942 that further consultations were held. Now the state govt. was ready with its side of case and what is more the ruler had travelled the entire area of the flat valley which faced submergence and held consultations with the affected people on a heart to heart basis. In 1942 the then political officers, Mr Thompson the resident for the Punjab states and major bazelgette, the politic agent of the Punjab hill states, visited the site of the propose flooded area and Bhakra dam on "Khatnaos" with the ruler and we made to seize the enormity of the problem. "Khatnaos" to give the reader some idea of them, consisted of inflated buffalo skin on two of which, being bound side by side, a specially made wide legged chair or even a cot or a "charpoy" was securely tied and then this man made draft was guided

through water by another two “drains” (men floating on bloated buffalo skins with paddles) to keep it straight in the water and not allow it to run into the whirlpools which were often encountered in the swift running waters of the rivers. In the month of October, after the monsoon the “Khatnaos” was an ideal mode of river transport and doing on the average about five miles an hour it was great fun floating on it and seeing the land valleys on both sides. Starting from Bilaspur after breakfast the “Khatnaos” would reach the valley of “Chaunta” a village downstream about miles by tea time and here amongst the densely populated villages and hamlets camp under canvas would be pitched for the night, when after an early dinner the village folk would flock in their hundreds to tell the tale of dread and woe which awaited them should the Bhakra dam ultimately come to be built, this apprehend being allayed by the ruler personally with the guarantee that the uprooted would be given land for land besides other modern amenities like schools and hospitals which they lacked at that time and their sacrifice in the common cause would be well rewarded. A promise which was solemnly made and equally solemnly accepted but alas not wholly kept by the successor govt. Of Bilaspur when the ruler ceased to be such in 1948 thus causing the economic betrayal of a quiet and innocent people whose only fault was that they happened to be residents of the valley involved in the Bhakra scheme. To turn to our story however, both MR. Thompson and Major Bazelgette were not only thrilled but considerably impressed by their “khatnaos” journey that October and henceforth the British crown, represented by them, stood by the state govt. in their sustained efforts to get a better deal from the Punjab. Another visitor to

the valley on a similar errand sir Bertrand Glancy, a distinguished British officer who was then the governor of the Punjab and even he beg them to have a lot of sympathy for the Bhakra Oustees once he had seen them in their natural habitat. This visit which took place in February 1946, nearly a year after the end of the 2nd world war, put the seal on the Bhakra Agreement and moulded it the way the state govt. wanted it to be made out by late 1945 two district changes, unfavourable from the point of view of the state govt. had appeared in the Punjab. The originate of the revived Bhakra scheme on the engineering level, Shri AN khosla had left the Punjab and gone over to new Delhi as the additional secretary to the govt. Of India in the department of irrigation & power and an Englishman under the name of Mr. Foy had replaced him who was not so favourably disposed towards the Bhakra dam scheme. Indeed for some time it came to be known that the Punjab might give up the scheme in view of what was described as "the recalcitrant attitude the Bilaspur state" but these doubts was set at rest when, as stated above, Sir Bertrand Glancy then governor of the Punjab visited Bilaspur in early 1946 and gave the assurance that Bhakra would be proceeded with and Mr. Foy 's ideas were no more then plan another barrage on the Sutleg at Nangal, nine miles downstream of Bhakra, which would create a balancing reservoir to better control the water of the main Bhakra reservoir! So in the February 1946 after Sir Bertrand Glancy's visit the stage was set to finalise the Bhakra Agreement once for all when suddenly there appeared on the scene in Bilaspur the Paraja Mandal or the people's body which claiming challenge to the political individuality of the state and all it stood for.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE BILASPUR PRAJA MANDAL

The start of the movement was harmless in itself and consisted of a few over zealous boys of the local high school sticking posters on the various buildings of the state capital overnight urging the people to awake and arise but on closer scrutiny it was found that the move had the backing of about score of state employees, mostly of junior rank who were dissatisfied with their superiors over trivial matters. They along with some misguided townsmen had found the idea of a Bilaspur state Praja Mandal rather rewarding as they were told such a move while giving precedence to the local over the outsiders would in reality gives a better deal to the people against the dictatorial behaviour of the ruler. The Himalayan Raisti Praja Mandal was of course affiliated to the Indian states people's conference, an off-shoot of the Indian national congress, under its resolution of 1938 when it was decided to open branches of the conference in the Indian states from time onwards. So in actual effect the Bilaspur Praja Mandal was eventually to be a body owing allegiance to the congress and taking the leadership of the people of Bilaspur outside the hands of the ruler and his govt. Once properly understood in its full perspective the state govt. was faced with the decision either to accept the Praja Mandal as the people's representative and yield political power to it, or to administrative leadership of the State in the hands of the Ruler and his Govt. After prolonged deliberations the second course was adopted and the Praja Mandal was officially banned as an organisatic within the Bilaspur State thus starting a political controversy which grew into a bloody fight in the years 1946 to 1948 and where in the political stability of the structure built so patiently by the state govt. Brick by brick was tested to the hilt

in the ensuing confrontation. No one however, least of all the state govt. Realised that this was to be Bilaspur into conflict with the whole might of the Indian national congress!

Having decided on its course of action the state govt. Acted with alacrity and rounded up not only the score or so junior state employees under the state servants conduct rules but also a dozen or so inhabitants of the town. Notable amongst the employees were Santram Sant and Daramveer Singh, the former a clerk in the education department and the latter an SDO in the PWD of the state both had some political following in the state and were therefore selected to be treated on a separate footing than the other; amongst the townsmen however the most notable was Daulatram Sankhyayan, son of a former opium contractor of the state, who too later to become one of the kingpins of the movement! Cases were now started against all these persons but after about a week or so it came to light that both Santram "Sant" and Daulatram Sankhyayan had fled from custody and left the boundaries of the state at their own violation, a fact that was considered more convenient by the state authorities rather than their continued incarceration. Along with these two had also fled Dharamveer Singh and the trio later took refuge in Shimla under the care of Himalayan riashti Praja Mandal. After a few days all the townsmen connected with the movement were warned and let off while the junior state employees were sent to their parent departmental heads to face further enquiry,

The Praja Mandal movement having been nipped in the bud with the state now began to function outside its territories and the Bilaspur Praja Mandal established its branch at Shimla

under the president-ship of one Sada ram Chandel, who was a teacher in the Hart Court Butler High School there and belonged to the Majhaun village of the state. Their executives naturally include Santram Sant, Daultaram Sankhyayan, Dharamveer Singh and few others of Bilaspur who were working in Simla. Brochure condemning the state govt. and the ruler's activities was issued and the threat of Satyagraha brandished in case recognition to the praja mandal was not given forthwith. Also at about the same time a formal letter from Dr.Y.S. Parmar, president of the Himalayan riasti praja mandal was received wherein he asked the state authorities to remove the ban on the Bilaspur Praja Mandal and duly recognise it! On the state government taking no notice of these threats and issuing a counter pamphlet in which the real identity as well as intentions of the "bogus" Praja Mandal were revealed, a political warfare of sorts made a start which was not to about till October, 1948 when Bilaspur came under direct administrative control of the then dominion govt. of India.

Two other steps were taken by the state govt. In quite success firstly a news bulletin under the name of Bilaspur bulletin began to be published in Hindi going the state version of the happening and secondly the people were taken into complete confidence as to why the govt. Of the state had decided to ban the Praja Mandal. The second step naturally took the ruler and his ministers out on tour of the various parts of the state where the assembled people were given the full background of all these happening. This occupied the months of March and April, 1946 and preceded the coming of the first "jatha" of the Praja Mandal from Shimla to Nahol, on borders of the state in early may 1946. This "jatha" consisted of the office beaters of

both the Bilaspur & the Himalayan states. It was met at the boundary at Namhol by the local populace and beaten off, without the help of any police of the state. The "jatha" included Shri Padam Dev of Bushahr state in the Shimla hills who was later in the day to become the home minister of Himachal Pradesh.

The Himalayan Riasti Praja Mandal was however well established in practically all the hill states of the Punjab failed to penetrate Bilaspur via the Shimla route at namhol, it now asked its "jathas" to march into Bilasput territory from neighbouring jahu, which was a hamlet situated in the hill state of Mandi, adjoining Bilaspur on the north-eastern side. The "jathas" of Jahu" as we later began to call them were numerous and gave the state a great headache for a few weeks. Eventually however with the active help of the local populace this danger was also warded of and we heaved a sigh of relief by the time the month of June, 1946 was over!

THE CABINET MISSION

In the mean while other more important things were happening in India and cabinet mission consisting of Lord Patrick Lawrence, Sir H. Alexander and Sir Stafford Cripps had been sent to New Delhi by the new labour govt. of Great Britain to find a solution to the Indian problem. The mission had arrived in early and began a series of meetings with the leaders of public opinion in India, mostly the congress and the Muslim league. The Indian states were in the picture and when they were called up to see the Cabinet Mission, two Delegations met them separately. Firstly the larger States led by the Chamber of Princes the Nawab of Bhopal and secondly the smaller states. Two man delegation of the rulers of Dungarpur (in Rajasthan) and the author met them in New Delhi in April of 1946. It was a rather historic meeting and once both of us were ushered into the presence of the three member mission as well as the then viceroy, Lord Wavell, the Maharawal of Dungarpur read out a paper in which he advocated the grouping together of smaller states for the purposes of joining the Indian provinces on all India bases. The author however chose the direct approach.

He told the mission that the relationship of Bilaspur with the British crown and lasted for well nigh 130 years since Raja Mahan Chand came into relationship with them in 1815 and if the British wanted to leave India he for one wanted nothing more than same freedom for action being given to the Indian states as they enjoyed when the British came into India and imposed themselves as the paramount power. Moreover if the idea of a united India was not considered as feasible and a new

state of Pakistan was to be carved out consisting of Muslim majority provinces then there was no reason why the Indian states should not be allowed to group themselves together into a confederation called Rajasthan as they had as much a stake in India as the congress or the Muslim league. The whole interview however lasted for less than 40 minutes and it would be interesting to note what the cabinet mission thought of it.

In May of 1946 before leaving India, the cabinet mission released their proposals to the press and in so far as British India was concerned they visualized a constituent assembly of the provinces into which the Muslim majority provinces to join later on they have had their own confabulation. The centre was visualized as one with very limited power of defence, foreign affairs and communications. In so far as the Indian states were concerned, once the proposals for British India were accepted by the congress & the Muslim league, Paramount over them would cease and they would be left 93 representatives in the Constituent Assembly of India, the latter to be chosen under a scheme to be evolved by a negotiating committee of the Indian states with its counterpart of the constituent assembly! This was the utmost the cabinet mission could go to meet the demands of the congress and the Muslim league, the latter being bent on the creation of a separate state of Pakistan. However for the time being both the congress as well as the Muslim league accepted the proposals of the cabinet mission and the Indian states rejoiced, foolishly enough, that the termination of the hates paramount of the British Crown was round the corner!

The new found optimism did not last long however and when Jawaharlal Nehru was asked by a press correspondent as to what he thought the constituent assembly would do once the representative of the Muslim majority provinces had joined it as visualised by the proposals of the cabinet mission, he frankly said that there was no limitation on the powers of the constituent assembly and I could draw up any kind of constituent it choose for the whole of India, this statement was enough for the leader of the Muslim league, Muhammad Ali Jinnah to back out of his commitments to the cabinet mission and he retaliated by saying that if that was the attitude of the congress then it was clear that the proposed constituent assembly was a trap into which the Muslim would enter under no circumstances and the only solution to the Indian problem was the division of the country! In so far as the Indian states were concerned, Jinnah saw the Pakistan in each one of them, because once free from the yoke of the paramount power they should act as they happy.

Mr. Attlee's labour govt. in Great Britain was much taken abated by this development and soon afterwards made a proposal for the creation of a cabinet at the centre consisting of equal number of nominees of the congress and Muslim league to be presided of by the viceroy. The congress accepted this proposal but the Muslim league vacillated with the result that a purely congress cabinet the Governor-General was formed in August, 1946 in New Delhi with Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister. An equal number of seats however were left unfilled for the league should they decide to enter later on. Having achieved their first objective of directly running the govt. of India at the centre the congress was quick to press their

advantage by calling a constituent assembly into being by the winter of 1946 from all the provinces of British India on a basis under which the then existing members of the provincial legislature were on a proportion basis to automatically become the members of the new constituent assembly. To this the Muslim league replied with its threat of direct action in September 1946 when hundreds of people lost the lives in communal clashes that broke out all over the country. Was to demonstrate to the British govt. that the majority of Muslim in India stood behind the demand of the league for the creation Pakistan and resulted in Mohamad Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru being called for detailed talks was in London in October of one outcome of these talks was that the Muslim league decided to enter the interim govt. And the other result was that the new constituent assembly of India being called by the congress was to consist of only those Indian provinces which were majority areas of the congress party.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS DEEPENS IN BILASPUR

But what was happening in Bilaspur in the meanwhile is more relevant to this essay. As has been stated already the “Jathas Jahoo “ had abated by the end of summer of 1946 and both the Praja Mandal as well as the state authorities were preparing for the next move. Just at this time, as if by a strange coincidence, the trial of the leaders and rank and file of the Indian national army began to be held in British India and the Azad Hind Fauj (as the INA were called) became the focus of attention of the Indian people. Unfortunately for them the leader of the movement Netaji Subhash Chander Bose was reported to have died in a plane crash while fleeing from Singapore to Japan in early 1945. As has been stated elsewhere Bilaspur had supplied over 3,000 men as recruits to the Indian army during the war and many out of them had become members of the Indian national army. They began to be screened by the British authorities at Delhi in early 1946 and were listed as white, grey and black. The white with little doctrinarian, the grey a little more suspect of divided loyalties while the black were the hard core of the INA. All three categories found their mention in the released personnel of the state and they posed a new and more virulent threat to the political fight which was going on between the state govt. And the Praja Mandal in so much so, that seeing in the Praja Mandal the representative of Indian freedom they readily lent their support to them without having ascertained the reason which had led the state to ban their movement!

In early September, 1946 anew type of “jatha” formed of the INA personnel of Bilaspur came to the headquarters and

hoisted the congress flag in the Chaunta garden. They came in the name of the Praja Mandal and had the support of a dozen or so shopkeepers of the township who had prepared a dinner of sorts for them. They were warned that the Praja Mandal was a banned organisation and when this warning was not heeded a lathi charge was made against this "jatha" through which it was dispersed. A few enthusiastic locals also entered the fray and are reported to have looted some shops under the guise of alleged support to the lathi charging police!

This was something quite new and had to be properly assessed the author was at Poona at the time and on hearing the news he alerted the home minister to act according to a pre-conceived plan which was to be put into operation if the "jatha" infiltrated into the state territory. It was just in time. By the first week of October a few hundred men of the Praja Mandal entered the state territories at the village of Hatwar in the north eastern of the state and the local sub-inspector police however moved in and with the active support of the local populace beat back this large mass of men outside the territories of the state. By this time the Ruler (author) had arrived in Bilaspur and found the atmosphere tense. It was therefore decided to call the first political conference of all Bilaspur's Kehloories at Bilaspur on Dussehra day which fell in the third week of October and in the meanwhile try to pacify the anger and anguish that had come to the open due to these happenings. Another step taken by the ruler was to personally meet Shri Jawaharlal Nehru at New Delhi and ask his intervention in this needless fight. He promised to send emissary of his to ease the situation!

The first conference of Bilaspur was a great success. By now the people had seen disruptive forces in their own minds and were ready and willing to take any step which maintained the integrity of Kehloor (Ballarpur) The ruler then moved a result from the chair reaffirming the full faith and confidence of the assembly, which had now risen to some ten thousand men, in the policies and actions of the state govt. and further pledged the they would act as one in maintaining the integrity and separate identity of Kehloor (Bilaspur) at this hour of peril. It was moving scene when thousand of arms stood raised in support of motion and thus the seal on years of hard work in the political arena was set that evening in so far as the state govt. was concern. Henceforth there would be no doubt as to where the loyalties of the people lay and it was a solemn but also a joyous occasion!

In the meantime Shri Nehru's emissary, one Shri Brish Bhan, of the Punjab states Praja Mandal was conduct by Dr. Parmar to the boarders of Bilaspur not by the direct route from Roop Nagar but through the dubious and unalterable path coming to Bilaspur from the Mandi state near Sreewan. Here he was intercepted and asked to wait till clearance was obtained from the state headquarters. The sub-inspector of police of the area did not know of Shri Brish Bhan's coming not did the state government ever think that he would come via this most unusual route. But this was only a subterfuge of Parmar and it succeeded. Brish Bhan, who must have been Parmar' friend, turned back at once and reported to Jawaharlal that there was no freedom of movement in the state for outsiders this led to an angry letter to the ruler from the Prime Minister and how so ever much we tried to explain the situation and the delicate

times we were passing through it was enough to make Shri Jawaharlal's attitude towards us far from friendly and Parmar objective of cutting us away from the congress was achieved. How he cashed on it in subsequent years will be told at the proper time!

Having dealt with the impending crisis, the attention of the state govt. was now turned towards those shopkeepers of the town who had taken sides with the INA "jatha". Cases under the defence of India rules, which were still in vogue, were instituted again some sixteen of them and they were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment and fine. Perhaps the sentences imposed were too savage but then the state administration had little experience of dealing with political agitations at that time and as it was late to realise that too much had been made of a minor incident, all the jailed shopkeepers were released unconditionally and fines realised from them fully refunded. In all they were in jail for a period of less than four months but perhaps even this could have been avoided if Sansei councils had prevailed! Anyway the mischief had been done and henceforth the state administration did lose the sympathy of some quite influential shopkeepers of the time and made them inwardly hostile to the state regime for time to come a great tragedy in its own sphere.

The winter had set in and it was the ideal time to tour the state. This tour was really a ritual of sorts in which a very detailed programme of the whole area to be toured was drawn up and the places of halt clearly marked. There were no cars hence the tour was undertaken on horseback and after good day's journey, which lasted for about 5-6 hours after lunch and

before dinner was undertaken often in difficult mountain terrain. The cavalcade of the ruler consisted of a military police guard at the very forefront consisting of about a dozen men with two NCOs' and then his own favourite pony, often bought in the lavvy fair of Rampur Basher state adjoining Tibet, from which latter area they came, varying in price from a thousand to five hundred rupees each even in those days, the "Pahari Goonth as the pony was named was very sure footed and ideal for hill travel. But in case the going was still more steep and difficult there was the rulers favourite "khachhar" or mule duly saddled, with a velvety cushion which would carry him practically on any track that men could climb. Very often the ruler was accompanied by one or two of his ministers and secretaries and a dozen or so personal servants like the cook, the bearer, the camp attendant and so on. There were two sets of tent age carried on these tour each set consisting of two Kabul tents, two shouldered or sing room tents, one shamans and a large footage of "kunai" or standing tent hedge of a kind which when put up on the open. Space on both sides of the Kabul tents gave the necessary private.

The Kabul tent, as those who have seen it would know, consisted of a double fly tent with one full sized room about 12'x12' and a small appendage at the end to serve as a toilet. Then there special tent furniture consisting of folding beds, chairs, tables etc. And the durries or jute carpets for the floor, usually spread over freshly cut rise stalks which would at once give the flooring a soft and cosy look! Before the arrival of the ruler at the night halting place, often outside a thickly populated village, in the fields from which the harvest has been recently cut, the camp would be ready to receive him while the

second set would move on to the next halting place so that no anxiety was caused the next day or the day after next when camp was struck up and the cavalcade moved on!

That winter the tours and camping had an added delight because the people had come into contact with the state govt. As never before and the Dussera Conference just proceeding it had charged the atmosphere so much so that every where the ruler went he was received with much ceremony, bordering on sheer adulation. He on his part not only reciprocated these touching sentiments of loyalty but in the morning meetings with the village folk, representing the area, which were held in the shamiana pitched for the purpose, threw detailed light on the happenings in India and how the Indian states were to be affected by them. After centuries the face of India was changing and Bilaspur state had to find an honoured place in the new map that was being drawn up; this was his favourite theme. He would then proceed on to say how the people by their united will and solid backing of the state govt. And its policies could help in this objective. But this was not the only object of these tours. The other purpose was to bring the ruler and ruled much nearer and to redress the grievances of the people on the spot, often through summary decisions, this was highly appreciated and applauded as no one was too high or sacrosanct not to be asked to appear before this assemblage and narrate his case, whether it was for the prosecution or the defence. This did not mean that these get to gathers really replaced the ordered system of justice which was in vogue in the state. What it meant was that such cases and happenings which were not sub-juice were freely dealt with here and redress given.

A very exhaustive tour programme had been drawn up that winter and if the author remembers aright about 10 of the 12 Fergana's of the state were covered by it, including the areas to be submerged in the proposed Bhakra Reservoir. In these latter the tour had its added importance of telling the people how their interests were proposed to be safeguarded and how the state government was asking the Punjab to give land for land to the Oustees. Indeed the Punjab govt. Had promised in the draft agreement to give land on Bilaspur outskirts of Bhakra in the NILIBAR COLONY of the Punjab in the Montgomery district but the state govt. Was not keen to avail of this offer as Montgomery district lay in the Muslim majority area of the Punjab and the Muslim league demand of Pakistan made it vulnerable to a purely Hindu population! Not that Bilaspur had any Muslim amongst its people. There were about 1500 of them in the whole state a very small minority from any account.

In New Delhi the constituent assembly had started to function and the Indian states were being asked to send their representatives to it. The formation of the states negotiation committee had therefore become a priority and it was with great satisfaction that the author received a letter from sir Conrad Cornfield, while the former was on tour in the village, that he (the ruler) had been selected as one of the members of the negotiating committee and should be ready to come over to Delhi for a meeting with the constituent assembly's counterpart in early February, 1947. Sir Conrad Cornfield was the political advisor to the Viceroy those days and the head of the politic department. He was personally known to the ruler over since he was the resident of the Punjab states in 1943-1945 and it

might be mentioned here that whatever his failings, sir Conrad was a true friend of the Indian states and tried his utmost to see that they got a proper deal from the new government of Indian. That he failed in his mission was not due to any shortcoming he might have suffered from but rather the course of events and history because on Pakistan was agree to, it was quite clear that the days of the Indian states as separate entities were over.

NEGOTIATING COMMITTEES FORMED

The negotiating committee of the states headed by the chancellor of the chamber of princes, the Nawab of Bhopal, the Pro-Chancellor the Maharaja of Patiala, the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, the ruler of Dungarpur, the Author and the Dewans (prime ministers) of Travancore (Sir Ramswamy Ayyangar) Mysore, of the princely states and on the side of the Jwaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Shri Ayyangar and others, who represented the congress. The Muslim League having boycotted the Indian constituent assembly was not represented in this committee.

Both the committees met in what is now known as the parliament buildings for three days and after many preliminary a rough division of the 93 seats allotted to the Indian states was agreed to.

During discussions between the two negotiating committees, however certain other interesting factors came to light which might be mentioned here in passing. In the previous weeks the constituent assembly had passed a unanimous resolution declaring that India would be a "sovereign democratic republic" and the states representative were eager to know Shri Jawaharlal Nehru as to how this could reconcile with the Indian states, having a monarchical system of govt. sharing the task of shaping the future constitution of India with others of British India who held dynamically opposite views. There was also the preliminary question of constituent assembly's negotiating committee accepting the monarchical system of govt. In the states before the negotiations proceeded any further. To this the Sardar replied in his characteristic way that

they could promise nothing as they were in no position to bind the constitution making body and it was for the Indian states via their representatives to carve out a place for them in the new body politic of India! The Indian states could have held on longer but their unity was falling to pieces and already the state of Baroda, whose nominee was not in the state negotiating committee, had declared that it had accepted the invitation to join the constituent assembly. Even in the committee itself the maharaja of Patiala, ruler of the premier Sikh state of the Punjab & pro-chancellor of the chamber of princes, was taking a pro-entry stand and the state of Jammu & Kashmir made it known that it had no intention whatsoever to take any further part in these negotiations. So the unity of the states was disintegration and the communiqué issued at the end of the talks giving a rough outline of the division of the 93 seats inter-se was just a formality.

Now these 93 seats had been earmarked for the Indian states in the constituent assembly on the basis of their population which was roughly 93 million at that time. So the distribution of seats was made on the rough & ready base of one seat per million people! Where the population of an individual state was less than about 900,000 it had to be grouped with others. In all about 18 states fulfilled the criteria of individual representation while the others were grouped. In the Punjab & Punjab hill states where Bilaspur was located, after taking the state of Patiala whose population was above a million, remainder, about 14 in number were grouped together giving them 3 seats with a population of roughly 2.8 million! Bilaspur had therefore to find a seat in the constituent assembly only through some

form of election by the rulers or representatives of the other states of the Punjab!

Just as these events were taking place the Muslim league had already joined the governor-general's cabinet and its representatives there were at loggerheads with the congress nominees giving them a hell of a time. Especially the role of Mr. Liqueat Ali Khan second to the leader of the league, Mr. Jinnah was proving very irksome as the Indian finance minister and Lord Wavell as the governor-general and the referee was quite unequal to the task as he was at best a soldier and never a politician. It was in these circumstances that Jawaharlal Nehru urged the Attlee govt. To offer a change in the vice royalty of India, without which, according to the congress party, there could be no hope of ending the stalemate.

This appeal was listened to in Whitehall and a search for a new viceroy was on. Eventually the choice fell on Mountbatten of Burma and Wavell was informed of his replacement.

MOUNTBATTEN REPLACES WAVELL

Pleasant manner! the soldier in Wavell was too honest however and although he was hurt at the manner of his summary dismissal he was rather glad to hand over the burden to someone else who had the necessary finesse to bring about the final transfer of power from British into Indian hands. For the Indian states the change of viceroyalty and the coming of Mountbatten was a tragedy because he was from the very beginning obsessed by the idea as to how the British could abdicate power in India and did not care who suffer in the process.

It will be out of place here to relate the many stories of the Mountbatten charm and the way he succeeded in winning over the complete confidence of the congress leaders. When he met Jinnah however he knew that nothing short of a division of India could be effective and even here a compromise was made with the congress leaders in the language that even the Muslim majority provinces could be divided into Muslim and non-Muslim majority areas. The Indian states representatives of the important states, with the exception of Hyderabad and Kashmir were by now working with the congress in the task of constitution drawing and therefore the rulers hardly posed an insurmountable problem to Mountbatten. By June 3rd the new plan was ready and when announced to the leaders of the congress & the Muslim league as well as the negotiating committee of the Indian states, as their representative body, it was clear that a rather truncated Pakistan had been accepted and the position of the Indian states left untouched as per the plan of the cabinet mission. This however could not last long

because the states were now under severe pressure to cast their lot with India, and as a vast majority of them had Hindu rulers this was made into a sentimental issue and played up as such. Forgotten for the time were the individual interests of the states and their people. The first and foremost thing was that India was being divided into Hindu & Muslim states and the rulers' place was with their Hindu brethren in India!

The ruler of Bilaspur had asked a couple of questions from leader of Mountbatten at the meeting of June 3rd. Firstly whether paramount in the case of the Indian states could not lapse forthwith as there was hardly any point in waiting for 15th August, 1947 for this to happen (the latter date having been announced for the handing over of power to India & Pakistan) and secondly whether the rulers were free from June 3rd onwards to decide their future course of action without any interference from the political department. The answers of Mountbatten to both these questions were non-committal and elusive. Paramount could not be withdrawn before August 15th and the rulers could not run away from their neighbours; was all he said on his return to Bilaspur from New Delhi after the announcement of the June 3rd plan, the ruler took council with the state govt. and the people's representatives. After much discussion it was decided to wait and see how things shaped and in the meantime strengthen the ties between the govt. and the people still more as time seemed to be approaching when with the withdrawal of the British the tiny state of Bilaspur would have to stand up on its own two legs to carry out the policy and programme it had adopted for itself during the last more than a year. Of course the Bhakra dam agreement, which was at the signing stage, was also relegated to the background

because with the impending division of the Punjab there was clearly no govt. with whom it could be finalised!

The June 3rd plan, gave birth to Pakistan, also doomed the future of the Indian states. True Paramount would lapse on August 15th1947, but how were the states to benefit by it? Clearly except for the very biggest of them, I. E. Hyderabad and Kashmir, the political future by identifying themselves either with India or Pakistan. Even in the case of the biggest two, the problem over Muslim ruler a Hindu majority population and vice versa made the future most uncertain. So the announcement of his resignation from the chancellorship of the chamber of princes, by the Nawab of Bhopal, that afternoon meant nothing except his having seen the impending doom to which his policy had led the Indian states. He of course stated bombastically that on the cessation of paramount Bhopal would be reverting to its independent status, but what it could really mean in actual terms for a state of 9 lacks of Hindu majority population set in the heart of central India surrounded by the central provinces, was quite clear to any person who had the sense to see things in their proper perspective. Only so long as a united India stayed was there a hope for the survival of the Indian states, with a divided India, they were doomed!

With the resignation of the Nawab from the chancellorship, the standing committee of the chamber met in Bikaner house that eventually to take stock of the situation. With most of the larger states having identified themselves with the constituent assembly and thus having come to terms with the congress which was to be now the successor govt. of India it was quite clear that the chamber was of little or no utility as a body which

could untidily face the challenge of the future. It was therefore decided, more or less unanimously to dissolve the chamber and a resolution to this effect was passed. The ruler of Patiala, the pro-chancellor however did not participate in this meeting and he later issued a statement the constitutionally he was now the chancellor and that the standing committee could not take any step for the dissolution of the chamber of princes where in he was not a participant but in actuality this mattered little. Obviously the chamber was dead, and it died a death un-honoured and un-sung. When the last viceroy, lord Mountbatten called the princes to their last meeting with him at new Delhi in July 1947 it was a chamber of princes meeting but as stated that they participated, so legal niceties had no place in participated in politics.

Sir Conrad Cornfield, the advisor to the viceroy on Indian states however bravely tried to go ahead with the policy enumerated by the cabinet mission and under his care the whole system of political control of the states through the channels of the residents & political agents began to be wound up. Files concerning the rulers personal lives were destroyed and those dealing with other matters of importance to them, returned to the states by the respective residents & political agents. They were also asked to be ready to proceed on leave preparatory to retirement and it must be said to the credit of the British officers of the Indian political services that not a single one of them opted to serve the new govt. of India in any capacity. Many in their early careers had to go back and start a new life elsewhere but they stuck to their guns and that was that.

These happenings of course did not go un-noticed by the committee rulers of New Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Mountbatten again Cornfield. He was therefore ingeniously retired & packed home!

Forgotten were the promises so often made to the Indian princes on behalf of his majesty the king emperor; forgotten their services in the second world war when they alone served in men and money whilst the Indian political parties had adopted a hostile and disruptive stance; forgotten also was the cabinet missions assurance that on the handing over of power to the British Indian people the paramount over the states enjoyed by the crown was to totally disappear. The only person who was trying to live up to that pledged word was not only ignominiously cashiered off but at one time a charge of misfeasance was levelled against him! It will thus be quite clear to the reader that in spite of the "halo" with which Mountbatten use to surround himself he was a man to whom promises and assurances meant little so long as the desired goal was achieved!

No sooner had cornfield left when the vacuum caused by the laps of paramount, which was to follow in about a month's time was purposed to be filled. This was done by the creation at the centre a state's department with Sardar Patel as the minister in charge and V.P. Menon as his secretary. V.P. Menon, who started work as a clerk and was at the time of the transfer of power in India, the person in charge of the department had pleased his new masters by leaking out state secrets and giving the congress leaders advance information of what the viceroy's of the day were communicating to the

Secretary of State in Whitehall. This had earned a place in the new regime was, in the eyes of Sardar Patel, a great asset in dealing with the Indian states against whom every guile had to be used to make them bend backwards in their dealing with the new ministry of states. On the .month of July the Sardar issued a public statement asking the rulers of the Indian states to join the constituent assembly and work in close harmony with the new govt. at the centre as equal partners. It was like the spider asking the fly to come into its web! There was option for the states however and whatever else they might have been more than a century's paramount of the British crown had made them wholly submissive to the dictates of New Delhi. As such a vast majority of them never understood what the withdrawal of the British from India really meant to them or their people and some were glad to have another states department on which they could henceforth lean as they used to do on the political department which had now been completely wound!

We in Bilaspur were watching the scene but were quite helpless play any effective part in the sequence of events that flowed from it, it was however essential not to come into the open as the antagonist of the new ministry of states so as soon it was formed the author seen a personal letter to the Sardar congratulating him on his new assign and asking him to direct his officials to have direct correspondent with the Bilaspur State. This move was considered essential to establish closer ties with the centre and to avoid the other channel of correspondence with the centre through the commissioners who as the counterpart of the residents, were soon to be appointed in the various regions where the Indian states were most numerous. On the 25th of July 1947 the viceroy, Lord

Mountbatten called a conference of the rulers of Indian states at New Delhi to which many went personally whilst the others sent their Dewans (prime ministers). This was the first and the last of such meetings where in the viceroy gave a background to the assembly of the current events and subsequently placed before them a draft of the instrument of accession a standstill agreement which the viceroy exhorted the princes to sign and so come into constitutional relationship with the new government at the centre. A very good account of these meetings is given by

Cambell Johnson? In his diary of the time, published which the author can add this meeting from Johnson's account it is clear that certain rulers hesitated in accepting the new agreements and led by the rulers of Bhopal, who had opted for complete independence, they put up a stand which was clearly supported by a very small minority. The majority of states were, as we have already been told in this essay elsewhere already functioning in the constituent assembly and their rulers to persuade their brethren that now was the time to accept the instruments of accession and the standstill agreement because any hesitation would only mean subsequent disaster. They were of course right in giving this advice as the lapse of Paramount and the independence which the Indian states were to regain thereby had now become only a legal myth and the fact of the matter was that as Mountbatten put it you could not run away from your neighbours! In this case the govt. of India in a vast majority of cases. So in the end the drafts were accepted and it was agreed that these would be signed by the rulers and his govt. individually so however that they became effective as from the 15th day of august 1947. The curtain had

finally rung for the Indian states as separate entities. Only the states of Jammu and Kashmir and Hyderabad chose to remain all and refused to have anything to do with the new dispensation!

In the first week of August 1947 the instrument of accession and the standstill agreement were received by the Bilaspur state and when the former was signed by the ruler himself the letter was signed by the foreign and political secretary of the state govt. duly exactly on the 10th of August these documents were accepted by the governor general of the new dominion of India on the 15th August 1947 and thus established the new relationship of the state with the centre which was of course the beginning of the end!

In New Delhi however things were moving fast towards a climax and the division of assets and liabilities between the two successor govt. of India and Pakistan nearing completion. There was however a new sign of political unrest and darkening of clouds in the provinces of Punjab and Bengal which had been sub-divided under the June 3rd plan between India and Pakistan. Here vast populations of both communities, Hindu and Muslim were openly fighting each other, the one trying to dislodge the other and as the British withdrawal came nearer each day so these conflicts grew into open conflagration hundreds of thousands of people were on the move and the politicians were breathlessly awaiting the award of the Radcliffe, one man, commission to whom had been entrusted the task of giving the final boundaries of the two new sovereign states in Bengal and the Punjab. This was finally announced on August 14th the day Mohammad Ali Jinnah took

over the governor-general ship of the dominion of Pakistan and marred the rejoicings of the people in both the capitals! The Indian constituent assembly however unanimously agreed to ask Mountbatten to be the first governor-general of free dominion of India, a proposal he readily accepted. There were of course great rejoicings in India on that historic day of August 15th 1947 when India, though truncated, became a free state after centuries of Muslim and then British domination!

Most of the Indian states whose rulers were Hindu by religion, traced their origin to either THE SUN, THE MOON OR THE FIRE (AGNI) and were known as Suryabansis, Chandrabansis and Agnikuls, and their ancestral trees would go back to either of these three over the length of time. The premier Rajput state of India, Udaipur or Mewar in Rajasthan had a pride of place amongst the Indian states and its Maharana, (as the ruler was designated), tracing his ancestors to the sun boasted that the house of Udaipur had never yielded to the Muslim emperors of Delhi, whose most powerful occupant Akbar had to send an army against the Maharana Pratap of Mewar, a legendary Indian hero who though defeated at the battle of Haldighati preferred to live in exile until he had reconquered his lost kingdom from the Mughals some twenty years later! The rulers of Bilaspur were known as Chandra basis and traced their origin to Shishupal, the Ruler of Chanderi at the time of the Mahabharata. That he was slain in a fight by Lord Krishna made the latter as the deity of the ruling family of Kheloor and its rulers and their descendants the worshippers of "Gopal" which is another name of Krishna.

We in Bilaspur celebrated August 15th in a solemn way. It was declared public holiday throughout the state and at the capital a service was held at Shri Gopal Ji's temple where the ruler read out a rather long message explaining the significance of the occasion and how the state, but for its new ties with the centre at Delhi, had achieved a certain measure of independence which was quite unique after the lapse of nearly 130 years of relationship with British. He emphasised that henceforth Bilaspur and its people had a historic role to play in the coming events and exhorted the people to maintain communal harmony within the state at all costs. Although the Muslim population here was quite small, less than 1,600 souls, still they had an equal right to live in the land of their birth, he said, and the communal riots now going on in the adjoining areas of the Punjab with such ferocity, should find no echo in Bilaspur territory. He also propounded the policy which the state govt. had adopted to deal with this new situation. Let now refugees from adjoining Punjab or other adjoining states enter Bilaspur territory and let no Muslim or Hindu of the state be harmed in any way. This message which was an important document of state policy was printed and distributed in thousands throughout the entire area of Bilaspur and served the state and its people well in the critical days that were to follow! Another decision taken by the state on that historic day was to replace the old flag of Bilaspur with the new flag of Kehloor which consisted of seven triangles, depicting the seven "dhars" with the river Sutlej in between and a crescent on the right hand corner depicting the Chandel dynasty. The words "jai kehloor" or "victory to kehloor" was inscribed on the left hand top side of the flag which had a saffron background. Thus

a complete break with the past 130 years was sought to be brought about and immediately after that day the ruler left Bilaspur for a short visit to Poona (in Bombay province).

The Independence Day having been celebrated throughout British India, the bloody communal riots in the Punjab and east Bengal came into the forefront. These were widespread in the areas adjoining Bilaspur in the north - east with the Punjab and the intensity of the feelings of the Hindu's, especially Sikhs, in this part of the Punjab against their Muslim neighbours was to be seen to be believed. Thousands were mercilessly butchered overnight and the tortures perpetrated on the women and children, the former being paraded naked in the streets of the cities, were not only brutal but positively inhuman. People, who were sane till yesterday, suddenly turned berserk overnight and not only took lives but looted property, thus showing a side of human character which one could not believe. The state of Bilaspur however, by God's grace, escaped all these happenings within its territories and it must be said to the everlasting gratitude of its people that not a single Muslim was killed or injured throughout Kehloor. Indeed many outsiders surreptitiously took refuge within the state and as the maize crop was quite high in the farms at that time of the year, they hid themselves in the fields to escape the fury of the Hindu & Sikh mobs. Not that the latter did not try to force entry into Bilaspur also: but the people stood firm and turned them back. It was also made widely known and fully publicised that the state govt. would not hesitate to shoot to kill any person who disturbed the peace within its areas and machine guns and other weapons mounted on jeeps, recently purchased from the centre, were freely displayed in the streets

of the capital and other important centres. The home ministers, Shri Sant Ram, had full control of the situation and his role in maintaining peace at that time can not be over elegised!

By the time the ruler returned from Poona by the end of September, 1947 the communal riots were in their full frenzy and had spread even to the capital of New Delhi. Millions of refugee was pouring into India from Pakistan, on trains, on carts, on cars, and foot and refugee camps all over the Punjab had been put to receive them. In the capital at New Delhi there was a sizable Muslim population and they have been moved into the Purana Kila (old fort) near the Mathura road for greater security. But even here they were not safe and there are stories as to how the Hindu police of the town turned their faces to the other side when the Muslim were butchered and looted by the Hindus and especially the Sikhs of the area. Anyway this state of affairs could not be tolerated by any govt. And the army was called in to quell the disorder. In Delhi a special armed police force to deal with the situation was set up under the superintendence & control of Shri MS Randhawa, who was the officer of the time but there are stories that Shri Jawaharlal Nehru was not satisfied the way Randhawa was dealing with situation and there was a clash between the former and Sardar Patel, who as the home minister in charge of law and order in new Delhi, over the issue. At this point of time the Mountbatten & his wife played a significant part in dealing with the communal situation and while the new governor-general with his military background was very helpful new central govt, especially the prime minister, his wife started various relief organisations and was looked upon by with sympathy and understanding by the populace at large!

To return to the events in Bilaspur however, has been already narrated the communal holocaust did not affect the people of the state physically but became a great cementing factor in keeping them united at a time of great emotional stress and strain. The first thing that the ruler did on his return home was to congratulate the people on their humane understanding and sheer courage in keeping the peace within the boundaries of the state and thereafter touring the length and breadth of the state to personally reward those who had stood the extreme test: for testing was of the most trying kind in courage and understanding. By the beginning of December 1947, conditions in the adjoining province of Punjab began to show distinct signs of improvement and the central govt. Having been able to meet the challenge of the worst communal riots in the history of India was able to turn its attention towards the Indian states!

In the middle of December 1947 the state govt. submitted a detailed memorandum to Sardar Patel, through the state ministry listing the united demand of the people of the state to maintain their identity in the new India and the ruler personally met the Sardar at New Delhi to press the point. The Sardar promised to look into the matter but could naturally make commitment. In the meanwhile regional of the states ministry were being appointed in the various areas where the Indian states were most numerous Vie Rajasthan, Orissa, Kathiawar and central India and with the new govt. At the centre the people of the states were anxious to achieve a similar kind of freedom in their respective areas. This resulted in popular people up surges in various states, the first of which was the small state of Tigriria in Orrisa. The time had come when the problem of hundreds of tiny states spread over the

length and breadth of India had be solved to give the country a sense of co-hessian and stability in the new era.

The process, when it started in Orissa, was harmless enough and perhaps the authorities at New Delhi did not know how helpless the ruler and their govt. had become with the withdrawal of the paramount power. When the states ministry officials visited Orissa they were able to persuade the ruler of Tigiria that his best interest lay in merging the identity of his small state in the adjoining province of Orissa and a legal draft agreement of merging was evolved under which to quote its preamble," whereas it was in the best interests of the state and its people that its govt. be carried out by or under the authority of the govt. of the dominion of India.

Then followed the typical clauses under which the ruler agreed to surrender the administration of his state to the dominion govt. and a date was set out when he would hand it over to them. In return the ruler, from the appointed day, was to receive a privy purse (usually 10% of the revenues of his state) per annum divided into quarterly instalments to be paid in advance at each quarter and sum was neither to be increased nor decreased for any reason whatsoever. Further the privy purse would be free from all taxes in the next clause the personal privileges of the ruler, his conscious his heir and other members of the family were guaranteed to the extent that they existed immediately before the 15th august, 1947 (the date of the lapse of paramount). Then there were other not so important clauses like the continuance in service of those employees who were in permanent service of the state on a partition day and

also if there was any other special provision which both parties thought it expedient to incorporate in the agreement.

At the end the agreement was signed by the ruler on his behalf and as on behalf of his heirs and successors and by the secretary in the ministry of states who guaranteed its provisions on behalf of the dominion govt.

The Ruler of Tigiria signed the agreement without a murmur what was unusual was the fact that the rulers of other states in Orissa followed suit within the next three days and it was a great boost to the personal prestige of VP Menon, the secretary of the states ministry that he was able to persuade them to do so. Of course the Sardar also visited Orissa to lend his moral support to the new arrangements and the regional commissioner of the areas nominee of the states ministry was there to put additional writing on the wall was clear. Either the rulers surrendered their powers of govt. to the govt. of India and became in effect its helpless pensioners, or the people of the state or states, under the influence and indirect control of the congress party, were to launch political agitations in the state or states in the name of total responsible govt. in these agitations the machinery to control the upsurge was wholly lacking in the states or even a group of states because the rebellion within their borders, would receive the wholehearted support of the provincial govt. who was the states neighbour and the govt. at the centre would not raise finger in support of the states administration because there was of course no such agreement then and the state concerned to protect them against internal disruption or external aggression. Too late the rulers and their govt. realized how impossible it was to meet this new challenge and they fell like ripe fruit in the wake of

attack. We in Bilaspur had of course been in sound knowledge of how these agitations were launched and curbed and it was therefore some consolation to see that we could, by ourselves resist the onslaught which was to engulf the Indian states in the next four months.

In the all India pattern the ministry of states evolved a three prong drive and formulae to deal with the problem of the Indian states. The first was outright merger of the states with the adjoining province as in the case of Orissa, the second was the creation of larger units of states where in the rulers merged their territories into what was called union of states with an elected rulers called the Raj-Pramukh to be its head, and thirdly there were those other states which on account of some special reason were to be directly administered by the centre as chief commissioners' provinces of the same name. After Orrissa debacle, the next move took place in the formation of the state of Saurashtra (Kathiawar) where the rulers formed a union of states with the jam sahib of Nawanagar to be unit of Indian republic. The states ministry in such a case guaranteed its provisions and the "covenant" as the cause was ratified by it. Thereafter came the union of the states of Rajasthan, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Vindhya Pradesh, etc. and the chief commissioners' states of Manipur and Tripura. In the case of a large state like Travancore the union of only two units, i.e. Travancore and Cochin was formed. Only Mysore being large enough to stay on its own as it was in the words of VP Menon himself "too large to be merged with anybody else."

In Bilaspur we waited patiently for the day when the centres attention was to be focussed on the Punjab hill states. This came in late march and early April of 1948. The rulers were

called to Delhi and there asked to sign an agreement surrendering all powers to the union govt. the idea being from a states into a chief commissioners' province under the name of Himachal Pradesh. On behalf of Bilaspur the development minister & the foreign & political secretary attended this meeting but when the draft agreement was circulated to the state by the states ministry were refused to sign it as this was contrary to the position which was had taken up two years back, that Bilaspur would maintain its separate identity in the new India. The new chief commissioners' province of the people Punjab hill states under the name of Himachal Pradesh came into existence on the 15th April, 1948 and although the states ministry and the Himalayan Riasi Praja Mandal exerted their full political pressure against our wishes and pressed us to form its part, we resisted successfully in warding off that crucial date. Earlier to the formation of this new entity, people's popular movement had been launched in the neighbouring hill state of Suket, where its Praja Mandal, actively supported by their counterparts in other states marched on the capital at Sunder Nagar, disarming the small state police force in the way. The ruler, fled to New Delhi and finding the climate hostile there also, quietly signed the merger agreement. In the meanwhile the administration of Suket had been taken over by the dominion govt. through a commissioner of the Punjab province and at one time some externed leaders of the Bilaspur Praja Mandal knocked at the very doors of at debar on our boundary but finding the resistance of the govt. and the people strong they never entered it the author however took no chances and had already moved to the village of Panjgain, bordering Dehar, when he heard of this news here the people

welcomed him with more than ordinary warmth. By now they fully understood the happenings around them and the way the erstwhile Indian States were being obliterated one by one. It was learnt later on that the uprising in Suket had at its apex members of the Bilaspur Praja Mandal at Simla and they had pleaded with Sardar Patel to allow them to march into Bilaspur rather than Sundernagar. The Sardar however, was in full known of things and wisely guided them to try their tactics in Suket and leave Bilaspur alone.

India in January of 1948 lost her greatest son, Mahatma Ghandi father of the nation through the bullet of an assassin and news of this tragedy was conveyed to the ruler through telegram sent by Shri Jawaharlal Nehru personally. The Mahatma had died for his convictions and yet he lives on because men such as him are born perhaps once in a thousand years.

On the political front also we had been quite active and after detailed consultations amongst ourselves a policy was framed under which it was the goal to get a separate entity for Bilaspur, now possible only in the guise of a chief commissioner's Province of the same name but with the formation of Himachal Pradesh next door in the same category the threat to the merger of Bilaspur in the latter became much more real. Luck however and the will of God came to our rescue and we heard from Shri A.N Khosla, who was now a full fledged Secretary in the Department of Irrigation and Power that he had had a talk with VP Menon about Bilaspur and it would be worth our while to see him. The Ruler went to Delhi and there Shri Khosla told him that should the state Government agree to the raising of the Bhakra Dam to a height

of 680 RL, submerging the town of Bilaspur, then he could make a case for its separate existence. Later talks between Shri VP Menon, Shri Khosla and the author were held on the same lines and although VP Menon hesitated a lot before agreeing to the proposal he later on acquired and it was pressed by the author that to clinch the matter mention of these arrangements should be made in the first White Paper on Indian States which was to be placed before the Constituent Assembly in its capacity as the Central Legislature that coming April. This was done and once the Political Leaders of Himachal Pradesh found out what was being done there was a furore all over the area. The Bilaspur Praja Mandal rejected the arrangement which was contemplated and it was argued that the interests of the people of Bilaspur could be safeguarded as well by merging in Himachal Pradesh as they would be by keeping it a separate entity. Under political pressure Menon hesitated but the State Government stood firm and what is more the Sardar having approved of the arrangement was not going to back out of it under any pressure. So Bilaspur's separate entity in the new order of things was after all secured but the cost it would have to pay in the up- root-ment of thousands of its people by the raising of the height of the Bhakra Dam and the sheer Physical changes that were to accrue as a result there of was no small price which the State Government agreed to pay to maintain its identity. Just then the new government of the Punjab, Eastern Punjab as it was called, woke up and sent its emissary Shri Swaroop Singh, to Bilaspur to ratify the Draft Bakhra Agreement but was told that it was now a question which lay in the hands of the successor of Government, and that the State Government was in no position to sign it although legally it

was still in existence. Thus the Bakhra Dam agreement, drafted with such great care and patience ended up in smoke and denied many advantages which have accrued from it to the people of Bilaspur. Another development of those times which should find mention in this essay is the Punjab States Council and the way its President ship was offered to the author. In each region there was a body of Indian States, formed by them for taking counsel, and there was one for all the Punjab States of which the Nawab of Bahawalpur which was the President in 1946. In the wake of Pakistan Bahawalpur which was a state lying on the border naturally opted for it and the Nawab suggested to the other rulers that the interests of the Next President of the Council. This was agreed to and a meeting of the council under his president ship was convened at Nabha, the Capital of the State of the same name in early 1947. No Decision was of a vital nature when taken at this meeting as membership its self would prove.

The Membership of the Constituent Assembly June-July 1947, the author was made the Governor of The Punjab State Prasad, later elected to be the First President of free India. To elect three members there from to the Constituent Assembly and he accordingly called the States to send their representatives to Bilaspur for the purpose. This meeting was convened in the historic Rang Mahal Palace at Bilaspur in 1947 and all the states of the Punjab minus the Punjab Hill States and Patiala participated unfortunately there was no unanimity on the nominees and this eventually necessitated an election. The representatives from Jind, Tehri-Garhwal and the author himself were elected from the Punjab States Group to represent these States in the Constituent Assembly at New Delhi but this

election was challenged by the nominees of Faridkot State through an election Petition. So although the author and the other two nominees of Jind and Tehri Garhwal States had duly taken their Seats in the constitution making body this arrangement was short lived and the election petition was allowed on technical grounds.

To return to the story of Bilaspur however, In the beginning of June Shri VP Menon sent a letter to the ruler of Bilaspur telling him that as a special case the States Ministry were ready to keep Bilaspur as a separate Entity and that the agreement of merger should now be signed. The Draft of the Agreement however presented a hurdle, the Ruler insisting that the Preamble detail the reasons for Bilaspur's separate identity and the State Ministry trying to avoid all mention of it. After dragging on for several days the final Draft was approved by both parties which was its Preamble the following-

“Whereas it is in the best interests of the State of Bilaspur and its people that its government be carried out by or under the authority of the government of the Dominion of India, and Whereas the Government of The Dominion of India have, in view of the location of the proposed Bhakra Dam in the said State Agreement to administer it as a separate Unit, it is hereby agreed as follows,

Thus the ultimate was achieved. Along with the Agreement, signed the Ruler and Shri VP Menon, there was a Colateral letter. Agreement and the letter were auspiciously signed on the 15th day of August 1948 (India's Independence Day. As has been stated above, the Bilaspur Merger Agreement had the definite Preamble that the State would be administered by the

Dominion Government as a Separate Unit and this was re-affirmed in the Collateral Letter issued by the Secretary , Ministry of States Shri VP Menon the same day. Besides this assurance, the collateral Letter mentioned three or four other very significant things. Firstly it said that it was the intention of the government of India to appoint the author as the Administrator of this Unit on a temporary basis and there would be a deputy Administrator to assist me.

Secondly there would be Council of Elected representatives of the people of Bilaspur to advise the Administrator in the administration of this unit and thirdly as the height of the Bhakhra Dam would now be raised and in consequence the Town of Bilaspur would be submerged. The government intended to acquire the Palaces and Temple of the Ruler and pay him an appropriate consolidated sum and also make available to him 300 acres of land of his choice. The permanent employees of the state as they existed on the First day of April 1948 were to be re-employed or retired on pension and not allowed to suffer in any way. The agreement was to come in force on the 12/13th day of October 1948 (Dussera Day) but the Privy Purse which the Ruler was to receive was not stated and left blank. The reason for this significant omission lay in the fact that because of continued treats by the States Ministry (especially Shri VP Menon) that the government of India would send in a Military Force of the Indian Army to forcibly take over the tiny state of Bilaspur it was considered essential to completely destroy all the financial records so that then it would be no knowledge of the State of Affairs if a military occupation did take place as threatened. As a matter of fact as more weeks passed after the formation of Himachal Pradesh in

April 1948 and the threats of taking over the State Administration by the Government of India grew in Intensity we in the State Government adopted a completely scorched earth policy. All papers and documents of the State were destroyed systematically, all taxes from the people ceased to be realized, all Land Revenue (Bilaspur's main source of Income) was totally remitted as from the month of April 1948 and each State servant was given only his Service book which mentioned his name, his occupation, his years of service and his pay at the time. This was all the information he would have in his possession to prove his identity. The State's small Irregular Forces and the Military Police Armed Constabulary) consisting in all of about 200 men armed with semi-modern weapons were especially taken into complete confidence and were told that in fact if an attack did come they were to resist as best as they could and then melt away. Taking their arms and ammunition home and leaving no trace of their identities behind. It was an hour of the deepest anxiety and for these 1100 or so State Servants averred from his duty and having fully understood the implications of the State government's policy they acted as directed. Perhaps it was facts such as these that compelled the Government of India to listen to us with patience and understanding because they would not have liked to have played the role of an invading army conquering the tiny Indian State of Bilaspur, however a small booklet giving vital statistics of the finances and employees of the State was drafted up and this the Ruler (author) put under his special lock and key so that the whole structure of Administration could be re-constructed. A very wise step as subsequent events were to show.

The Agreement having been signed and the Government's approval to the new set-up in his pocket, the Ruler returned home to Bilaspur from New Delhi in great Triumph After the Signing of the Agreement he had met Sardar Patel and thanked him on behalf of the people of Bilaspur for having acceded to their request and assuring him that from that day onwards the tiny Indian State would act in complete harmony and understanding with the Dominion Government. The Sardar said he was glad the bitterness had ended and enjoined upon the author to act wisely in the interim period between the 15th August when the Agreement was signed and the 12/13 October 1948 when it was actually to come into force. It was also agreed that an officer of the Ministry of Finance of the government of India would come to Bilaspur to determine its exact financial position on the date of the merger, the Sardar having full knowledge of the destruction of the importance of the State Papers and the reasons therefore, this was adhered to and I think it was in the third week of September 1948 that Shri J. Dayal, Joint Secretary in the Ministry especially came to Bilaspur and together with him and the help of the booklet here before mentioned a fairly accurate State of the State's Finances and on the date of the signing of the Merger Agreement was arrived at but in the meantime the Bilaspur as well as the Himalaya or more correctly the Himachal Praja Mandals had not at all taken kindly to the new arrangements and they planned a move to yet demonstrate their ability to create chaos before the day of Dussera dawned and the administration of the State changed hands from the Ruler to the Dominion Government.

This is what they did, in the first week of October, about 20/30 men who were the cream of Bilaspur Praja Mandal, infiltrated into the heart of the State and assembled at the village of Rahin about 7 miles from Bilaspur from where it was their intention to march into the Town in the form of a "Jatha" and demonstrate that they had after all succeeded in their mission of having changed the State's future. As soon as definite news of this move was received adequate police forces were dispatched to Rahin and the group of Praja Mandalists was told that until the Government changed hands on Dussers Day the organization was still banned and they were there after asked to remain in a house in Rahin for a week or so closely guarded. They of course sent desperate telegrams to Sardar Patel in New Delhi and even the Hindustan Times published news on its front page saying that about 50 or so members of the Praja Mandal had been killed in Bilaspur but we had put the Sardar in the know of things and he understood the position very fully. So even this last challenge to the authority of the State Administration was fully met and the State Government stuck to its policy up to the last day of its existence. On that date a historic communiqué was issued under the signature of the Ruler and his three ministers saying that from the morrow i.e. Dussera day the Administration of the State would be handed over to the Dominion Government and the small State of Bilaspur would become a Unit of a new India. It thanked the people for the heroic way in which they had struggled to achieve this and wished them well in the years that lay ahead. A moving and sentimental message at the end of one of the most savage and at times exhilarating

struggles waged by a small people in order to safe guard their future in a democratic manner.

At least the day of Dussera dawned and thousands of people from all over state converged on the twin because this was not only the appointed day when the state as such would cease to exist but it was also the third anniversary of the first all Bilaspur people conference which on this day in 1946 had passed the historic resolution to achieve the separate identity of their tiny state in the new India! For them it was a day mixed with happiness and regret; happiness that their struggle had borne fruit and regret that their ruler whom they loved and cherish would henceforth not be their sovereign head to rule them, to the author it a day of great satisfaction and much work. Many important state papers which he had to sign as the ruler were to be signed, amongst them the historic halqua committees act of 1948 which made the 56 halqua committee's of the completely autonomous. Then before the clock struck 12 noon, the union flag was hoisted on all the state buildings, including the ruler's palace which had the unique dominion of India and the flag of Kehllor. The first signifying the fact that he was henceforth the administrator of the state of Bilaspur which was a unit of the govt. of India at new Delhi, while the second signified his personal privilege of having his own flag in the new arrangements. As has that the personal rights privileges of the rulers as they existed on the 14th august 1947 were guaranteed by the new government.

Just after noon the ruler entered the Shri Gopal Ji's temple and there signed in all solemnity a document handing over the state government to the government of India. Here was a situation

unique in the history of those times. In other states the ruler handed over the state administration to an employee or representative of the union government but here in Bilaspur the author as the ruler handed over the state administration to his own-self as the newly appointed administrator of the new unit of Bilaspur, his letter of appointment as such having been reviewed from the ministry of states only a couple of days before. After the handing over ceremony the author went to great pendal that had been erected in the maidan in front of Shri Gopal Ji's Temple and addressed the vast assemblage of more than 12,000 people who were present. The all India congress committee had also sent its representative, Shri Kaushik, to be present on the occasion and then took his seat on the dais along with the ruler & others. Shri J.Dayal of the finance ministry was also there. The Praja Mandal leaders were however conspicuous by their absence. The author related to the assembly of people all that had passed and thereafter Shri Kaushik spoke on behalf of the all India congress committee. Just then there was a mild earthquake and the maidan shook with its tremors for perhaps two-three minutes, this signifying the change in govt. after a passage of well nigh 1250 years the old Bilaspur was gone but the new had come and with it a great hope for the welfare and happiness of its people. In the words of Tennyson-"the old order change the yielding place to new, lest one good system should corrupt the world & god fulfils himself in many ways-"this was the phrase uppermost in the mind of the author on that historic day! He had lost a kingdom but there was no regret because he had won the love and affection of his people in great measure and that surely was a prize well worth having than land and riches that very

evening a public meeting organised by the Bilaspur Praja Mandal was held near the Shri Rangnath Temple, in the heart of the Bilaspur town. To this the author, in his capacity as the new administrator was also invited. This was all due to the efforts of Shri Kaushik of the AICC to bridge the gulf between us but try as he would, it proved to be unbridgeable! Perhaps in the preceding 2& half years too much bitterness had been caused, for too much personal animosity between the now defunct state govt. and the Praja Mandals that it was futile to efface its memory. In this meeting nothing special was said against the rulers. The new dominion govt. was thanked and the people were told that henceforth there would be complete freedom of speech; as if this did not exist already. Anyway it was a very small gathering consisting of less than five hundred people and from the Himachal Praja Mandal, Shri Padam Dev had come to attend and to speak in it. His speech was mild and on the whole conciliatory. So in end of the day and the author was able to see that as the state govt. had always believed, the Praja Mandal had very small section of the populace behind it and but for those who had become self-exiled and now returned home, there was little, if any rejoicing. More difficult tasks however awaited the new govt. and very so work was begun on choosing the new personnel of the services. It was very onerous job. Each state employee had to be asked of he was willing to serve the new administration or would prefer to retire, and after his choice had been ascertained, he had to be absorbed in a new post which in salary and other benefits was as equivalent to the old job as possible. Luckily as unit was a separate entity the number of employees it could recruit from amongst the old was not limited hence most of those who

showed their desire to go on serving were absorbed! One thing which rather hurt the author but to which he did not object was that all the three ministers of the late state govt. chose to remain in service of the new regime and thus exhibited a sign of weakness which could be noticeable to many. Should they have preferred retirement on pension then perhaps the story of subsequent years could have been different, but then nearly all the three of them were in their forties and retirement at that age was perhaps out of question for them. Moreover not having been elected from amongst the people but appointed by the rulers, their political links were restricted and should they have retired it would have perhaps proved to them an exercise in futility it was on these grounds that the author did not pay serious attention to this matter. With regard to the others, except a few personnel of the state irregular forces and the military police, most of the employees, including all the 12 secretaries or departmental heads chose to remain and were suitably absorbed. While this process was in the making it was seen that the state treasury was nearly empty, as all taxes having been remitted or suspended by the state govt. there was no source of income left. So then author as the administrator along with a newly appointed finance officer from the Punjab went to Ambala and got a sum of rupees eight lack rupees to carry on till the new budget was passed by the states ministry. In this interval one Shri Shrichand Chhabra, a civilian officer of the Punjab, had been appointed as the deputy administrator of the new unit by the states ministry and he took over most of the work from of the hands of the author who was very unfamiliar with the ways of the new setup the task however continued. Often till late at night, and by the binging of January

1949 the new set-up was complete. The papers were got ready and the deputy administrator and the finance officer left for New Delhi to get the approval of the states ministry to the new proposals. The Praja Mandal and the Himachal political leaders however, were not sitting quite during this interval and they were pressuring the central govt. to remove the author from the administrator ship of the Bilaspur state. Their argument was that with the rulers still retain his high position, which was true, there was hardly any noticeable change and perhaps secretly they told the political leaders at New Delhi that as long as the author remained at the helm of affairs, the little hope of the Praja Mandal gaining any hold on the people! It was therefore no surprise when Shri VP Menon met the author in Delhi one January morning and asked him to tender either his resignation from the post of administrator of Bilaspur or if was willing to serve the new govt. then he could be posted as a chief commissioner some other state, perhaps Manipur or Tripura on the eastern borders of India which had also been taken over as separate entities when they ceased to be states of the same name. The author told Shri VP Menon that his appointment as the administrator of the new unit was political one and there was no question of his joining the regular service of the dominion govt. what was needed as the next step was the appointment of the council of advisors to the administrator as assured in the collateral letter and the raising of the status of the deputy administrator to that of the administrator to whom the author would hand over the charge. This was not what Shri Menon had in mind however and his idea behind the whole move was to somehow integrated Bilaspur with Himachal Pradesh. The author therefore one day in February received a

telegram from the states ministry to hand over charge to Shri NC Mehta, the chief commissioner of Himachal Pradesh this I refused to do under any circumstances and when Shri Mehta sent me a telegram asking when he should come I telegraphed back then there was no need to do so as I was going to Delhi to get the order of the govt. rescinded. This was a new challenge; a challenge at a time when everything was going on smoothly and had to be met. On my arrival at Delhi I met Menon and told him that I would neither resign nor hand over charge of the state administration to Mehta but would only leave my post if Shri Shrichand Chhabra, my deputy was elevated to the rank of administrator or chief commissioner of the state. After much haggling Menon finally asked Sardar who agreed on my proposal so on the 2nd April 1949 I handed over charge of my office to Shrichand Chhabra, new administrator. The last crisis had been successfully surmounted. Bilaspur still remained a separate entity. No sooner the news of my resignation spread, people from all over Bilaspur went to Delhi to plead with Menon and Sardar not to let me go. As is sometimes believed, I, for one, had no hand in these moves at all and within a week it is reported that well nigh a thousand people, elected representatives etc., had converged on New Delhi for the purpose. Menon was angry and perplexed but I believed that this assembly of men having gone and waited upon the Sardar have the desired effect. Not of getting me back as the administrator that was out of question, but of demonstrating the will of people to retain their identity and henceforth till the finalisation of the new constitution of India in November, 1949 and the ushering in of Indian republic as from the 26th January, 1950 there was no further question of uniting Bilaspur with

Himachal Pradesh and it remained a separate unit of free India in the new dispensation in the period August 15th 1947 Indian independent day and the 2nd April 1949 when I handed over charge to the deputy administrator, Shri Chhabra, other important events had happened in the largest state of India Hyderabad and Jammu & Kashmir which need a brief mention. First there was the police action against the Indian state of Hyderabad by the military forces of the central govt. in September 1948 which ended in bringing the Nizam to his knees and signing the instrument of accession thereby acceding Hyderabad to the Indian dominion. All through the months after August 15th 1947 then governor-general, Lord Mountbatten had tried his "charm" to make the Nizam come into the Indian fold but his moves had proved abortive and when he left India in June? 1948 to return home to England the largest of the Indian states, Hyderabad as maintaining its separate entity! It was however a matter of time, because as I have stated at the beginning of this essay there was no identity of interests between the rulers and the ruled in state and further Hyderabad was much more venerable than Kashmir because it lay in the heart of the India territories. To General Chaudhary the commander of the forces that invaded and conquered Hyderabad by defeating a small contingent of the Nizam's forces numbering no more than about 20,000 men or so was given credit which he hardly deserved, having had the whole might of the Indian army behind him. Moreover with the handing over of power to the new govt. at the central there was a complete stoppage of military hardware and equipment to the Indian states forces, which existed as an army of sorts in most of the Indian states. The British as the

paramount power had seen to it that these forces received only a very limited number of arms and ammunition so that they could never challenge the supremacy of Britain but only aid them in any war or rebellion that broke out, and once the British had withdrawn, the successor Indian government on one excuse or the other never supplied any further arms or ammunition to these forces in the states. Thus the Nizam was foolish led by his advisors to go up to the breaking point in his relations with the new Indian govt. and even his letter to the king emperor of England, reported to have been written by him and sent to Mountbatten for onward transmission before 15th august 1947 in which he had pleaded for treating Hyderabad as a separate dominion of his majesty, was never forwarded by Mountbatten to the king! On enquiries by the Nizam as of this epistle after august 15th 1947 Mountbatten is reported to have blatantly replied that he had forgotten to despatch it! A much fuller account of the Hyderabad episode is given in the book of sir Kenneth Fitze was the last British resident of the state!

Secondly the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir had acceded to India in October 1947? After the ruler there of vacillated in his decision to chose between India & Pakistan and the latter invaded the state through the help of the Pathan tribesman and the Pakistan forces in “mufti”. Maharaja sir Hari Singh, the last ruler of the state at last realized that his forces were no match against the invaders and after his accession to the dominion of India, the armed forces of the latter were just in time to stop the invader at the very gates of Srinagar, summer capital of the state, having been airlifted from various places in the dominion. It is reported that Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the creator and at that time the governor- general of Pakistan, wanted to

declare war against India but his Commander-in-chief, General Auchinleck, a British whom he had retained refused to carry out Jinnah's orders! So even in the new circumstances the British still had the power and the means to decide the destinies of the Indian sub-continent! Thus India was able to gain both the states of Hyderabad and Kashmir, the firstly by sheer military force and the second by a legal document of accession executed by its ruler. That the Kashmir affair led to its reference to the united nation and subsequently to a by the security council which still exists on paper makes no difference to the factual position. The territories over which Pakistan has gained military control are under its subjugation while the rest of the state along with its capital town of Srinagar remains with India; of course enjoying a certain amount of autonomy denied to the other units of the union, but still an integral part of the republic. Possession indeed nine out of ten points in law.

To return to Bilaspur, as I have stated already, the deputy administrator was handed over charge of the state administrator by the author on 2nd April 1949 and thereafter a series of events of happenings took place which has led me to the title of this essay a "Betrayal of the people of Bilaspur". Firstly on 9th august 1949 a second collateral letter to the agreement of 15th august 1948 was written out by the ministry of states and received by me later on in the month. In this second letter the mention of the author as the temporary administrator of Bilaspur was completely left put as also the appointment of an advisory council of the elected representative of the people to aid and advice the administrator. The first omission would not have counted much but the second clearly indicated that govt. of India

through the states ministry was going back on its word and was denying the people their legitimate rights. In vain the author protested against this violation of the written word of the government, both verbally and in writing. Menon gave no reply nor did the Sardar make any response. This showed in no uncertain terms as to how truthful the rulers of the states ministry at Delhi were and when the privy purs of the ruler was arbitrarily fixed at a sum of Rs.70000/- per annum against the figure of Rs.1,40,000/- to which he was entitled as the revenues of Bilaspur were over 14 lacks rupees per annum in 1947-48 it became clear that the ministry was acting vindictively! Indeed had one of the copies of the merger agreement duly signed by both Menon and the author, but leaving the clause about the privy purse amount blank, not been in the possession of the author, perhaps even the sum of Rs. 70,000/- per annum could have melted away. I am mentioning these facts not in any vindictive way as I had no bitterness in my heart once the separate entity of Bilaspur was agreed to but rather to demonstrate as to how deceit and going back on their promised word was the underlying policy of the states ministry under the guidance of VP Menon! Any way Bilaspur was mentioned as a part "C" states in the new constitution of India ushered in on 26th January 1950 and on the date former rulers of some of these part "C" states were called to New Delhi to be present on the occasion. There the author saw the Nawab of Bhopal for the last time. As opposed to his boastful attitude of reverting to an independent status it is reported that he had very quietly signed the instrument of accession and thereafter the merger agreement, having first asked the Sardar not publicise the fact before the due dates. A somewhat pathetic attitude on the part

of one who was the last chancellor of the champ of princes and in that role the best guardian of the interest of the states and themselves at the turning point of history. Such were the rulers of the time and it was therefore no wonder that Indian states as such ceased to exist under their ruler ship.

To the author the period beginning 2nd April 1949 and ending somewhere in October 1951 was one of great stress and strain. Not only was he out of work but what is more the new administrator, whom he had virtually put into the chair, was acting in a manner which was clearly vindictive. It seemed that Shrichand Chhabra had come under the influence of the hostile elements to the ruler in the services and what is more he thought that by placating the Praja Mandallists, who were now functioning under the nomenclature of the Bilaspur district congress committee of Himachal Pradaesh, he would be able to retain his position as the chief commissioner of the state, although an energetic and painstaking administrator, Chhabra had streak of obstinacy in his nature which eventually led to a point where the people of the state united to ask the govt. of India for his recall in 1954. There were however 5 years to pass by since his appointment in 1949 and much was to happen therein.

The Bilaspur district congress committee having found out that they had no capable leader amongst them went to Haridwar in Uttar Pradesh and from there brought back to Bilaspur a certain person named Shri Hardayal Singh, who had been a Wazir, or chief minister under the father of the author. Hardayal Singh had subsequently been dismissed from service on charges of corruption by my father, raja sir Bijai Chand and

when the latter abdicated in my favour somewhere in 1928? And went to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Hardayal Singh is reported to have come back into the service of the ex-ruler and letter decamped with a sum of Rs.30,000/- from the cash box of the latter by forging duplicate keys of the same. He later took refuge in Haridwar and although the ex-ruler reported the incidence to the foreign & political department of the British govt. of India at that time, all they did was to confiscate Hardayal Singh's house in Bilaspur town and nothing more. Now many years, nearly 20 had passed since this episode and public memory being proverbially short, Hardayal Singh was given out as a martyr in the cause of the freedom struggle of the Bilaspur Praja Mandal and brought back to Bilaspur in triumph. Here he concocted a story of his persecution for alleged loyalties to the congress and requested for the handing back his house in the town and the payment of compensation to him as a political sufferer, a claim which the Praja Mandalists vehemently supported. Before Chhabra could forward his recommendations to the govt. of India in this case however, he asked the author about the facts of the case and as I had the whole file of Hardayal Singh past in my personal possession I only sent it to him without comments. The truth was out at last and Hardayal's case was finally rejected. That he still tried to retain some sort of a political leadership and worked closely with Chhabra is true but henceforth the glamour was gone and gone for good.

The Bhakra Dam issue now came into the forefront once again and the govt. of India appointed a Bhakra control board to go ahead with the project. The Bilaspur agreement not having been signed as it was now union territory, the advantages

which were to accrue to the people from it were denied to them. Henceforth the only issue that remained to be settled was the rehabilitation of the oustees and the building of a new township of Bilaspur. As the control board had the governor of the Punjab as its chairman, the interests of the tiny unit of Bilaspur nobody really cared although the new chief commissioner was a member of the board. It was also finally decided that there was now no question of giving land for land to the Oustees, who numbered nearly 16,000 and cash compensation was the only way out. This was necessitated by the fact that the new truncate Punjab already had a heavy population burden and was in no position to offer land to the Oustees. In so far as the new township was concerned, the central government took over the task under its own fold and this did prove to be of some benefit to the residents of the old town though even today, some 20 years after its completion, the half-built houses and unpaid housing loans stand testimony to the fact that little, if anything was done to rehouse the Oustees, another betrayal of their trust in the word of the government.

The author in conjunction with the representatives of the people however did not lose hope and political conferences were organised at village Chaunta in the heart of the area which was to be submerged in the Bhakra reservoir to unite the people in their legitimate demands. A Bhakra oustee's rights protection committee was formed and begun to fight for the Oustees cause. Thus the fateful years of 1949 and 1950 passed away.

The parliament of the union was now engaged in the important task of clearing the desks for the holding of the first general elections in India on the basis of adult franchise and the act, called the representation of the people's act, 1951 was passed by parliament early in 1951. Under its provisions seats on the basis of population were allotted to the various states of the union, but in the case of the part "C" states, even a tiny state of the size of Bilaspur was given one seat in the new parliament to be elected this news was received with great satisfaction by the people and the electoral rolls for the purpose began to be prepared by the state administration. In its representation in the council of states however, much against our units stand, the govt. of India did not agree to give Bilaspur a separate seat and it was made to share one with adjoining Himachal Pradesh. It may also be mention in passing that a legislative assembly with very limited powers had been set up in most of the part "C" states, including Himachal Pradesh but for Bilaspur there was to be no such apparatus, not even an advisory council. It seemed that so long as the Sutlej River flowed on through Bilaspur and thus safeguarded the future of Bhakra reservoir nothing else mattered in the eyes of the Indian govt!

Another event of some importance occurred in the month of July 1950 which should find mention in these pages. Some seventeen former rulers of states, the author among them, met at Bombay and set up a forum of them termed as "The Rulers Union". It had the late maharaja of Baroda as its president, the late Maharaja Rana of Dholpur as its vice-president and the author as its secretary. The object of the union was to safeguard the interests of the ex-ruler and their families in the new circumstances and an office of the same was opened by me in

Bombay. A membership fee amounting to 1% of the annual privy purse was decided upon payable yearly in advance, and a constitution drawn up and printed. The author thereafter seen the constitution copies along with entrance forms of its membership to each of the 280 former-rulers, big and small, and within a period of about three months over a 100 of them became its members, a no small achievement! The first general meeting of this body was called at the Taj Mahal hotel in Bombay in 1950 and a number of resolutions passed. The speech delivered by the president was very carefully worded and asked the central govt, to have a sympathetic attitude towards the rulers and give them some work to do as some were still young and having lost the states were finding themselves out of work.

New Delhi was hostile to the move from the beginning, VP Menon the most as he saw in the new unity a move towards his censure. That this was never the intention may be stated here categorically but unfortunately for the princes the Sardar died suddenly at that time and the move was therefore interpreted as the first act to undo the merger and integration of the states so painstakingly achieved by him. At the very time the president of the union, the late Maharaja of Baroda, Sir Fateh Singh Rao Gaekwar made an unwise move by submitting a petition to the president of India, stating that the state of Baroda had been unjustly merged in the Bombay state (as the part of area now named as the state of Gujarat was then included in the Bombay state) and asking for its being reverted to the status of a separate union territory. The author had cautioned the late maharaja against this move, more especially as expert legal opinion obtained by him from eminent

constitutions lawyers in the United Kingdom had opined otherwise but the Maharaja was in the hands of self-seeking advisors and thus goaded by them to press forward his petition. Shri Jawaharlal Nehru sent a reply to the Maharaja saying that the agreement under which Baroda, as well as the other Indian states, had become part of India was a political one and had now become a part of the Indian constitution by challenging this agreement, the maharaja was in fact challenging the constitution itself and this would lead to serious repercussion should the maharaja have withdrawn this representation even at this time he would have saved the situation. The author on behalf of the rulers union had already stated publicly that the union as such had no hand in this petition. But the maharaja did not yield. In the meanwhile, Shri Ayyenger a former minister of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and now a trusted advisor of Nehru had been made the minister of states in place of the late Sardar and he made a rather foolish statement in parliament saying that the union was a threat to the integrity of India and he was not going to recognise it! He further asked the congressmen to beware of this move as the princes were trying to undo the integration of India. We stoutly denied this and also said that the union had asked for no recognition by the states ministry. But VP Menon who now enjoyed the somewhat pompous title of the advisor to the states minister, was active behind the scenes and finally prevailed upon the prime minister to take the extreme step of de-recognising the late maharaja! Now in the new Indian constitution there were three clauses dealing with rulers. There was clause 291 which guaranteed their privy purses, there was clause 362 which gave a guarantee of the personal privileges of

the rulers as these existed on the 14th august 1947 (before the ushering in of the dominion of India and the withdrawn of the British) and thirdly article 366(22) which defined the word “rulers”. Here it was said that the “rulers” was person who had signed a covenant or agreement with the government before the passing of the constitution and who for the time being was recognised by the central govt. as a ruler. This on fact had reduced rulers a position where the withdrawal of such recognition would immediate result in their losing the Privy Purse and he privileges etc. In this clause Menon found the solution of his problem and the Late Maharaja of Baroda were “de-recognised” as from 1951.

This act of the union govt. was a severe blow to the rulers union and within a week of its announcement the author, who at that time was in Bilaspur, received the resignation of quite a few of leading members like the late maharaja of jodhpur and the joint secretary of the union, the maharaja of Sandur. The author rushed to Delhi and on meeting the Maharaja-Rana of Dholpur, requested him to issue a statement on the whole episode and save the union somehow the Maharaja-Rana did not respond! He was of the view that the union was a “home affair” of the rulers and what govt. did could not affect it in any way. Author curious attitude at a time when the union was in the political limelight and everything was being done by the central govt. to break it up! This silence on our party led eventually to the death of the union thereafter and it could never call another meeting of the general body it is true that Shri Jawaharlal Nehru did visit Dholpur house in Delhi and met the Maharaja-Rana, the author and a few other rulers but the stand of the govt. had been taken; when the Maharaja-Rana

asked Shri Venkatachar the new secretary of the states ministry, to an unofficial dinner at Dholpur house, his advice to the princes was "to die gracefully. In other words in Venkatachar's eyes the Indian princes had already died with the ushering in of the new era and grace on their part was all that was required. That they were very much alive then, as quite a few of them are even now, 30 years after the event is history! The late maharaja of Baroda now repented for his folly and waited upon the president to plead for himself. On very personal grounds he was allowed to retain the title of maharaja and granted a yearly pension for his lifetime but his son, the present Maharaja was announced as his successor and became the "Rulers of Baroda" for ten purposes of the Indian constitution. As for the author he quietly returned home and sent a circular letter to the rulers who still remained its members to await further calling of the meeting of the general body but with the acting president, the late Maharaja-Rana of Dholpur this was uncalled for and the union thus became past history within a period of one year of its incept a poor reward for some of us who had worked so zealously to bring it into existence. One result of the union's formation was perhaps to be seen in section 168 of the new representation of the people's act 1951. Here it was stated and accepted by Parliament, that a "rulers" could stand for an election with the condition that during the period following nomination and ending at the time of election he would not enjoy any personal privileges. Here was a way of finding work in the political arena for the erstwhile rulers of Indian states and although there numbers in the first Lok Sabha (house of the people) that came into being

in 1952 was small it multiplied in later years, in the second Lok Sabha and subsequent.

To return to Bilaspur once again Himachal Pradesh being snow bound from November to early may each year could not go the polls with the rest of the country in February/march 1952 so it was decided to have Lok Sabha elections in Himachal as well as Bilaspur earlier in the winter of 1951 October 1951 in fact. In Bilaspur there was great rejoicing and the author stood for the seat on behalf of the congress Shri Hardayal Singh, who was then the president of the DCC was made to stand but before the election could be held he suddenly withdrew thus leaving the author to be elected un-opposed to the first Lok Sabha as its very first member. There was bound to be distress and dismay in the congress circles over this and eventually an election petition was filed against the author challenging his election.

Now the withdrawal of Hardayal Singh from the contest was no sudden act on his part. A person highly qualified that he was having time and spent many years in virtual exile at Haridwar, would not take Congress Party which he was leading in Bilaspur at that time, But he was a bitter and disillusioned man, bitter because of the two warring groups in Bilaspur District Congress Party which had openly developed at the time, one under his leadership which was not widely accepted and the other under the Leadership of Bhandari Kanshi Ram S/O the late Shri Bijal Ram Bhandari of the village Manjhas in the Ghumarwin Tehsil of the Bilaspur Unit. Kanshiram's father was a close confidante of the author's father, Late Raja Sir Bijai Chand, and acted during the Rulership of the latter as a virtual all in all having won the

complete confidence of his master. Bhandari as he was locally called was a good man in his own way and the author sometimes remembers how he used to recount the daily events and the personal income and expenditure incurred by the late Rajah to home every evening, when the day's chores were done. It is a very vivid memory of a child of nearly eight years of age, sitting on the lap of his father listening to the droning voice of the Bhandari and his accounts of which I remember very little. Bhandariji of course had to take care of him as well and it was here that his greed for land led to certain acts which discredited him in the eyes of his people. At that time any estate to which there were no collaterals living within Five generations used cheat the State and it was at the will of the Ruler to depose of it as he pleased, Bhandari took advantage of this rule and got hundreds of Bigha's of Land transferred in his name in Village Dakkari, which was situated close to his own village of Manjhasoo and even he was able to grab land from the author's father elsewhere , in one village the land was a "Muafi" (revenue free tract) in the name of a village deity and Bhandariji not only became its owner in the Deity's name but what is more got himself entered in the Revenue records as the "Pujari" (Priest) of the Deity itself because without such an entry he could not grab it, Moreover my father used to pass orders at these files whereby they were handed over to the Bhandariji free of an "Nazrana" (a kind of monetary payment to which the Ruler was legally entitled on all such transfers). On Bhandarij's death his eldest son Shri Kanshi Ram inherited his father's estates and it was left to the author, on the attainment of his Ruling powers in 1933 on wards to undo these acts of Raja Sir Bije Chand and thus deprived Kanshi Ram

of much of his land and prestige. I may mention there was no vindictiveness in my mind at all, these acts of the late Government were bad in the eyes of the law as well as the people and had to be reversed but the Shri Kanshi Ram naturally took them to heart and must have natured a grievance against me for many years which came to the forefront in 1946 when he aided and abetted all those who were in the Praja Mandal. That he was clever enough to keep himself apparently aloof outwardly speaks for his political sagacity, but the State Government knew of the factual position and yet did nothing to disturb him as he certainly had a sizable following in his area. Not only this, the author formally employed Shri Ramlall the younger brother of Kanshi Ram as a Sub-Judge and Magistrate in the State government, a position he held with great dignity till he retired at the time of the creation of Bilaspur into a Chief Commissioner's State in October 1948 when he chose to retire, with this background it is easy to see that Kanshi Ram's group in the Bilaspur District Congress had much larger following as opposed to Hardayal's friends and this was presented by the latter the disillusionment came with the rejection of his petition for return of hi property, including his house in the Town to him no wonder there after that once he was selected by the AICC to control the Bilaspur Lok Sabha Seat against the author Hardayal Singh wanted to be assured of sufficient funds etc. To give him some hope or chance of winning. Add to this the factor that the author was closely linked to the people and here was the first opportunity for them to exhibit their love and gratefulness' to him and the scales were very heavily balanced against Hardayal's success indeed he had no hopes of victory at the polls whatsoever.

When he failed to get the necessary guarantees of financial support from the AICC and when eventually Bhandari Ramlall's younger brother of Kanshi Ram, also filed his nomination to the Lok Sabha seat of Bilaspur with author's blessings, Hardayal rout was a complete and he sent me an emissary on night in October about a day before the withdrawal date, seeking financial help from me in case he withdrew from the contest. The emissary was none other than the late Shri Dina Nath, a magistrate first class of the State Government who after a clash with Shri Chand Chabra had preferred to resign rather than carry on with the Administrator with humiliation. Shri Dina Nath was much admired for his courage and later won the esteem and love of the people of Bilaspur in abundant measure. He Came to be affectionately called "Panditji" and was returned duly elected to the Himachal Assembly from Bilaspur more than once. So when Shri Dina Nath came with the message from Hardayal the Author was in prayer at Shri Gopalji's temple. After the hill station of Swarghat, which lays to the south east of Bilaspur, a distance of nearly 40km away and there the two of us sat on a stone slab debating the point. I told Dinananth that to accept Hardayal's demand would be against the law and as I had a valid good chance of winning why go into the matter at all. Dinananth's argument was that why go into the contest at all when the opponent was ready to leave but still he finally accepted my word and we met at the temple again and he told me that the Hardayal had finally decided to withdraw unconditionally. I asked him to hurry back to the town where Hardayal was staying and stop him but it was too late. As I came out of the temple I could see Hardayal going into the

office of the returning officer, which was very near the author's temple and he withdrew. At that time Shri Ramlal who was the other contestant alongside with Hargobind Singh, my brother who was my covering candidate came to me and asked my permission to withdraw as they were there Ramlal to get Hardayal defeated and with their withdrawal, I was the only contestant left and so declared elected unopposed. I have tried to give here the true and accurate account of the whole happening as it was completely twisted out of shape in the Election Petition and the main accusation was that the author had offered a bribe of 50,000 to Hardayal and 10,000 to Ramlal to retire, a pure fabrication.

Moreover the Petition was filed by one Daulatram Sankhyan, one of the pillars of the Bilaspur Prajamandal about whom I have said something earlier in this essay and whose personal venom against the author had now reached alarming proportions.

The All India Congress Committee sent an emissary of its own to enquire into the sudden withdrawal of Hardayal but the Author didn't know what actually transpired between them. Anyway they did promise Sankhyan support and later one Shri Sarwate, a retired District Judge of Madhya Pradesh, was appointed as the head of the Electional Tribunal which consisted of two other members. The hearing of the Petition began in the district courts within a few weeks of its filing, perhaps in early may 1952 and by then the thought of it was decided to appoint Shri Harish Chander Anand, a local Advocate to defend the Petition on my behalf, although initially Shri Harish Patasker later to become the Minister of

Law in The Indian Union Cabinet to present the case of the Petitioner, anyway the Author had full faith in Shri Harish and told him so.

Moreover I myself was present at practically all the hearings and was able to guide Shri Harish in many ways. Shri Harish Chander who at the moment is a legal luminary and accepted as the most brilliant lawyer in Bilaspur District originally came to us when Shri Chabra was the Chief Commissioner in the early 1949-50s but soon made a name for himself and in the proceedings of the election petition the author found his cross-examination brilliant. Most of the witnesses on behalf of the petitioner were formed. Praja Mandalists and were clearly giving false evidence. Then at the petition fate intervened and Shri Hardayal Singh died suddenly perhaps the strain of it all, h had suffered and the final humiliation and insult of his having accepted a bribe when actually nothing had been given to him was too much of a strain on the old heart and it gave way. To the author it was a great shock, though he possessed something of the old nobility which sadly has passed away into history now. Moreover our best defence was to put Hardayal himself in the witness box as a defence witness and now that opportunity was lost forever. Anyway that is the way of God and we have to accept it.

In the cross examination of the Petitioner's witness we always began by asking whether he was a member of the Praja Mandal and I could see Sarwate getting irritated by this as he failed to see what the connection was to the Praja Mandal could have with the petition in this case. The case was not going well for us and now Daulatram himself was in the witness box testifying

in his own smug way the truth of his allegations and saying that his respect and affection for the author was unbounded. How hypocrite a person can be.

That evening as we sat in the palace room debating the very tense moment we were facing and the attitude of Shri Sarwate, it was getting clear that unless we had proof that Sankhyan bore a personal grudge against me, things would take a turn against us. Just then the hand of fate intervened! A servant of the household came into the room and told me that someone was waiting for me in the Sandoo maidan(I have already described it elsewhere) very near the Shri Gopalji's temple and wished to see me urgently went alone and on reaching the spot the person waiting there told me that he was the personal servant of the late Shri Hardayal sir who had served the latter at Jardwar for two decades and was leave Bilaspur the next morning, before leaving he wanted to hand to hand over to me some of the personal papers of Hardayal and he took over a sheaf of papers and oases them on to me in the darkness of the night. I thanked him and came away. On reaching the palace root and looking through them I was amazed to see the records of the happenings of the time including the copies of frantic appeals sent by Hardayal to the AICC asking for money or he would withdraw and what was much more important, copies of telegrams & letters typewritten and signed by Daulatram Sankhyan, the petitioner, and duly addressed to Sardar Patel and Shri Jawaharlal Nehru etc. Pleading with them to take drastic action against the author for his allege disloyalty to the union. In all fifteen or sixteen allegation, all of a personal nature and untrue, had been hurled against me in writing with Sankhyan's Signature at the end of each copy!

What more evidence could be produced of the perverse nature of this man who while trying to destroy the author on the one hand was smugly stating his personal love & affection as well as loyal to me on the other in open court, God had intervened at the right moment and given or placed in our hands the weapon with which to peeve our innocence.

The very next morning as the cross examination of Daulatram began, Harish confronted him with the typed copies of his various deeds and after getting him to admit the veracity of his signature thereupon, quietly passed them on to Shri Sarwate. As Shri Sarwate read through the contents his facial expression underwent a dramatic change as if he understood for the very first time what the Bilaspur Praja Mandal really stood for and henceforth the petition was doomed. Shri Ramlal, Shri Dinanath and the author himself, appeared as the witnesses for the defence was now a pure formality and even the AICC changed their legal aid, Shri Pataskar giving way to Shri Tek Chand, a member of the Lok Sabha and retired judge of the Punjab high court. After the evidence was closed the arguments were heard at Bhakra as the judges preferred to go there, it being more accessible to Bilaspur and the day the judgement was announced, the author was a few minutes late in reaching their Bilaspur. However he met Shri Sarwate and the two other judges on their way back, near Nangal, and Shri Sarwate was kind enough to get out of his car and meet the author and shake hands with him. He told me that he had dismissed the petition with cost and congratulated me, I do not know why. It was much later that I learnt from my Lok Sabha friends that Shri Jawaharlal Nehru had himself got interested in this petition and Sankhyan's spell, for so it can be termed, had

made the former believe that I was a culprit. Anyway the petition was gone but another and far worse challenge to Bilaspur had gone. The govt. of India had, under the guidance of the prime minister himself,

Taken a decision to merge or in legal terminology, unite the two states of Bilaspur & Himachal Pradesh and a bill for the purpose duly introduced in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of parliament in late 1953!

To us in Bilaspur there was nothing new in this decision of the govt. of India. Ever since the political tensions in Bilaspur had multiplied with the passage of time since 1946 onwards, everyone at all India level was sick of it and it was the personality of Sardar Patel that finally put it as a part "C" state in the into constitution. With him gone, and the Bhakra issue having been satisfactorily settled with the creation of the control board, that satisfied the Punjab, there was no reason-de-ere left to keep Bilaspur as a separate entity any more. In vain we pleaded for the centre to keep its written word. We also duly presented to the Lok Sabha a petition signed by no less than 46,000 inhabitants of the state against the merger bill but it was at best a "swan-song". Moreover to our misfortune Shri Chhabra was getting more and more discredited in the eyes of the people who wanted to see him removed from office even if meant the loss of a separate identity to Bilaspur and thus everything we had done in the very historic & momentous years of 1946- 48 was brought to naught. After its passage in the Rajya Sabha in early 1954 the bill was finally debated in the Lok Sabha in May 1954 and the author as the local Member of Parliament, gave a lengthy but to the point speech of the whole episode! The author's book, Bilaspur past & present, was also

published at the same time and freely distributed to the members of the Lok Sabha to give them the full background. It mean be said to the credit of the opposition, to which the author belonged, that they did give support to our case but the govt. of India under the home minister ship of Shri KN Katju was wholly unbending and the bill was passed into law. It is known as the "the Himachal Pradesh & Bilaspur, new state act, 1954 and received the assent of the president in July? 1954. Under its political provisions, while the Lok Sabha member would continue till the current term of five years, ending May 1957, and five members were to be elected from Bilaspur to represent this area in the then legislative assembly of Himachal Pradesh.

The very first act of the changeover was the coming to Bilaspur of Gen. Shri Himmat Singhji, who was then the LT1 Governor of Himachal and its relegation to a district of the same name. A deputy commissioner, Shri Mahabir Singh was appointed but this was later on. It was Gen. Himmat Singhji who took over charge from Chhabra, thus ending his more than five years chief commissioner ship of the state. Everything was in shambles; the entity of the state had disappeared. The Bhakra oustee's problem was unsolved and the welfare of the people for the future placed in the hands of the Himachal politicians who inwardly & outwardly hated the Bilaspur for their successful fight merger all the years from 1946 to 1954. The govt. of India had betrayed the trust we had reposed in their written word. The Bilaspur merger agreement was a scrap of paper and nothing more. That in the ensuing elections the Himachal Assembly of the five members from Bilaspur resulted the total rout of the congress party and we under the

name of the united independent front were able to secure all the seats, the congress having to lose their deposits in three of them was of little any, consolation. That is why I have termed this essay as "A PEOPLE BETRAYED" and would leave the reader after going through its pages, to judge for her or himself if the title is correct. I sometime feel that perhaps the very idea of sticking on to the concept of survival as a separate entity for Bilaspur was wrong in itself as it was against the tide of the time. But when I now see small areas like Nagaland, Meghalaya etc. being elevated to full-fledge statehood of the union I fail to recognise as to why Bilaspur with its past history and the commitments of the central govt. could not be allowed to retain itself as a separate state! But all these are pure ideas. The story has been told and Bilaspur today continues as a district of the state of Himachal Pradesh, still politically very active and enlightened but still licking its scars and perhaps once in a while remembering its past when a bitter and successful war on the political front was waged by its people for their survival, of which any Indian be proud.

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