

Sovereign Skies: Aviation and the Indian State 1939-53

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Short Abstract

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Aashique Ahmed Iqbal, St Edmund Hall,

DPhil thesis, Trinity term 2017.

This thesis traces the Indian state's engagement with aviation during the period of its transformation from British colony to Indian republic. It argues that the aeroplane played a critical role in securing and legitimating the Indian state during the first years of its independence. Further, the use of aircraft is revealing of the ways in which the new state conceptualised and projected its sovereignty. The thesis is divided into five chapters organised in broadly chronological order each of which is centred on one of five major themes; expansion, partition, escalation, integration and nationalisation. The first of these studies the complex consequences of the expansion of Indian aviation during the Second World War which transformed India's anaemic aviation sector into one of Asia's leading aviation powerhouses portending the passing of colonial rule. Chapter two traces the effects of partition in 1947 on aviation as well as the critical role played by aircraft in refugee evacuation and the restoration of order. The third chapter investigates the ways in which civil and military aviation helped initiate, sustain and then escalate war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir later that year. The fourth chapter highlights the ways in which India's semi-autonomous princely states invested in aviation in the hopes of legitimising their states through an appeal to modernity with differing results in the decade before their integration into independent India. The fifth and final chapter focuses on the emergence of the Republic of India in 1950, a fully sovereign state with a coherent national ideology capable of exerting its will on recalcitrant neighbours and confident enough in its socialist vision to nationalise its airline companies. Indian aviation this thesis will conclude was critical in shaping the outcomes of decolonisation and was in turn moulded in important ways by the Indian state.

Long Abstract

Sovereign Skies: Aviation and the Indian State 1939-53

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This thesis examines the Indian state's engagement with aviation during the decade of its transformation from British colony to independent republic. Through the prism of aviation, both civil and military, it charts the long process of decolonisation from the Second World War to the emergence of India as a sovereign state with a highly centralised government. Drawing on fifteen archives in India and the United Kingdom it argues that the aeroplane played a critical role in securing and legitimating the Indian state in the first years of its independence. Further the manner in which aircraft were used is revealing of the ways in which the new state conceptualised and projected sovereignty.

Despite its deep implications for the projection of state power by national elites, the history of Indian aviation has received little academic attention. This is a consequence of several factors. Military historians have paid scant attention to the Indian Air Force (IAF), continuing to privilege studies of the Indian army and to a lesser extent the Indian navy. Historians of international aviation have thus far privileged the history of the aeroplane in wealthier predominantly western states. Moreover while technology history is a burgeoning field in India, it continues to remain relatively small. Writing on aviation outside the academy continues to suffer from a number of

shortcomings, not the least of which is an adherence to a rigid divide between civil and military aviation. This is despite the fact that, as a state with limited aviation resources, India often blurred the boundaries between civil and military aviation, using civil aircraft for military tasks and vice versa. This thesis therefore attempts to fill an important lacuna. In doing so it attempts to address a number of important questions. How did Indian aviation impact, and in what ways was it in turn impacted by, the process of decolonisation? What can the aeroplane tell us about the post-colonial Indian state's notions of sovereignty? What, if any, legitimisation did aircraft provide South Asian regimes, real and putative, colonial and post-colonial? How do we evaluate the ruptures and continuities before and after Indian independence in the relationship between technology and politics?

Sovereign Skies comprises five chapters. These follow a broadly chronological order, tracing the engagement of the Indian state with aviation from the large scale expansion of the Indian aviation sector triggered by the outbreak of the Second World War to the nationalisation of Indian airline companies in 1953 by the independent Government of India. The chapters are also organised thematically around five core themes; expansion, partition, escalation, integration and nationalisation.

Chapter I, 'Indian Aviation in World War II', studies the transformation of the Indian aviation sector as a consequence of the Second World War. The war led to the unprecedented expansion of Indian aviation with a series of consequential results. Foremost among these was the reversal of military policies aimed at concentrating military control in British hands. The outbreak of the Second World War forced the colonial government to embark on a large scale expansion of the IAF that saw the single squadron force grow to include ten squadrons by 1946. Though the force would perform well in the war, earning the prefix 'Royal' from the King Emperor in 1945,

expansion was plagued by a number of issues. Foremost among these was the severe shortage of educated recruits. The rushed and ultimately incomplete expansion of the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) would give rise to severe instability within the force, culminating in a wave of ‘strikes’ in 1946 that pitted Indian personnel against each other.

For Indian commercial airline companies, the Second World War would prove initially to be a testing period. Lucrative peacetime subsidies were lost and civil aircraft were commandeered by the Indian government to service the war effort. As the war proceeded however the indispensability of a functioning civil aviation sector to the war effort became increasingly apparent to the government which then proceeded to support Indian airline companies by providing them with aircraft and personnel. Moreover Indian airline companies would fly more routes than they previously had and stood to make significant gains in the post-war period. The Indian princely states too would play an important role in prosecuting the war in the air. Indian states like Hyderabad, which contributed personnel, aerodromes and funds to the air war, hoped that this would help them extract political concessions in the constitutional negotiations that followed the war.

Chapter II, *‘Ittehad Mein Shakti (Unity in strength): Aviation and the Partition of India 1946-7’*, focuses on the impact of the Partition of British India on aviation as well as the role played by aircraft during the chaotic transfer of populations in 1947. It begins with a discussion of the collapse of the Tymms plan, which aimed to regulate the civil aviation boom that had followed the Second World War in order to ensure the sector’s long term profitability. The plan’s abandonment by the 1946 interim government, headed by a joint Congress-Muslim League ministry, is illustrative of the dysfunction that had come to characterise relations between India’s two largest parties. This dysfunction and accompanying mass violence between India’s three largest religious

communities would convince British and Indian leaders to opt for the Partition of the subcontinent. Consequently, the colonial Royal Indian Air Force would be divided between the dominions of India and Pakistan, bringing into existence two new air forces. I argue that the creation of two new air forces is indicative of the ruptures accompanying Indian independence contrary to claims by scholars such as Partha Chatterjee who have stressed the continuities between the armed forces of colonial and independent India.

The second half of the chapter studies the critical role played by aircraft in the transfer of populations accompanying Partition. It argues that the Indian state relied heavily on high technology, such as aviation, to survive the unprecedented crisis represented by the mass violence accompanying partition. Aircraft carried out the desperately needed evacuation of key government officials necessary to organise the transfer of populations on the ground. Despite their best efforts however, Indian airline companies were simply not able to keep up with the pace of evacuations demanded by the government. As a consequence India and Pakistan were forced to hire British charter aircraft to carry out mass evacuations dubbed ‘Operation India’ and ‘Operation Pakistan’. The Royal Indian Air Force meanwhile was deployed against rioters engaged in a sophisticated campaign of mass violence against minorities. RIAF aircraft would be central to the Indian government’s attempts to re-establish the state’s monopoly on violence in the context of the democratisation of violence by sectarian militia groups following the Second World War.

Chapter III, ‘War in Kashmir 1947-8’, focuses on the role of aircraft in three key events during the 1947 Kashmir war between India and Pakistan; the Srinagar airlift, the siege of Punch and the bombing of Palak. It argues that aviation enabled India to initiate, sustain and escalate the conflict in Kashmir, a theatre where it was at a significant logistical disadvantage in comparison to Pakistan. Aircraft initially played a critical role in preventing the conflict from escalating into a

full scale war that would have proved ruinous for both the new states. However I argue that as the conflict continued, the extensive use of aircraft by the Indian government inadvertently escalated the conflict. Moreover the ways in which the Indian government utilised aircraft are revealing of its emerging notions of sovereignty with regard to Pakistan. The war would inaugurate an enmity between India and Pakistan that continues into the present and end British hopes that the two countries would serve as its clients through the Commonwealth.

Chapter IV, 'Of Princes and Planes: Aviation in the Indian states', analyses the important contributions of the semi-autonomous princely states to the development of Indian aviation. Several Indian states invested heavily in aviation in an attempt to entrench their authority as modern political entities in the face of both nationalist and colonial criticism. However the ways in which they did so could vary depending on a number of factors as revealed by case studies of three states: Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad. The Maharaja of Jodhpur, Sir Umaid Singh, invested in the construction of a number of aerodromes and personally served as an Air Commodore in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War in an attempt to combine the state's Rajput martial tradition with the modern aura of the aeroplane. Mysore state's bureaucracy led by dewan Sir Mirza Ismail would set up India's first aircraft factory, Hindustan Aircraft Limited, during the Second World War, in the hopes of triggering a wider process of industrialisation in the state. As India's wealthiest and most populous state, Hyderabad, would set up its own airline in 1945 and attempt to set up its own air force following the end of colonial rule. The state's ruler, Nizam Asaf Jah VII, sought to re-establish Hyderabad as an independent state in 1947. When the independent Indian government responded to the Nizam's bid for independence with an economic blockade, the Hyderabad government hired Australian smugglers to fly military equipment into the state. New Delhi's decision to aggressively use RIAF aircraft to interdict arms being flown to Hyderabad

is indicative of new notions of sovereignty held by the independent India which in contrast to the colonial regime was unwilling to accept any mediation of its sovereignty. This would have catastrophic consequences for Hyderabad following the Indian invasion of the state in September 1948.

Chapter V, 'Towards Sovereign Skies: Aviation in independent India 1948-53', traces the evolution of aviation policy in the first five years of independence, leading up to the nationalisation of airline companies in 1953. Indian aviation made its formal debut on the world stage in 1948 with the inauguration of Air India International flights from Bombay to London. The establishment of an Indian international flag carrier owed much to wartime air route negotiations surrounding the Chicago conference of 1944, which left air route agreements to bilateral negotiations. Independent India thus found itself undertaking negotiations on an ostensibly equal footing with the world's leaders in aviation. However negotiations undertaken with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands underscored the extent to which international legal sovereignty was undermined in practice by material differences between various states. Bilateral negotiations with Pakistan were further complicated by the hostility prevailing between the two states. This hostility was only deepened by a 1950 confrontation in Bengal over the rights of minorities. Both civil and military aviation were mobilised by New Delhi in order to ensure the resolution of the crisis in its favour. Indian airline companies conducted mass evacuations of non-Muslims from East Pakistan while the Indian Air Force was mobilised to coerce Pakistan into guaranteeing the rights of its minorities. While the confrontation was resolved in India's favour it effectively ended hopes of a major reconciliation between the two states. This in turn resulted a greater entanglement between the state, the military and the ruling party.

The signal role played by civil aviation in major crises from the 1947 refugee evacuations to the 1950 Bengal crisis was recognised by the Government of India, which moved to nationalise Indian airline companies. While much of the writing on nationalisation has focused on the commercial failures of civil aviation to explain nationalisation, I argue that successes of Indian airline companies in serving the state during emergencies contributed to the nationalisation. In certain ways nationalisation signalled the culmination long held views dating back to the colonial period that civil aviation was simply too important to be left in the hands of private operators.

The year 1953 in important ways represents the end of an era that began with the expansion of Indian aviation during the Second World War. The Indian Air Force achieved total Indianisation that year when an Indian finally became commander-in-chief of the Indian Air Force two decades after its establishment. The nationalisation of Indian airline companies that year led to the establishment of a near monopoly over Indian aviation for the state. This inaugurated what can justifiably be considered to be a new era of state control of aviation that would last four decades.

This thesis makes three overarching revisions to received narratives of decolonisation. First it argues for the need to understand decolonisation to be a considerably longer process than is understood as it began earlier and continued beyond the grant of formal independence to India. The transfer of military control from British to Indian hands as a consequence of the Second World War made decolonisation in some form inevitable. Nevertheless India remained dependent on Britain, even after independence, for equipment, expertise and personnel in vital sectors such as aviation. Indeed British planners hoped that India would continue to provide the United Kingdom with military support in exchange for technological support through the framework of the Commonwealth. While this hope was not realised it points to the importance British Cold War calculations in the process of decolonisation. Second I argue that independent India conceptualised

sovereignty in ways that diverged radically from its colonial predecessor, stressing the importance of ruptures over continuities in explaining decolonisation. Independent India's leadership was committed to centralising state power and was consequently less tolerant of older forms of sovereignty represented by the princely states. This would lead to the coercive and often violent integration of the Indian states after independence. Third I contend that aviation was critical to securing and legitimating independent India. Aircraft played a small but extremely critical role in ensuring the survival of the new state in the face of unprecedented mass violence and war. The aeroplane also played an important part in legitimating India as a modern nation-state. This fact was not lost on other contenders for legitimacy in South Asia such as the princes and Pakistan, both of whom also moved to utilise aviation to legitimate their power.

A study of Indian aviation in the decade of decolonisation serves as a case study of the ways in which poor states engage with high technology. It also contributes to histories of Indian politics, technology, warfare, transportation and business. By following David Edgerton's (2006) exhortation to treat technology as 'things in use' it will aim to uncover the roots of social power through a study of aviation. In doing so this thesis sheds new light on the complex relationship between high technology, decolonisation, and state formation in twentieth century South Asia.

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List of Abbreviations

AAC- Army Airlift Committee

AFRC- Armed Forces Reconstitution Committee

AHQ (I) - Air Headquarters (India)

AIRC- Aeronautical and Industrial Corporation

AII- Air India International

APSA- Andhra Pradesh State Archives, Hyderabad.

ATIC- Air Transport Inquiry Committee

ATLB-Air Transport Licensing Board

BCA- Balliol College Archives, Oxford

BL-British Library, London, United Kingdom

BOAC-British Overseas Airways Corporation

CoP- Chamber of Princes

CPWD: Central Public Works Department

CRO- Commonwealth Relations Office

DCA-Director of Civil Aviation

DGCA- Director General of Civil Aviation

EFTS- Elementary Flying Training School

EIC- East India Company

FEU-Forward Equipment Unit

GoI-Government of India

GoP- Government of Pakistan

HAL-Hindustan Aircraft Limited

HMG-His Majesty's Government

IAF-Indian Air Force

IAFVR-Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve

IATC-Indian Air Training Corps

IEAL- Indian Eastern Airways Limited

INA-Indian National Airways
IOA- Indian Overseas Airways
IWAL- Indian Western Airways Limited
JNU-Jawaharlal Nehru University
KSA-Karnataka State Archives.
MEO- Military Evacuation Organisation
MoD (I) - Interservices History Division, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi, India
NAI- National Archives of India, New Delhi.
NFAI- National Film Archive of India, Pune.
NMML- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
NSR- Nizams State Railway
NWFP- North West Frontier Province
ORB- Operations Record Book
PC (AR)- Anuradha Reddy Private Collection
PC (JRN)- J.R. Nanda Private Collection
PJDC- Provisional Joint Defence Council
RAF- Royal Air Force
RIAF-Royal Indian Air Force
RAFM-Royal Air Force Museum, London, United Kingdom
RPAF- Royal Pakistan Air Force
RIN- Royal Indian Navy
TAS-Tata Aviation Services
TAL- Tata Air Lines
TNA-The National Archives, London, United Kingdom
ToI-Times of India
USAAF-United States Army Air Force
UKHC-United Kingdom High Commissioner
UNICIP-United Nations International Committee for India and Pakistan

Glossary

Azad Hind Fauj-Indian National Army

Quran-Sacred book of Islam

Lakhs-One hundred thousand

Crores-Ten million

Raja-King

Maharaja-Great king

Nizam-Hereditary ruler of Hyderabad

Nawab-Mughal era title for governor

Azad-Independent

Dewan-Prime Minister

Razakar- Volunteer Hyderabad militia

Ansar-Auxiliary Pakistan force

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Introduction

After all our country is going to be free and I think that will be soon. Where after independence shall we get persons who can fly aeroplanes? It is obvious even to the most superficial observer that this victory over the air in Europe and America will bring far reaching results to the world, foremost being the effect on the methods of warfare. It is now established that the old-fashioned armies and ships cannot stand up to aeroplanes and gas. Aeroplanes can annihilate a big army and can ruin several cities with a bomb. The work of the ordinary army will gradually become what the police are doing today and guns and canons will be reduced to the level of *lathis* (batons). Our leaders, who are striving to secure for Indians also commission in the army, should consider this a little. Otherwise our officers and army will be mere glittering dummies on parade and be worth nothing else.¹

-Jawaharlal Nehru,

Aaj, 28 September 1927

Jawaharlal Nehru's quote above, from an essay titled 'Victory Over the Air', succinctly sums up Indian hopes and fears about aviation. Indians during the years leading up to the Second World War were certain that aviation represented an exponential technological leap with especially critical military consequences. Bombing would make other forms of warfare obsolete and enable countries that possessed aircraft to prosecute genocidal warfare against countries that did not. Indian opinion was hardly unique in believing what was a near universal axiom at the time. Conventional wisdom throughout the world regarded air bombing in much the same apocalyptic terms as nuclear warfare is regarded today. Apocalyptic visions of the aeroplane as a tool of warfare and genocide in science fiction had preceded the invention of the aeroplane.² Following the First World War, during which

¹ J. Nehru, 'Victory over the air' (Original in Hindi), in S. Gopal and U. Iyengar eds, *Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru*, (New Delhi, 2003), p 635.

² S. Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, (London, 2002), p 73.

aircraft had demonstrated the ability to bring war to civilians hundreds of miles away from the frontline, fears about the devastating potential of bombing in future conflicts had become commonplace throughout the world. What differentiated Indian concerns about bombing from those of European states, such as Britain, was the sense of helplessness springing from India's status as a colony of the British Empire. Indians, such as Nehru above, were alarmed at the prospect of a conflict in which India might find itself defenceless because it did not have its own air force. They assumed, correctly as future events would prove, that the Royal Air Force would prioritise the defence of the British Isles over that of India in case of the outbreak of a general conflict. Aviation was recognised as a prerequisite for true independence since in the absence of sufficient air defences, a formally independent India would find itself at the mercy of enemy states possessing aircraft. Conversely if India came to possess aviation of its own it would achieve the substance of sovereignty even if the colony was not granted formal independence. The question of who would fly aeroplanes in India came increasingly to be tied with the question of who would truly rule India.

This thesis is a study of the Indian state and its engagement with aviation during the decade of its transformation from British colony to independent republic. Through the prism of aviation, both civil and military, it charts the long process of decolonisation from the Second World War to the emergence of India as a sovereign state with a strong national identity. In doing so it raises and seeks to answer a number of important questions. How did Indian aviation impact, and in what ways was it in turn impacted by, the process of decolonisation? What can the aeroplane tell us about the post-colonial Indian state's notions of sovereignty? What, if any, legitimisation did aircraft provide South Asian regimes, real and putative,

colonial and post-colonial? How do we evaluate the ruptures and continuities before and after Indian independence in the relationship between technology and politics?

The aeroplane made its debut in India, soon after its invention, at the United Provinces Industrial and Agricultural fair on 10 December 1910.³ The country would earn the distinction of becoming the birthplace of air mail when Captain Windham delivered letters from Allahabad to Naini to the Post-Master General of the United Provinces on the 18th February 1911.⁴ Perhaps just as significantly India would become one of the earliest sites of aerial military reconnaissance when Henry Jullerot scouted the movements of ‘enemy forces’ during war games at Aurangabad on the 16 January 1911.⁵ Indian pilots, recruited primarily from Britain, would serve in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War. One of them, Indra Lal Roy would posthumously be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross after becoming the first Indian fighter ace.⁶ However as one observer commented these developments had no ‘organic connection’ with the subsequent development of Indian aviation, since Indians were largely excluded from aviation in India.⁷ Consequently, more determined attempts had to be made to ensure greater Indian participation in aviation, particularly in the military. The period after the war would see members of the Indian legislatures call for greater Indian participation in the air force. B.S Kamat, for instance, tabled questions in the Central Legislative Assembly inquiring whether Indians were to be granted entry into the Royal Air Force as early as 1923.⁸ As Nehru pointed out above, with his mention of commissions for Indians in the army, aviation would become central to

³ P. Singh, *History of Aviation in India*, (New Delhi, 2003), p 16.

⁴ *Flight*, 18 March 1911.

⁵ P. Anuradha Reddy, *Aviation in the Hyderabad Dominions* (Secunderabad, 2001), p 6.

⁶ R. Chhina, *The Eagle Strikes*, (New Delhi, 2006), p 3.

⁷ B.R. Nayar, *The State and International Aviation in India*, (New Delhi, 1994), p 43.

⁸ CS, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, (New Delhi, 1923), p 2441.

attempts by Indian nationalists to attain the substance of sovereignty by wresting military control of the Indian armed forces from the British. Jawaharlal Nehru's father, Motilal Nehru along with another prominent Indian nationalist, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, would play an important part in passing recommendations as members of a committee set up to investigate army reforms in 1926 that resulted in the eventual establishment of the Indian Air Force (IAF).⁹ Attempts were also made outside the legislature to make Indians more 'air minded' through the establishment of flying clubs from 1929 onwards in a number of major cities including New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Madras.¹⁰

The Government of India's (GoI) stance towards Indian aviation during the inter-war period was far from encouraging. While it was pressured into establishing the IAF in 1932 as a concession to Indian opinion, it deliberately kept the force small as part of a broader strategy aimed at preventing decolonisation. Similarly the first Indian Airline companies, Tata Air Services and Indian National Airways which were established at the same time as the IAF, received little support from the government until the inauguration of the All-Up Empire Air Mail Scheme in India in 1938.¹¹ This scheme was already showing signs of failure when it had to be wound up because of the outbreak of the Second World War.¹²

The Second World War transformed Indian aviation in fundamental ways. Indian aviation experienced enormous growth during the Second World War as military imperatives forced the colonial government to lift earlier constraints. The Indian Air Force would expand tenfold during the war going from a force consisting of a mere 16 officers and 269 airmen in 1939

⁹ BL, A. Skeen et al, *Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee*, (London, 1927).

¹⁰ See for instance: *Times of India*, 29 January 1929, 30 October 1929, 3 February 1931, 14 February 1936.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6 Feb 1936.

¹² P. Ewer, 'A Gentlemen's Club in the Clouds: Re-assessing the Empire Air Mail Scheme 1933-39', *Journal of Transport History*, 28, 1, pp 75-92.

to one that by 1945 was made up of 1638 officers and 26,900 Other Ranks.¹³ It would fight with extraordinary valour in the conflict with Imperial Japan, earning the prefix 'Royal' from the King Emperor in recognition for its wartime services.¹⁴ The great wartime expansion of the IAF was not without its problems however. Equipment and personnel shortages continued to plague the force throughout the war and the sheer rapidity of expansion severely destabilised the force resulting in a series of 'strikes' in 1946. The transfer of military control from British to Indian hands and the political instability that accompanied it played an important role in the calculus of decolonisation, likely contributing to the decision to end British rule in India two years after the war.

While the IAF had grown during the war, Indian airline companies had been effectively commandeered for the war effort. After the war Indian commercial airline companies went through an unprecedented boom as cheap aircraft, trained personnel and advanced infrastructure became available as a result of military demobilisation.¹⁵ The number of Indian airline companies and the routes that they flew proliferated substantially in the post-war period. However the dividends of the Second World War were seriously imperilled by political changes sweeping the subcontinent. The partition of British India between India and Pakistan in 1947, which accompanied independence, caused major disruptions for the Indian aviation sector. Government plans aimed at ensuring the profitability and therefore the long term viability of the civil aviation sector were jettisoned as a consequence of political infighting between the Congress and the Muslim League, who briefly shared power in the interim government of 1946. Indian airline companies would lose critical routes and find

¹³ B. Prasad, *History of the Indian Air Force 1933-45*, (New Delhi, 1961),

¹⁴ R. Chhina, (2006), p 222.

¹⁵ See for instance: *Flight*, 15 August 1946.

themselves in the midst of a complex refugee evacuation process that would eventually overwhelm them. The Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) meanwhile would find itself split between the India and Pakistan. Despite this, aircraft would be at the centre of efforts by the Indian and Pakistani states to restore order and set up new governments in South Asia. Aeroplanes would perform a variety of specialised tasks necessary to expedite the previously unplanned transfer of populations between India and Pakistan. In doing so they helped further entrench the Jawaharlal Nehru led Congress government's faith in the importance of using high technology to centralise state power.

Even as independent India's government grappled with the chaos of partition it found itself enmeshed in a conflict over Kashmir with Pakistan. India's participation in the Kashmir conflict of 1947 would not have been possible without the contributions of both the Royal Indian Air Force as well as several airline companies whose pilots and planes were commandeered to serve a military role. Whereas the Indian Air Force had merely served as a tactical air force during the Second World War, in Kashmir it would be second in importance only to the Indian army. Aircraft would enable India to overcome severe logistical weaknesses to confront Pakistan over the mountainous terrain of Kashmir. The Kashmir conflict would remain limited because neither India nor Pakistan wished to embark on a war that would have ruinous consequences for both countries. Aircraft as such remained an important component of wider manoeuvring by both states to prevent the conflict from escalating.

A key reason for the conflict in Kashmir was the difficulty of reconciling the existence of semi-autonomous princely states with the emergence of new nation-states in South Asia. While the governments of the princely or Indian states have been the subject of a great deal

of research in recent years, their engagement with aviation has received little attention.¹⁶ The governments of princely India were quick to grasp both the ideological and the strategic potential of aircraft. Many princely governments would deploy the aeroplane to legitimate their rule in the face of claims by Indian nationalists and the colonial government that their regimes were anachronistic. Hyderabad state even set up its own airline in a bid to establish its credentials as an independent state following the British departure from the subcontinent. When India blockaded Hyderabad in 1948, the state relied on aircraft to smuggle much needed supplies of arms in from Pakistan. The aggressive use of the Royal Indian Air Force to prevent arms smuggling in Hyderabad and to eventually invade the state is indicative of the ways in which the new state viewed its sovereignty as being deep and indivisible.

The crises of partition, war and integration faced by the government of India in the immediate aftermath of independence helped confirm the central role of aircraft in projecting the state for the new republic. In the five years after independence the GoI would move to strengthen the links that bound the aviation sector to the state. India would conclude a number of agreements with the leading aviation powers of the world as well as its regional neighbours aimed at protecting its infant international flag carrier, Air India International, from competition. Indian civil aviation meanwhile became something of a victim of its own

¹⁶ R. Jeffrey (ed), *People Princes and Paramount Power*, (New Delhi, 1978); I. Copland, *The British Raj and the Indian Princes*, (Bombay, 1982); I. Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire 1917-1947*, (Cambridge, 1997); B. Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire*, (Columbus, 1978); B. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States*, (Cambridge, 2004); M. Gowda, *Modern Mysore State 1881-1902*, (Mysore, 1997); V. Sampath, *Splendours of Royal Mysore*, (New Delhi, 2008); J. Manor, *Political Change in an Indian State*, (New Delhi, 1977); J. Nair, *Mysore Modern*, (Minneapolis, 2011); M. Bhagwan, *Sovereign Spheres*, (New Delhi, 2003); L. Benichou, *From Autocracy to Integration*, (Chennai, 2000); A. Ikegame, *Princely India Re-Imagined*, (London, 2013); B. Cohen, *Kingship and Colonialism in India's Deccan*, (Basingstoke, 2007); V.K. Bawa, *Hyderabad Under Salar Jung I*, (New Delhi, 1996); E.L. Beverly, *Hyderabad, British India and the World*, (Cambridge, 2015). For exceptions to this see: P. Vacher, *History of the Jodhpur Flying Club*, (Ontario, 2008); A Reddy, *Aviation in Hyderabad Dominions*, (Secunderabad, 2001).

successes. Political opinion across party lines came to see aviation as a technology that was too important to leave in the hands of private enterprise. Consequently, in 1953 Indian airline companies would be nationalised. This would coincide with the departure of the last British commander of the Indian Air Force, inaugurating a four decade long era in which Indian aviation would become a near-monopoly of the Indian state.

While this thesis features a number of chapter specific arguments it also makes three overarching revisions to received narratives of decolonisation. First, an engagement with aviation reveals that decolonisation was a longer process than is understood. Decolonisation began considerably earlier than the formal grant of independence to India in August 1947. The transfer of military aviation from British to Indian hands during the Second World War and the political destabilisation that accompanied the rapid expansion of all three armed services made a major transfer of power increasingly likely after the war. With mutinies in the Royal Air Force, the Royal Indian Air Force and the Royal Indian Navy, Britain's ability to hold India militarily was significantly weakened. Decolonisation also took longer than is appreciated. The formal grant of independence to India did not mark the end of decolonisation. A British admiral, Lord Mountbatten, became independent India's first Governor-General and British commanders continued to lead the Indian armed forces. The United Kingdom continued to remain India's key supplier of expertise and equipment for the RIAF. There is evidence that His Majesty's Government assumed that India and Pakistan would continue to serve as client states that would defend British interests in the context of the Cold War. Indeed the new Commonwealth was conceived of as a military alliance in which newly independent dominions would provide military services in return for British technical assistance. While the 1947 Kashmir war effectively ended this hope, the process of

institutionally disentangling the British and Indian governments would last into the early 1950's.

Second, though the independent Indian government inherited several colonial institutions and legitimated itself with claims of continuity, a study of aviation reveals the emergence of novel notions of sovereignty. Independent India recognised no sovereignties in erstwhile British India other than Pakistan's and its own, unlike the colonial state which had recognised a number of subordinate sovereignties such as those of India's semi-autonomous princely states. As such the independent government projected what I term 'deep sovereignty', of the kind to which no previous state in India had previously aspired. The new state sought to project unmediated sovereignty within its territorial bounds and pursued policies that favoured centralisation of state power such as the nationalisation of airlines in 1953. This was partially a consequence of the preference for centralisation of sections of the ruling Congress party. It was also a result of the emergence of a new international order following the Second World War, which privileged the nation-state over older ways of organising sovereignty. The emergence of deep sovereignty as revealed by the Indian state's use of aircraft is revealing of the novel nature of the state in the face of claims of continuity that have characterised much of the literature on decolonisation.¹⁷ Independent India had new notions of sovereignty, embarked on a program of unprecedented centralisation and even featured a new air force, albeit with an old name.

Third, I contend that aviation technology was critical to both securing and legitimating the state in South Asia. Discarding what I consider to be a false civil-military dichotomy, I assert

¹⁷ See for instance: P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, (Oxford, 1997).

that aviation technology was central to ensuring the survival of the new Indian state in the face of partition, war and integration. Though few Indians would ever set foot on an aeroplane, aviation impacted the lives of millions of Indians. Anti-cholera vaccines carried by aircraft, to give one instance, almost certainly prevented the outbreak of major epidemics at the overcrowded refugee camps created by the 1947 partition, saving thousands if not millions of lives.¹⁸ Aviation was central not only to securing India but also to legitimating the right of various governments to rule it. This was one of the key reasons for the reluctance of colonial authorities to concede control of military aviation to Indians before the Second World War. As seen above, the governments of the princely states were also quick to grasp the legitimating power of the aeroplane and invested heavily in it. This was because of the association of the aeroplane with other key vocabularies of legitimation such as modernity and development. The focus on aircraft as a source of legitimacy by various South Asian governments led to the reordering of the aviation sector to represent statist concerns. While this was most apparent in the nationalisation drama of 1953, aviation policy in India, as elsewhere, was always driven by politics. Though aviation doubtless remained an elite preserve it also precisely for this reason arguably offers greater insights into the preoccupations, priorities and self-conceptions of political leaderships in South Asia than any other contemporary technology.

¹⁸ MoD (I), 601/14476/H, *Partition Proceedings*, vol. V, (New Delhi, 1948), Emergency committee meeting, 12 September 1947.

I. Literature Review

Much has been written on the ability of aircraft to serve as a technology of legitimation for the modern state. Aeroplanes were deployed by governments as varied as the communist Soviet Union and the democratic United States in order to legitimate their governments.¹⁹ In India however no attempts have been made at writing histories of the relationship between aviation and the state. Indeed the history of aviation has received little attention in the academy. Aviation remains an important lacuna both in the fields of science and technology history on the one hand and military history on the other. This is a consequence of a series of different factors. Technology history has, until recently, received little scholarly attention in India.²⁰ David Arnold began the historiographical essay for his book on the subject by noting that there have been ‘few general surveys of science, technology and medicine in colonial India and a dearth of interpretative essays’.²¹ Though this trend is in the process of being reversed with the publication of a number of technology histories, it is fair to say that technology history in India is still in its infancy.²²

In the meanwhile the Indian Air Force has received little attention from military historians who have concentrated on India’s army and to a lesser extent its navy.²³ This is partly a result

¹⁹ R.R. Rice, *The Politics of Air Power*, (Lincoln, 2004); G. Vidal, ‘On flying’, in *Armageddon? Essays 1983-87*, (London, 1987); S. Call, *Selling Air Power*, (Williams-Ford, 2009); J.J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, (London, 2002); K.E. Bailes, ‘Technology and Legitimacy: Soviet Aviation and Stalinism in the 1930s’, *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 55-81.

²⁰ The history of science in India is not discussed here in the interests of brevity. For a detailed survey of Indian science history see: D. Kumar, *Science and the Raj*, (New Delhi, 2006).

²¹ D. Arnold, *Science, Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, (Cambridge, 2000), p 217.

²² R. Macleod and D. Kumar eds, *Technology and the Raj*, (New Delhi, 1995); D. Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, (Chicago, 2013); D. Haines, *Building the Empire, Building the Nation*, (Karachi, 2003).

²³ For the Indian army see: K. Roy, *Brown Soldiers of the Raj*, (New Delhi, 2008); A. Deshpande and P. Gupta, *The British Raj and its Indian Armed Forces 1857-1939* (New Delhi, 2002); A. Deshpande, *British Military Policy in India 1900-1945*, (New Delhi, 2005); G. Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the two World Wars*, (London, 2014); D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, (Basingstoke, 1994); D. Marston and C.

of the much larger size of the Indian army, which has led at least one historian to dismiss the Indian Air Force as having played ‘a minor role in the 1930’s and 1940’s’.²⁴ It is also partially a result of the concentration of academic attention on the 1946 Royal Indian Naval mutiny, which has received more academic attention than every other aspect of colonial Indian naval history combined.²⁵ Indian aviation history, both civil and military, has also been marginal to more global histories of aviation.²⁶ This is not to say that India does not feature prominently in histories of aviation but rather to point to the absence of Indian aviation from aviation histories even when they deal with the region.²⁷ The neglect of Indian technology history, the focus on other military services and the perceived marginality of India to global aviation have all combined to ensure that Indian aviation has not been the subject of historical inquiry.

The absence of academic work on the subject however does not mean that there is no literature on Indian aviation. On the contrary there exists a very large corpus of writing by non-academic authors on aviation, most of which focuses on the history of the Indian Air Force. IAF history has been the subject of a number of official, semi-official and non-official

Sundaram eds, *A military history of India and South Asia*, (Westport, 2007). For the Indian Navy see: S. Singh, *Under Two Ensigns*, (New Delhi, 1986); D.O. Spence, *Colonial Naval Culture and British Imperialism 1922-67*, (Manchester, 2016); C. Madsen, ‘The Long Goodbye: British Agency in the creation of Navies for India and Pakistan’, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History*, 43,3, 463-488.

²⁴ K. Roy, *The Army in British India*, (London, 2013), p 3.

²⁵ See for instance: A. Deshpande, *Hope and Despair*, (New Delhi, 2016); R. Spector, ‘The Royal Indian Navy Strike of 1946: A Study of Cohesion and Disintegration in Colonial Armed Forces’, *Armed Forces and Society*, 7, pp 271–284; C. Madsen, ‘The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny, 1946.’, *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century*, ed Christopher M. Bell and Bruce A. Elleman, (London, 2003) 212–231; J.M. Meyer, ‘The Royal Indian Naval Mutiny of 1946: Nationalist Competition and Civil Military Relations in India’, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History*, 45, 1, 46-69; D.O. Spence, ‘Beyond Talwar: A Cultural Reappraisal of the 1946 Royal Indian Navy Mutiny’, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History*, 43,3, pp 489-508.

²⁶ See for instance: J.J. Halley, *The Squadrons of the Royal Air Force and Commonwealth 1918-1988*, (Kent, 1988)

²⁷ See for instance: D. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, (Manchester, 1990).

histories as well as a number of biographies.²⁸ In the absence of attention from academics non-official histories have been primarily written by air force personnel for a service audience.²⁹ Rana Chhina's *The Eagle Strikes* and Bharat Kumar's *An Incredible War* are perhaps the finest examples of the genre and draw on their respective author's access to networks of retired IAF personnel as well as their own military experience to provide rich accounts of IAF operations.³⁰ These books cover IAF operations in painstaking detail, serving as an important foundation upon which the present work is based. In addition to official and non-official histories, autobiographies and official biographies of IAF personnel serve as important sources of often personal information that cannot otherwise be obtained.³¹ Taken together this non-academic corpus of literature represents a substantial body of work. Despite this however IAF literature suffers from two major shortcomings from an academic perspective. First, histories of the service are concerned almost exclusively with the operational history of the IAF. This means that the force's extra-operational history is often marginalised presenting an incomplete historical picture. This genre of writing throws little light on the force's critical role in facilitating the transfer of populations for instance. Second, since most IAF history is written by retired IAF personnel, the training of authors as soldiers rather than scholars becomes apparent in many works. While non-academic IAF histories

²⁸ For official histories see: B. Prasad, (1961); S.N. Prasad, *Operation Polo*, (New Delhi, 1972); S.N. Prasad, *Operations in Jammu and Kashmir*, (New Delhi, 2005 reprint); S. Riza, *The Pakistan Army 1947-49*, (New Delhi, 1977); B. Prasad, *Expansion of the Armed Forces and Defence Organisation 1939-45*, (New Delhi, 1956). For semi-official histories produced by the IAF Warrior Study Cell see: J.P. John and B.S.K. Kumar, *Wing Commander K.K. Majumdar DFC BAR*, (Secunderabad, 2003); T.S. R. Chhina, *Air Marshal Subroto Mukherjee*, (Secunderabad, 2002); P.P. Khandekar ed., *Air Commodore Mehar Singh*, (Secunderabad, 2006); P.P. Khandekar ed, *Dragons Forever: History of No. 6 Squadron*, (Secunderabad, 2006).

²⁹ S.S. Hussain, *History of the Pakistan Air Force 1947-1982*, (Karachi, 1982); P. Singh, *Himalayan Eagles*, (New Delhi, 2007); J. Singh, *Defence from the Skies*, (New Delhi, 2007); S. Sapru, *Combat Lore*, (New Delhi, 2014).

³⁰ R. Chhina, (2006); B. Kumar, *An Incredible War*, (New Delhi, 2007)

³¹ O.P Mehra, *Memories Sweet and Sour*, (New Delhi, 2010); P. C. Lal, *My Years with the IAF*, (New Delhi, 1986); J. Singh, *The Icon*, (New Delhi, 2009); J. Loveday, *RAF and Raj*, (Norwich, 2002); M. Edwards, *Spitfire Singh* (New Delhi, 2016).

serve their stated goals as operational accounts and commemorative works well, they do not address the concerns of the academic historian, which is to locate events in the context of broader shifts, such as decolonisation, that defined the period.

In comparison to the IAF, Indian civil aviation has received almost no attention, both in and out of the academy. Writing on the history of Indian civil aviation is almost entirely limited to the province of political economy. The period before the 1953 nationalisation of airlines is particularly neglected and rarely receives more than a few pages in studies, whose primary concern is the performance of India's nationalised airline companies; Air India International and Indian Airlines.³² A small but significant exception to the absence of work on civil aviation is the presence of two non-academic works on civil aviation in princely India, Anuradha Reddy's *History of Aviation in the Hyderabad Dominions* and Peter Vacher's *History of the Jodhpur Flying Club*.³³ These two books serve to alert us about the understudied third dimension of Indian aviation, aviation in the indirectly ruled Indian princely states. They are also exceptional for their healthy skepticism about the civil-military divide in aviation, which is a key weakness of other histories of Indian aviation. Pushpinder Singh's *History of Indian Aviation*, for instance, sets out to trace the history of both civil and military aviation in India over the course of a century but immediately divides itself into two sections that detail civil and military aviation separately.³⁴ While the belief that civil and military aviation operated in different ways and had relatively little to do with each other characterises nearly all writing on the subject placing books either within the category of

³² P. Rao & G Rao, *Indian Airlines*, (New Delhi, 1997); B.R. Nayar, (1994); A.W. Nawab, *Economic Development of Indian Air Transport*, (New Delhi, 1967); V.B. Singh ed, *Economic History of India 1857-1956*, (London, 1965).

³³ P. Vacher, (2008); A Reddy, (2001).

³⁴ P. Singh, *History of Indian Aviation*, (New Delhi, 2003).

civil or the military aviation, even a cursory study of the subject points to blurred boundaries between the two. Given the extremely limited aviation resources at its disposal, the Government of India had little regard for whether aircraft belonged to the civil or the ‘service’ category when confronted with an emergency. As this thesis will show civil aircraft were constantly pressed into war service while the Indian Air Force was a central part of the government response to civil emergencies such as refugee evacuation.

While this thesis addresses a critical lacuna, it also tells the story of the political transition of the Indian state from colonial rule to independence, from the perspective of aviation. This transition, with its deep implications for understanding modern India, has been the subject of a great deal of academic interest. A number of studies have attempted to explain the ways in which the Indian state was transformed as a consequence of decolonisation, utilising a variety of perspectives. Benjamin Zachariah has traced the phenomenon of decolonisation from the viewpoint of India’s most important politician after independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.³⁵ Faisal Devji has pointed to the importance of the history of political ideas in contributing to the eventual partition of the subcontinent.³⁶ Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper have illustrated the profound impact on the Second World War on South Asia.³⁷ Further, Yasmin Khan and Srinath Raghavan have argued for the need to place the war at the centre of the process of decolonisation.³⁸ Srinath Raghavan has also conducted a pioneering study on Indian foreign policy to show that independent India led by Jawaharlal Nehru pursued a highly sophisticated foreign policy that juggled domestic, regional and

³⁵ B. Zachariah, *Nehru*, (London, 2004); See also: J. Brown, *Nehru*, (London, 1999), S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, (Cambridge, 1976-84).

³⁶ F. Devji, *Muslim Zion*, (London, 2013).

³⁷ C. A. Bayly and T. N Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, (Cambridge, 2005).

³⁸ S. Raghavan, *India’s War*, (London, 2016); Y. Khan, *The Raj at War*, (London, 2015).

international priorities with more success than was previously assumed.³⁹ Daniel Marston has traced the impact of the end of colonial rule in India from the perspective of the Indian army, illustrating the centrality of the army to ensuring a relatively successful transfer of power from British to Indian hands.⁴⁰ Telling the story of political transformation of the Indian state through its engagement with aviation therefore means referencing a more diverse body of writing than the literature pertaining directly to Indian aviation that has been outlined above.

Histories that trace the complex interplay between technology and the Indian state have also informed the present work. Two technologies, railways and nuclear power, are especially relevant to the study of aviation. The history of the Indian railways is arguably the least neglected field of technological history in India.⁴¹ The vast network of railways in India, constructed during the colonial period, in the words of Gyan Prakash, configured the country into a ‘field of technics’ where humans and resources could be mobilised by the state.⁴² The railways not only reconfigured India but expanded the responsibilities of the colonial state transforming it into a government. By ‘forging a link between space and state’ the railways effectively brought modern India into being.⁴³ Aircraft essentially continued to do what trains did, that is transport goods and passengers, albeit with greater speed and flexibility. The two technologies would continue to remain tied to each other in a number of important ways.

³⁹ S. Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, (Basingstoke, 2010).

⁴⁰ D. Marston, *The Indian Army and the end of the Raj*, (Cambridge, 2014).

⁴¹ G.S. Khosla, *History of Indian Railways*, (New Delhi, 1988); H. Mukherjee, *The Early History of the East Indian Railways*, (Calcutta, 1994); S.N. Sharma, *History of Greater Indian Peninsular Railways*, (Bombay, 1990); R. Srinivasa, *Our Indian Railway*, (New Delhi, 2006). Ian Kerr is the author of the most number of works on the Indian railways. I. Kerr ed, *Railways in Modern India*, (New Delhi, 2001); I. Kerr, *Building the Railways of the Raj*, (New Delhi, 1995); I. Kerr, *Engines of Change*, (Westport, 2007).

⁴² G. Prakash, *Another Reason*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000, p 168.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p 160.

Given India's lack of a substantial industrial base, the aircraft industry relied substantially on the railways as a source of skilled personnel. It is no coincidence that Hyderabad state's airline, Deccan Airways, was initially run as a department of the Nizam's State Railway.⁴⁴ Further, the Indian Air Force was highly dependent on railways to transport its ground crews.⁴⁵ In political terms too both aviation and railways were enmeshed in debates around 'Indianisation'. Indian nationalists would lobby for greater Indian participation in the higher management of the railways in the same way as they had for the greater representation of Indians in the air force.⁴⁶ The two technologies would remain interlinked in complex ways for much of the period under discussion as the protection of trains by planes during the transfer of populations between India and Pakistan during partition would show.⁴⁷

Histories of nuclear power in India have also been critical to locating this study in a broader technological field. Jahnvi Phalkey's work on the institutionalisation of nuclear physics in India has important parallels with the story of the aeroplane in India. Like aviation, nuclear science, served to realise the modern state and was in turn fundamentally transformed by the shift from the imperial era to the Cold War.⁴⁸ Nuclear science would also be effectively monopolised by the independent Indian state as part of a broader project of the centralisation of science and technology, which was seen as being too critical to India to be left in private hands.⁴⁹ This was at least partly a consequence of the state's interest in nuclear science for the purposes of national defence in much the same way as the nationalisation of airlines was tied to security imperatives. Itty Abraham has pointed to the ways in which nuclear power

⁴⁴ A. Reddy, (2001), p 67.

⁴⁵ H. Doe, *Fighter Pilot*, (Stroud, 2015), p 169.

⁴⁶ I. Kerr and J. Hurd, *India's Railway History*, (Leiden, 2012), p 36.

⁴⁷ MoD (I), 601/14185/H, R. Singh, *Draft History of the Military Evacuation Organisation*, p 71.

⁴⁸ J. Phalkey, *Atomic State*, (Ranikhet, 2013), p 290.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p 292.

represented more than the sum of its strategic potential through the deployment of the idea of the fetish. Technology was used as a stand in for a ‘scientific temper’ which the state could not easily impart to its populace. Technology was therefore mobilised in an attempt to transform colonial subjects into scientific citizens by an independent Indian state deeply anxious about the absence of modernity.⁵⁰

Aviation in certain ways combines visions of the state for railway technology and nuclear science. As has been seen above Indian politicians were concerned about Indian control of aviation before independence and saw it as a necessary pre-requisite to attain sovereignty. In the period after independence the states reliance on aircraft to resolve a series of crises would only serve to confirm the importance of the aeroplane in the minds of the national elite. Locating aviation in the a ‘field of technics’ whose most prominent representatives were railways and nuclear power contextualises it in a broader process of technological development driven by political transformation, improving existing understandings of both technology and the state.

II. Scope of the Study

This thesis seeks to answer one central question. What can the engagement between the Indian state(s) and Indian aviation reveal about the process of decolonisation? As such it seeks to recover the experiences not only of the colonial and independent Indian states but also the princely states. I contend that control of aviation was closely tied to both securing and legitimating new governments in decolonising South Asia and that the aeroplane offers important insights into the evolution of notions of sovereignty in South Asia. Further, by

⁵⁰ I. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, (New Delhi, 1998), p 20.

locating the politics of the aeroplane in a broader international context in which Indian governments operated, this thesis aims to shed light on the increasingly universal transmission of the nation-state as the sole legitimate entity around which sovereignty could be organised in the new global order that emerged from the Second World War. This thesis therefore is as much about the adoption of new notions of sovereignty in India as it is about the adoption of the aeroplane by a decolonising polity.

This study limits itself to an analysis of Indian aviation. As such it is concerned primarily with the Indian Air Force and airline companies formed in India. Foreign airlines and air forces are not the objects of research here, with a few significant exceptions, despite the fact that their impact on India was significant. This deliberate choice is made for a number of reasons. Indian aviation has received little academic attention, as opposed to aviation in India, which was predominantly Western. Furthermore, as this thesis is an examination of the political transformation of the Indian state, Indian aviation was naturally of the most relevance. Maintaining an exclusively national focus on aviation is more starkly revealing of the international provenance of Indian aviation than beginning with a multinational lens. Indian aviation remained in the period under discussion, and indeed continues to remain, highly dependent on international circuits of aviation. Indian aircraft and aviation equipment would be almost entirely imported from abroad. Foreign personnel would continue to serve in the Indian Air Force and in civil aviation until 1953. Deccan Airways for instance hired a number of Polish pilots and British air hostesses to staff its air fleet.⁵¹

⁵¹ A. Reddy, (2001), p 131.

This work will also concentrate on those facets of aviation that foreground the political transformation of the subcontinent as a result of decolonisation. This is a fine point to make given the statist nature of aviation. Nevertheless given the nearly infinite perspectives from which a history of Indian aviation could be written it is an important point to make. As such the thesis does not undertake a study of a number of themes upon which entire studies could be based. Some examples of such wide topics to which little attention is paid here include the history of air quarantines, air tourism, aerial survey work, air memorialisation projects and aviation archaeology.

While the Indian Air Force is a subject of central interest it is important also to state that this is not meant to be a purely operational history. A number of highly detailed official and unofficial operational histories already cover nearly all the conflicts in this study. This thesis will instead seek to embrace a framework that is reflexive about the axioms of military history. The boundaries between war and peace, combatants and non-combatants and above all social and military history will thus be treated as convenient social constructs rather than rigid discrete categories.⁵² Detailed discussions of military operations undertaken in this study will therefore aim to illustrate the often profound impact of tactical actions on state formation in South Asia.

A number of terms recur in this thesis which need to be defined or to, where necessary, be left explicitly undefined. In her study on the cultural politics of emotion Sara Ahmed has coined the phrase ‘sticky signs’ to describe signs that accumulate ever greater value through

⁵² This is in keeping with calls by several leading scholars in the field for military historians to be more reflexive with their research. See: J. Black, *Rethinking Military History*, (London, 2004), p x; J. Shy, ‘The George C. Marshall Lecture in military history; History and the history of war, 2008’, *Journal of Military History*, 72, pp 1033-1046; M.V. Creveld, ‘Thoughts on military history’, *Military History*, v 18, no 4, pp 549-566.

their repeated association with other words to the point where articulating the sticky sign is also an act of implicitly calling up other associations.⁵³ The term state can potentially act as a sticky sign that evokes a number of other words that are closely associated with it to the point where invoking one means invoking the others including sovereignty, modernity and development. In the context of aviation the state here is defined as being constituted by the Indian central government. In doing so I am aware of prevailing debates about the difficulties of defining the state in the modern context.⁵⁴ Social scientists have long grappled with the difficulty of demarcating the boundary between state and society.⁵⁵ However this task is made relatively easy in the context of aviation since aviation policy was, and continues to remain, within the domain of elite politics centred on the Government of India. There are some indications that the state operates ‘as an idea as well as a system’.⁵⁶ According to Thomas Blom Hansen, for instance, the Indian state is seen by its citizens to embody ‘profane’ systems, such as the police and the bureaucracy, that contribute to their victimisation. Simultaneously however the state is also understood to be a ‘sublime moral entity’ which is imagined to be an entity of immense power that ensures the prevalence of a higher rationality and even justice.⁵⁷ The Indian state thus derives its legitimacy from what Hansen terms the ‘myth of the state’ which combines the state’s everyday institutional practises with imagined notions of its ultimately just and rational nature. While this thesis primarily approaches the state from an institutional perspective, it also seeks to emphasise

⁵³ S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh, 2004), p 93.

⁵⁴ See for instance: J.C. Scott, *Seeing like a State*, (New Haven, 1998); P. Chatterjee, ‘Sovereign Violence and the Domain of the Political’, in Thomas Blom Hansen (eds), *Sovereign Bodies*, (Princeton, 2005).

⁵⁵ T. Mitchell, ‘The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics’, *The American Political Science Review*, 85,1, pp 77-96.

⁵⁶ C.J. Fuller and John Harriss, ‘For an anthropology of the modern Indian state’, in C.J. Fuller and V. Benei (ed), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, (London, 2001), p 23.

⁵⁷ T. Blom Hansen, ‘Governance and myths of the state in Mumbai’, in C.J. Fuller and V. Benei, (2001), p 35.

the extent to which the process of state making, particularly in the context of aviation, was an ideological project in which the state was constituted by more than the sum of its parts.

While defining the state, in the context of high technology, is a relatively simple task defining the sticky terms associated with it is more difficult. Few terms are as closely associated with the state as the term sovereignty. Indeed as a recent study on the subject pointed out the two are conflated so often that it has become necessary to disentangle them analytically.⁵⁸ Despite or perhaps because of its centrality to the state, sovereignty remains a notoriously difficult term to define. Part this difficulty is the sheer multiplicity of sovereignties. Stephen Krasner has laid out a framework that encompasses four different forms of sovereignty.⁵⁹ Westphalian sovereignty is based on the principle of respect for territorial boundaries and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs. International legal sovereignty is tied to the diplomatic recognition of states on the basis of legal equality on the international stage. Interdependence sovereignty refers to the ability of states to effectively police flows of goods and people passing across their borders. Domestic sovereignty is primarily concerned with establishing the state as the highest authority within its own territorial boundaries. Krasner argues that sovereignty in the twentieth century is in fact a form of 'organised hypocrisy' since state behaviours often diverge from international norms in pursuit of narrow national interests.⁶⁰ The four forms of sovereignty contradict each other providing powerful states with opportunities to redefine sovereignty in ways that justify their actions. He suggests that international legal sovereignty is not in fact like chess, a game with fixed rules. Rather it is a

⁵⁸ T. J. Bierteker and C. Weber, 'The Social construction of State Sovereignty', in T. J. Bierteker and C. Weber (eds) *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, (Cambridge, 1996), p 11.

⁵⁹ S. Krasner, *Sovereignty*, (Princeton, 1999), p 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p 220.

set of cultural norms that are often altered, particularly by dominant states, for purposes of expediency.⁶¹

Whereas mainstream studies of sovereignty, such as Krasner's, focus largely on the nation-state, for the purposes of this thesis it is important to conceptualise sovereignty in the colonial context. Achele Mbembe has convincingly suggested that sovereignty in countries that experienced colonialism was closely tied to extreme and often ritualised state violence. He identifies three forms of violence which helped establish 'colonial sovereignty'. Firstly, the founding violence that marked out a space within which colonialism could operate. Secondly, the violence of legitimisation that enabled the colonial state to transmute violence into authority. This violence was vital to silencing older forms of authority and establishing the vocabulary, practises and institutions of colonial rule. The third form of violence was aimed at sustaining colonialism. Inflicted so often on the colonised that it became ritualised and even banal, this form of violence constituted 'the central cultural imaginary between state and society'.⁶² Colonial sovereignty could only be exercised in circumstances where all three forms of violence were simultaneously deployed, forming a 'seamless web'.⁶³ Indian opinion in the years leading to the Second World War certainly saw violence as the foundation upon which colonial sovereignty rested, as evidenced by the Indian insistence on the need for Indian control of the armed forces as a prerequisite for eventual self-rule. The struggle for sovereignty in India therefore was also a struggle for the legitimate authority to exercise of violence. Consequently, in India, like in other decolonising societies, sovereignty was associated closely with violence.

⁶¹ Ibid, p 237.

⁶² A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, (Berkeley, 2001), p 25.

⁶³ Ibid, p 26.

The end of colonial rule saw the emergence of new forms of sovereignty explored later in greater detail through the lens of aviation. It is worthwhile however pointing out some of the distinct characteristics of sovereignty in independent India. Despite its centrality to this thesis as an analytical concept the term ‘sovereignty’ itself was rarely used by Indians in the debates of the period, partially due to the conflation of sovereignty with rhetorical terms such as *Swaraj* (self-rule) and legalistic terms such as dominion status. The most significant exception to this trend however is the invocation of sovereignty in the 1950 constitution proclaiming the establishment of the Republic of India. Adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, the first line of the preamble to the constitution reads:

‘WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN, DEMOCRATIC, REPUBLIC...’⁶⁴

Significantly the constitution invokes the people of India as the fount of legitimacy in a rejection of the colonial sovereignty of the past based on violence. In doing so it embarks on a reconstruction of the sources of the authority of the state in modern South Asia. This is not to deny the immense violence that accompanied the process of state making in twentieth century India, much of which this thesis covers. Rather it is to point to the distinctly socially constructed nature of sovereignty. As Cynthia Weber has argued sovereignty is a social construct.⁶⁵ This becomes especially apparent when considering the mutually referential nature of sovereignty and the state. Weber argues that the modern state refers back to a ‘domestic community’ in order to represent itself as sovereign in the community of states

⁶⁴ Later Amendments would add the words ‘Socialist’ and ‘Secular’ to the Preamble. See: *The Constitution of India*, (New Delhi, 1996).

⁶⁵ T. J. Bierteker and C. Weber, (1996), p 11.

sometimes referred to as the international community. Yet the category of the domestic community is hardly stable. In the Indian case seen above, the Indian constitution claims that the Indian people have constituted a sovereign republic. However the question of who made up the Indian people and who had the right to represent them had not been resolved, nor indeed has been resolved today. Indian Muslims for instance were on the receiving end of the Evacuee property acts that treated them as foreigners by confiscating their property despite ostensibly being citizens of the republic.⁶⁶ By referring back to a domestic community therefore sovereignty is essentially referring back to ‘an alibi of a domestic community’.⁶⁷

There are other challenges to effectively defining sovereignty. David Strang has pointed to the ethnocentric nature of its social construction. Sovereignty based on diplomatic recognition explicitly sought to delegitimise non-Western states in order to facilitate colonial imperialism. States outside the Western political order were liable to be politically degraded until they submitted to colonialism or effaced their own institutions by adopting Westernisation.⁶⁸ Strang’s argument certainly carries weight in the Indian context where writing about sovereignty in the twentieth century is complicated by the existence of a number of semi-autonomous princely states exhibiting varying degrees of sovereignty. The arrival of colonial rule in India led to a ritualised de-legitimation of Indian states placed under indirect British rule. Not only were such states prevented from having independent foreign relations and military policies but they were also subjected to a degrading colonial hierarchy

⁶⁶ V. Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, (New York, 2007), p 129.

⁶⁷ C. Weber, ‘Reconsidering statehood: Examining the Sovereignty/Intervention border’, *Review of International Studies*, 18, 3, p 215.

⁶⁸ D. Strang, ‘Contested Sovereignty: The social construction of colonial imperialism’ in T.J. Biersteker and C. Weber, *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, (Cambridge, 1996), p 44.

aimed at reinforcing their subordination. The deliberate decision to categorise Indian monarchs as ‘princes’ in order to cement their inferiority vis-à-vis the British Queen Empress is perhaps the most obvious example of this. The question of how to approach sovereignty in these indirectly ruled territories, many of whom were major players in the field of aviation, continues to be debated.⁶⁹ Eric Beverly for instance has compellingly argued that the princely states exhibited fragmented sovereignties and ought to be treated as sub-imperial states on par with the colonial Government of India, which itself represented a subordinate state.⁷⁰ Despite this it remains difficult to write about sovereignty in contexts that imperfectly mirrored Westernised notions of the state sovereignty. The nation states that emerged in South Asia in the period after colonial rule are in certain ways representative of the continued domination of ethnocentrist norms internationally. While they are independent, both India and Pakistan are modelled on western European nation-states. Indeed the non-recognition of the sovereignty of several princely states that could have emerged as independent countries by the British government following the end of colonial rule in India is representative of the continued hostility to non-Western authority claims.⁷¹

The greatest difficulty with defining sovereignty however is the danger of reifying what is essentially a contested term. Taking the critiques above seriously and treating sovereignty as a social construct means that attempts to define it must remain provisional. This is especially important since writing about sovereignty as if it does in fact refer back to a ‘foundation or signified is to constitute foundations in the very act of talking about “them”’.⁷² Treating

⁶⁹ See: N. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, (Cambridge, 1987); M. Bhagwan, (2003).

⁷⁰ E. L. Beverly, (2015), p 3.

⁷¹ There were also several other reasons for the decision by the United Kingdom and the United States to not recognise the princely states as independent countries which this thesis will cover in chapter 4.

⁷² C. Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty*, (Cambridge, 1995), p 27.

sovereignty as a given effectively contributes to the discursive processes through which sovereignty is constituted. This necessarily effects understandings of the state, which as we have seen, is closely enmeshed with sovereignty. Treating sovereignty as a set of socially constructed practises through which states constitute themselves means treating the state itself as a social construct that is in constant flux. Thus while the state here, unless otherwise specified, is understood to be the Government of India, governments are understood to be undergoing constant crises of self-definition.

Modernity is another term that was closely interlinked with the state especially in the context of decolonisation. Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed to the ways in which modernity was an attempt to universalise certain specific and indeed ill understood conditions that had briefly prevailed in nineteenth century Europe.⁷³ This work treats modernity as an aspirational reaction to European colonialism in India. It argues that India was the site of not one but several competing modernities during the course of decolonisation which included British, nationalist and various princely ideas on the nature of the future. Modernity, a study of Indian aviation will show, was one of the surest means to strengthen sovereignty and was constructed differently across time and space in the subcontinent depending heavily on material conditions.

‘Development’ was a critical means for different Indian states to acquire modernity. As Benjamin Zachariah has shown development could carry different meanings for different groups which included the British, the Gandhians and a group of Indian nationalists referred to as the ‘modernisers’. He states that development offered these groups a means of arguing

⁷³ D. Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe*, (Princeton, 2000), p 4.

about divergent visions of future progress using a colonial vocabulary based mostly, though not solely, on economics that legitimated their claims.⁷⁴ Itty Abraham stresses the adoption of development across the decolonised world. He points to the complimentary ways in which national development and national security were institutionalised to the point where they have become interchangeable in the present.⁷⁵ Development as such is understood in this thesis to refer to one of the key vocabularies of political legitimation in twentieth century South Asia, tied to notions of future progress, including technological and economic progress, whose meanings could be interpreted differently by different actors.

III. Sources

The research for this thesis has involved consultation of fifteen archives in the United Kingdom and India. It has also relied on a bevy of non-archival sources including newspapers, magazines, journals and websites. Another rich vein of sources which has been drawn on are two previously untapped personal collections belonging to two private collectors.

Three archives have been especially important for the writing of this work; the British Library, the National Archives (United Kingdom) and the Interservices History Division of the Ministry of Defence, Government of India. The British Library and the National Archives predominantly feature sources from the colonial Government of India until Indian independence and the reports of British personnel based in India for the period after this. Several British government officials remained in India after Indian independence, the highest

⁷⁴ B. Zachariah, *Developing India*, (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012).

⁷⁵ I. Abraham, (1998), p 11.

ranking of whom was Lord Mountbatten, Governor General of India from August 1947 to June 1948. Britons based in India after independence including the Governor General, Ambassadors and British staff officers commanding the Indian armed forces dispatched voluminous reports to the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) which represent the most detailed records of events in that decade that have thus far been declassified. CRO files along with files from the India Office Records are critical to reconstructing major events during the period. The Ministry of Defence archive in New Delhi features a variety of files dealing with defence matters of which those involving the Indian Air Force were naturally of the greatest interest. Many of these, including the Operations Record Books (ORBs) of the Indian Air Force, have been previously consulted by authors of both official and non-official histories of the Indian Air Force.⁷⁶ Nevertheless several records in the archive have not been ever previously consulted due to the narrow operational focus of most IAF history writing. As such I have been fortunate to consult untapped files including files pertaining to ‘Operation Radar Gunman’, the IAF operation to end gun running to Hyderabad from Pakistan and ‘Plan Shikar’ the plan for the emergency expansion of the Indian Air Force in 1950. I have also been fortunate to see the unpublished draft history of the Military Evacuation Organisation responsible for the transfer of populations.

This study has not been without its challenges, some of which were never fully overcome. Several key sources have been lost to circumstances. The Operations Record Books of the Indian Air Force, which provide a daily record of the forces activities, were lost during the retreat from Burma in 1942. The papers of the eight major Indian airline companies established between 1932 and 1953 were all lost after the Government of India confiscated

⁷⁶ See for instance: B. Prasad, (1986); R. Chhina, (2007); P. Singh (2007).

them during the process of nationalisation. J.R.D. Tata, the chairman of Air India and Air India International was so outraged by this loss of materials dating back two decades that he set up his own archive to collect materials that remained in the company's possession; the Tata Central Archive. If the present work exhibits a greater focus on the Tata owned airlines, this is largely a consequence of the loss of materials pertaining to other airlines. If the loss of materials represents a key challenge it is one that can be overcome by lateral research that can at least provide the historian with an outline of what the materials might have included. More difficult to resolve however are gaps in the archive caused by the absence of materials in the first instance. Despite a number of efforts it has been impossible to collate precise statistics for certain key events. This thesis thus cannot state with precision how many refugees were evacuated by air during partition and how many civilian casualties occurred during the Kashmir conflict. This is not the first time these important questions have been raised and left unanswered simply because the chaos which accompanied the events discussed did not permit counts to be made.

Despite these challenges this work has also had notable successes uncovering and deploying new sources. This is the first piece of writing to make use of the papers of Air Marshal Thomas Elmhirst, who commanded the Indian Air Force in 1948-9, which are stored at the Churchill Archives Centre at Churchill College, University of Cambridge. The Air Marshal's papers provide new details on the 1947 Kashmir war and are the source of key insights on the calculus of escalation that characterised the conflict. I have also been able to access the previously untapped papers of Air Vice Marshal Harjinder Singh, who rose through from the lowest rank in the IAF to become its second-in-command, from the personal collection of Mr J.R. Nanda, the retired chairman of Avioil Ltd. The secret reports on the RIAF and RAF

strikes of 1946 stored at the Royal Air Force museum have also somewhat surprisingly never been used despite their immense importance for both the history of India and the history of the RAF.

In addition to archival materials I have also drawn on several other primary sources. Newspapers such as the *Times of India* and *The Pakistan Times* provide snapshots of popular nationalist perspectives in India and Pakistan respectively. *Flight* and *The Aeroplane* represent the leading international aircraft magazines of the time while *Indian Skyways*, of which regrettably few copies remain, represented the voice of specialist Indian aviation journalism. The proceedings of Indian legislative bodies and the reports of Government of India committees such as the Air Transport Inquiry Committee help clarify the government position on aviation matters especially on controversial issues such as nationalisation.⁷⁷ Indeed one of the arguments made here is the need to study government committee reports in detail since these often possess an internal consistency that is useful in undermining the grand teleological narratives that academics who are not historians seem willing to embrace without question.⁷⁸ Further, I have also drawn on a number of websites, the most important of which is www.bharat.rakshak.com.

Before closing the discussion on sources it is worth dwelling also upon a different type of source; the image. In accessing the private collections of Miss Anuradha Reddy, a keen aviation enthusiast and author as well as the aforementioned B.R. Nanda I have been fortunate to acquire permission to use a number of aviation related images. The bulk of these are photographs but the collections sometimes feature other images such as posters, calendars

⁷⁷ NMML, G. Rajadhyaksha et al, *Report of the Air Transport Enquiry Committee 1950*, (New Delhi, 1950).

⁷⁸ B.R. Nayar, (2004), p 56.

and advertisements. A critical engagement with images can serve to deepen our historical understanding. This thesis therefore attempts where possible to use images not merely as an ornamental flourish but also as a means to draw historical knowledge.

IV. Structure

This thesis consists of five chapters that are organised both thematically and chronologically. Each chapter is organised around an event, such as the Second World War, and a major theme, such as the expansion of aviation to meet wartime demands. Though a chronological framework is broadly adhered to, this work features a number of overlaps, particularly when events in one chapter had effects on event in another. As such the thesis is organised around five key themes that defined aviation; expansion, partition, escalation, integration and nationalisation.

Chapter I of the thesis entitled ‘Indian Aviation in World War II’ studies the politics of the expansion of the Indian aviation sector during the Second World War with an emphasis on the political actions of the men of the Indian Air Force, the difficulties of expansion and the complex role of the Indian princely states in providing for the war in the air. The Second World War forced the Government of India to give up a script of military control based on what I term a policy of ‘military tokenism’, whereby the IAF was maintained as a token force to pacify Indian opinion. Expansion resulted in the transfer of military control from British to Indian hands. It also gave rise to serious instability that not only turned IAF personnel against the Government of India but also drove a wedge between senior IAF officers, many of whom saw the force as a national institution, and IAF airmen who were angered by more immediate concerns around working conditions, the Royal Indian Navy mutiny and racial

discrimination. For princely India the war would prove to be an opportunity to prove monarchical loyalty to the colonial Government of India and in doing so to strengthen their position in post-war constitutional negotiations. While the war was initially ruinous for Indian civil aviation, it also made the need for a robust civil aviation sector clear, bringing civil aviation closer to the state than ever before.

Chapter II entitled '*Ittehad Mein Shakti* (Unity in Strength): Aviation and the Partition of India 1946-47' looks at both the impact of partition on the Indian aviation sector as well as the role played by aircraft in restoring order during the transfer of populations. Starting with the collapse of the 'Tymms Plan' to regulate Indian airline companies the chapter moves to a discussion of the partition of the colonial Royal Indian Air Force as part of the broader partition of the subcontinent. Contesting Partha Chatterjee's assertions of continuities between the colonial and independent armed forces of India I assert that the reconstitution of the colonial Royal Indian Air Force into the air forces of independent India and Pakistan effectively brought two new air forces into being. This points to significant differences between colonial and independent India at the point of the independence of the latter from the former. The chapter then moves on to study the role of aviation in partition. Confronted by an unprecedented crisis in the shape of mass violence during partition the Government of India would rely on high technology for its survival. Indian aviation played a critical role in partition; by transferring government officials necessary to expedite the previously unplanned for transfer of populations between India and Pakistan and effectively constituting the governments of two new states. Despite strenuous efforts however Indian commercial airlines were ultimately unable to keep up with the steep demands of refugee evacuation forcing the Indian and Pakistani governments to rely on British chartered aircraft to carry out

the mass evacuations dubbed ‘Operation India’ and ‘Operation Pakistan’. Meanwhile the RIAF would be mobilised by an Indian state desperate to reassume a monopoly on violence that had been lost to militia groups engaged in the purging of minorities. High technology such as aviation, this chapter argues, was critical to establishing the authority of the Indian state in a context of violence carried out by sectarian groups that were increasingly difficult to distinguish from the military.

Chapter III, ‘War in Kashmir 1947-48’ points to the central role played by aircraft in initiating, sustaining and eventually escalating the conflict between India and Pakistan. Focusing on the Srinagar airlift, the siege of Punch and the bombing of Palak during the war, the chapter traces the evolving role of the aeroplane in the calculus of escalation. Neither India nor Pakistan wished to escalate the limited conflict in Kashmir into a broader war that might decimate both nascent polities. This chapter argues therefore that Indian aircraft, both civil and military, offered a means to the Indian government to keep the conflict going without necessitating its expansion to other theatres. As the conflict dragged on, however, aircraft would inadvertently play a dangerously escalatory role that has been consistently misunderstood both by contemporaries and by historians of the conflict.

Chapter IV, ‘Of Princes and Planes: Aviation in the Indian States’, studies the role of aviation in the semi-autonomous princely states in the lead up to their integration with India in 1947-8. The chapter takes up the case studies of aviation in three princely states that contributed in different ways to aviation; Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad. Beginning from the premise that princely states invested in aviation to shore up their legitimacy through the construction of what Manu Bhagwan has termed, ‘native modernity’, the chapter points to the very different

constructions of not one but multiple modernities under the princely aegis.⁷⁹ Jodhpur state would achieve prominence for its Maharaja who served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, its major international aerodrome and its role in framing aviation law. Mysore state led by its bureaucracy would pursue a sophisticated agenda of development through the establishment of India's first aircraft factory, the Hindustan Aircraft Limited Factory at Bangalore. Hyderabad would meanwhile establish its own airline, Deccan Airways and also attempt to establish its own air force as part of a bid for independence from India. When its sovereignty was ignored by an Indian government that saw no place for an autonomous Hyderabad, the state would make use of airborne gun runners until its violent integration into India. While all three states broadly sought to legitimise themselves through the modernist aura of the aeroplane, the ways in which they did so could vary radically depending on their political and material circumstances.

The fifth and final chapter of this thesis, 'Towards Sovereign Skies: Aviation in independent India 1948-53' tells the story of Indian aviation from the establishment of India's first international airline, Air India International, in 1948 to the nationalisation of Indian airline companies in 1953. The chapter locates India in an international system of apparently modular nation-states characterised by steep asymmetries in power. India thus found itself negotiating with nations with considerably greater aviation resources such as the United States in negotiations supposedly based on equal terms in which the best it could do was ensure the survival of its international airline. Further, the chapter makes a start at an analysis of the 1950 Bengal crisis and argues that India's military was entrenched by the crisis which made Pakistan into a permanent adversary against which India could define itself. Moving to

⁷⁹ M. Bhagwan, (2003), pp 3-5.

a discussion on the nationalisation of airlines I point to the popularity of an undefined policy of nationalisation that would have highly uneven results across the aviation sector. While much of the debate over the causes of nationalisation has centred on the apparent financial failures of Indian airlines, this chapter argues that seen from the perspective of defence Indian airline companies may well have been victims of their own success. The chapter, and the thesis with it, ends with the reordering of aviation as a near monopoly of the state.

Together these chapters serve as an important corrective to a prevailing imbalance in global histories of aviation. The vast majority of histories of aviation are histories of wealthier, predominantly western states who possess the majority of the world's aviation. Yet few histories have been written about the engagement of the majority of the states of the world, who are predominantly poor and non-western, with aviation.⁸⁰ A study of Indian aviation therefore serves as a case study of the ways in which non-western states engaged with aviation, especially during the process of decolonisation. For states like India, aviation constituted a limited resource with which seemingly unlimited political ends had to be met. The aeroplane had to secure the state, legitimate it and serve as its representative in a new community of modular nation-states. This thesis also addresses a critical lacuna within the emerging field of Indian technology history, highlighting the ways in which aviation was exceptional. As the first academic history of the Indian Air Force it also represents a substantial intervention into the field of military history.

While focused on the aeroplane the present work is also an attempt to tell the story of the political transformation of the Indian state in the 1940's. It is a story that spans over a decade

⁸⁰ For a partial exception see: R.L. McCormack, 'Imperialism, Air Transport and Colonial Development: Kenya, 1920-46, *The Journal of Commonwealth History*, 17, 3, pp 374-395.

and features a vast cast of characters including Indian nationalists, Australian smugglers, British Air hostesses and French diplomats. This thesis makes several interventions into historical debates about the nature of decolonisation. It argues that ruptures rather than continuities characterised the establishment of independent India and offers insights into such themes as development, modernity, sovereignty, aviation law, warfare and commerce. Indeed the interdisciplinary nature of much of this work means that it draws on and carries some relevance for subjects other than history, particularly cultural studies, international relations and political science. By telling the story of India and the aeroplane, I hope to answer David Edgerton's call to regard technologies, even high technologies such as aviation, as 'things' since things are owned, used and have a politics that is revealing of the roots of social power.⁸¹ In doing so this thesis sheds new light on the complex relationship between high technology, decolonisation, and state formation in twentieth century South Asia.

⁸¹ D. Edgerton, *Shock of the Old*, (London, 2006), p xvii.

Indian Aviation in World War II

The outbreak of the Second World War represents a watershed in the history of Indian aviation. The imperatives of the war led to an unprecedented mobilisation of Indian aviation in service of the colonial state. This had the effect of exponentially expanding Indian aviation, both civil and military, during and after the war. The Indian Air Force would grow tenfold from a single understrength squadron in 1939 to ten squadrons equipped with a bevy of the latest aircraft by 1946. Indian civil aviation would fly more routes than ever before during the war and would in the aftermath of the war benefit from the enlargement of aviation infrastructure. Though the crash program of wartime expansion of Indian aviation was not without its problems, it also in important ways, signaled the coming of age of Indian aviation with implications for the eventual transfer of power from British to Indian hands. The war forced the colonial Government of India (GoI) to revise earlier policies that had concentrated aviation, and therefore military control, in British hands. This would lead, albeit in complex ways, to the eventual decision to decolonise India. The war would also leave other significant legacies. Governments in the Indian princely states would press forward with their modernisation agenda and attempt to strengthen their position in constitutional negotiations by supporting the war effort. Indian civil aviation would go through a period of state expropriation before it became clear that state support for the civil aviation sector would be a necessary part of the war effort. Radical political cleavages caused by wartime expansion would divide the personnel of the Indian Air Force. Before discussing the war, however, it is profitable to briefly discuss the state of Indian aviation in the decades that preceded it.

Though the aeroplane had arrived in India as early as 1910, the Indian aviation sector was established, in earnest in the 1930s with the creation of an Indian Air Force and two Indian airline companies, Tata Air Services (TAS) and Indian National Airways (INA).¹ The IAF was created as a concession to Indian opinion, particularly in the legislative assembly, that had been demanding commissions for Indians in the Royal Air Force since the end of the Great War.² This demand was associated with the broader debate on ‘Indianisation’ whereby Indians sought greater military control of the armed forces in India with a view to realising the substance of independence and cutting the high costs of recruiting British personnel.³ In 1926, the Skeen committee, which had been brought into existence to look into the possibilities of Indianising the Indian army officer corps by establishing an ‘Indian Sandhurst’, somewhat exceeded its brief by recommending the admission of Indians into the Royal Air Force. This recommendation most likely sprang from the committees’ two most ardent advocates of Indianisation, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Motilal Nehru.⁴ The RAF’s response to the recommendation was immediate. Arguing that the RAF enjoyed the same status as the British Army in India, as opposed to the Indian Army, Air Vice Marshall Geoffrey Salmond stated that if Indians were given commissions in the RAF they would be required to serve all over the world. Since this would not be acceptable to the Air Ministry he suggested the formation of an ‘Indian Air Unit’ separate from the RAF in which Indians could be commissioned.⁵ In doing so he made use of a set of practices that I term ‘military

¹ P.Singh, (2003), pp 7-9.

² The Indian Army had earlier attempted to set up its own military aviation but the idea had to be abandoned with the outbreak of the Great War. See: C. Richards, ‘First into Indian Skies: The Indian Army, Military Aviation and the creation of the Indian Air Force 1910-32’, in R. Johnson ed, *The British Indian Army*, (Newcastle, 2014).

³ See for instance-CS, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, (New Delhi, 1923), p 2441.

⁴ BL, A. Skeen et al, *Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee*, (London, 1927).

⁵ C. Richards, ‘The Origins of Military Aviation in India and the creation of the Indian Air Force 1910-1932: Part Two’, *Air Power Review*, (2008), 11, 1, p 42.

tokenism' wherein insubstantial concessions to Indian opinion by the GoI were made in the form of segregated military units in order to maintain a pretence of Indianisation while retaining military control. This closely resembled similar measures taken to limit Indianisation such as the infamous '8 unit scheme' in which Indian officers were given commissions but subsequently limited to 8 units.⁶ The Indian Air Force was kept small and in the words of the official IAF history of the Second World War, 'swaddled in the castaway garments of the Royal Air Force'.⁷ More than five years after it came into existence, the Indian Air Force at the outbreak of the war in 1939 consisted of no more than a single understrength squadron equipped with obsolete Wapiti aircraft.

Civil aviation fared relatively better. Tata Air Services and Indian National Airways had to contend with an absence of government investment in aviation infrastructure outside of the militarily important Northwest Frontier region and along the Imperial air routes that connected Britain to the East. As TAS manager Neville Vintcent pointed out, 'government must accept the blame for the lack of any ground organisation apart from on the trans-India route.'⁸ They also had to deal with the fact that the GoI's airline subsidies were few and far between. In these circumstances, the All-Up Empire Air Mail scheme conceived in 1934 came as a great boon to India's commercial airline companies. The scheme aimed at improving the declining competitiveness of Imperial Airways and also preventing 'sectionalisation', or the setting up of independent international airlines in the Dominions. India's airline companies would act as feeders for the scheme and began receiving the

⁶ CS, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, (New Delhi, 1923), p 3364.

⁷ B. Prasad, (1961), p xix.

⁸ *Flight*, 22 March 1934.

substantial subsidies they required to operate profitably from 1938. Unfortunately for them the outbreak of the war brought the scheme to an end and with it their subsidies.⁹

Both civil and military aviation in India showed few signs of growing as a result of government policies. The GoI showed little inclination to provide infrastructure and subsidies to Indian airline companies until imperial interests tied to the All-Up Empire Air Mail Scheme, demanded it. It also did very little to expand the IAF.¹⁰ When the Chatfield committee of enquiry on Indian defence in 1939 recommended the setting up of a modest Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve to protect India's coasts the GoI moved slowly to recruit necessary personnel. The committee's recommendation that the Indian Air Force be expanded to two squadrons was still in the process of being implemented in late 1940.¹¹ While it is true that the GoI subsidised some of the new flying clubs and provided princely states with assistance in setting up aerodromes, this translated into a commitment to aviation that was limited at best. This meant that the foundational institutions upon which the government could base the air defences of India were unpromising. The policies that had stunted the growth of flying in India would prove difficult for the government to reverse despite the imperatives of the Second World War.

⁹ It is very likely the scheme would have needed to be discontinued in the future due to the enormous losses that it had incurred. Nevertheless the war brought it to a sudden end. See-P. Ewer, 'A Gentlemen's Club', pp 75-92.

¹⁰ B. Prasad, (1961), p xx.

¹¹ TNA, T 161/1079, India Office to Treasury, 29 January 1941. The committee also recommended that the total strength of air forces be brought up to ten squadrons in India.

I. India wages air war

The defeats that came to characterise the first years of the Burma campaign were not the result of a total lack of preparation. The GoI began preparing for war on its own frontiers soon after it declared war on Germany in September 1939. The USSR had concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany and many in the Indian establishment believed it was likely that the 'Russian menace' would turn its attention to India.¹² Even if a full invasion did not, as some feared, materialise, the Red Air Force might well strike at the Indian Northwest Frontier which remained undefended necessitating the expansion of Indian air defences.¹³ As early as November 1939 the Government of India established an Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve (IAFVR) and equipped it with obsolescent military and commandeered civil aircraft, primarily for coastal defence.¹⁴

As Indian opinion, long exposed to the inter-war fears of bombing, called more stridently for air defences, Governor General Linlithgow made an extraordinary proposal to Secretary of State Leo Amery in December 1940.¹⁵ The Indian Air Force would be expanded from one to fifteen squadrons over the next two and a half years under 'Plan A' aimed at defending India from the Soviet Union.¹⁶ The plan would make use of whatever aircraft Britain could spare, even if these were obsolete, until better aircraft became available. There were several reasons for the apparent volte-face by the GoI. The situation in Europe had considerably deteriorated with the fall of France, meaning that the RAF was going to be engaged in Europe

¹² TNA, T 161/1079, GoI Defence Department to Secretary of State, 18 May 1940.

¹³ S. Raghavan, (2016), p 43.

¹⁴ BL, IOR/L/MIL/7/19319, Proposed formation of a Reserve and Volunteer Reserve.

¹⁵ For an instance of Indian calls for air force expansion see: CS, *Council of State Debates*, (New Delhi, 1940), p 231.

¹⁶ TNA, AIR 19/159, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief to Air Ministry 26 Dec 1940.

for the foreseeable future. Both Amery and Linlithgow saw that establishing an Indian Air Force would be well received in India. As the Governor General noted, expansion of the IAF would be ‘unmistakably and universally welcomed by Indian opinion.’¹⁷ Moreover, only by expanding the IAF, as opposed to the RAF, could the GoI hope to appeal to Indians to join the air force.

‘Plan A’ however was doomed to fail due to severe shortages of equipment and personnel. Britain could not spare the shipping space required to send India planes, let alone the planes since she was going through a shortage of her own. Even the reduced estimates of personnel that the GoI had requested from the Air Council for RAF training were not forthcoming.¹⁸ Further, a shipment of Tomahawk aeroplanes meant for India from the United States was diverted by His Majesty’s Government (HMG) to Iran.¹⁹ In the absence of any support from HMG the Indian government decided to scale back plans for expansion for 1941 and concentrate on those RAF squadrons that remained in India.

By the end of 1941 the IAF had expanded to only two squadrons and five coastal defence flights of Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve had been formed. Plans were now afoot to form three more IAF squadrons and to expand the IAFVR flights to squadron strength over the next two years in order to form a ten squadron force.²⁰ Two RAF squadrons were sent eastward to defend against Japanese air attacks and the IAF was given the sole responsibility for manning the tumultuous tribal frontier of India’s North West. Very much at the bottom

¹⁷ BL, IOR/L/WS/1/496, Linlithgow to Amery, 22 December 1940.

¹⁸ *Idem.*,

¹⁹ B. Prasad, (1956), p 142.

²⁰ TNA, AIR 23/1973, The Expansion of the Air Forces of India with particular regard to the Indian Air Force (hereafter Expansion..IAF), p 4.

of the order of priority among the Air Forces in India, the IAF was awaiting further expansion when war with Japan broke out.²¹

As the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force (IJAAF) began its first attacks on Burma in the final weeks of December it was confronted by a motley group of air forces- the RAF, the American Volunteer Group and the IAF- all of which it easily outnumbered.²² The desperation of the situation for the Allies can be gauged from the fact that the Karachi and Calcutta Coast Defence flights with their inexperienced crews and outdated machines were ordered into Burma in December 1941.²³ Unsurprisingly allied air forces were forced to retreat in the face of superior Japanese aircraft numbers and the rapid advance of Japanese ground troops on their bases. However the small allied air forces demonstrated great courage in the course of their defeat. The IAF bombing of Mae Haungsaung in Thailand, for instance, is one of the most celebrated events in the history of the force.²⁴ While allied air forces staged a slow fighting retreat, the GoI mobilised all its resources to evacuate refugees from the warzone. Indian National Airways began refugee evacuation in conjunction with the British Overseas Airways Company (BOAC) and KLM Royal Dutch Airways from Rangoon on 23 December 1941, the day after the first air raids in Burma. When the Burma Oil Company sought to evacuate its workers and their families from the Yanangyaung oilfield, INA and TAS along with China National Aviation Corporation and Indian Air Survey and Transport Ltd evacuated 631 people in 13 days. As allied forces were defeated evacuations were

²¹ The term 'Air Forces in India' was used to refer to the collective forces of the RAF and the IAF. Other air forces such as the United States Army Air Force were not covered by this term. They were transferred in 1943 to Air Command South East Asia for better co-ordination with the Americans. In the interests of simplicity however I shall continue to refer to the collective RAF and IAF formation as the Air Forces in India.

²² For the American Volunteer Group see: R. Heiferman, *Flying Tigers*, (London, 1972); J. Toland, *The Flying Tigers*, (New York, 1973).

²³ S. Sapru, *Combat Lore*, (New Delhi, 2014), p 127.

²⁴ R. Chhina, (2006), p 50.

conducted by INA and TAS in conjunction with any available airlines from Magwe and eventually Myiktina. Between the 1 of January and the 9 of May the total number of civilians evacuated by air by all airlines combined stood at 11,210. One INA Airspeed Envoy plane was lost in operations and one TAS Stinson was badly damaged.²⁵

By the middle of 1942 the decision was taken not to commit India's remaining air force squadrons to battle as it became clear that Burma was lost.²⁶ India was now at its most vulnerable with only a single RAF squadron available for the defence of Calcutta. Japanese air power was at its apogee. The IJAAF did not press its advantage however since many of its *Sentais* (units) were in dire need of refitting. In fact the China-Burma front was at the bottom of the list of priorities of IJAAF high command.²⁷ Japanese grand strategy had been aimed at cutting off the road from Burma to China, preventing the Allies from resupplying the nationalist government of China. When this was accomplished the Japanese displayed little inclination to push their already overstretched forces further into India.²⁸ As a result the China-Burma-India theatre was relatively quiet aside from a few raids on Eastern India.

If the IJAAF had relented in India's East, its naval counterpart was more aggressive in India's South. Aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Service were able to launch air raids against the port of Colombo in Ceylon on the 9th and 12th of April 1942. Earlier on the 6th of April IAFVR Flight No. 4 had spotted the fleet that was to bomb Vizagapatam, Madras and Ceylon.²⁹ Luckily for India's bedraggled air forces, the raid on Ceylon was the furthest point

²⁵ TNA, AVIA 2/1490, Gurunath Bewoor to Undersecretary of State, 17 August 1942.

²⁶ TNA, AIR 23/2205, Air Forces in India, March 1942.

²⁷ R.C. Mikesch, *Broken wings of the Samurai*, (Livesey, 1993), p 22.

²⁸ C. A. Bayly, , and T. N Harper, (2005), p 206.

²⁹ R. Chhina, (2006), p 32.

to the West Japanese aviation would advance. As the war in the Pacific heated up, Admiral Ozawa's fleet left the Bay of Bengal, never to return.



Image I: IAFVR Coastal Defence Flight ground crew with Lysander c 1942

The passing of the Japanese air threat however was far from apparent to Air Headquarters (India) [AHQ (I)], as it rushed to shore up India's defences. The IAF was expanded under a new plan aimed at raising ten squadrons including five Hurricane fighter-reconnaissance, one bomber-reconnaissance and four Vengeance light bomber squadrons.³⁰ This was to be achieved by reforming the IAF's coast defence flights into full squadrons. India was reinforced with American and British squadrons in ever growing numbers and an ambitious program was undertaken to field them and to expand the IAF's capacities. India's vast labour

³⁰ TNA, AIR 23/1973, Expansion...IAF, p 5.

force was tapped for the construction of over 240 aerodromes by November 1943.³¹ The Posts and Telegraphs department set up a vast network of telephone and telegraph communications for the Air Forces in India. A balloon branch was formed to set up barrage balloons and officers and men were transferred to the IAF from the army.³² The Indian Observer Corps was expanded and its men were sent to Eastern India to observe Japanese aerial moves. An IAF Meteorological branch was established to help with weather predictions by borrowing personnel from the Indian Meteorological department.³³

Princely India, meanwhile, did its bit for the war. The Nawab of Bhopal and the Maharaja of Jodhpur were both granted honorary commissions as Air Commodores in the RAF for their contributions to the war.³⁴ Indeed, the two monarchs feature prominently in the records of the IAF as they often visited IAF units and did much to promote the IAF in their states.³⁵ In addition to donating great sums of money to the Air Forces in India the princes were also to contribute in a variety of ways such as providing land for airfields and factories and encouraging recruitment. They hoped, through unstinting support for the war effort, to strengthen their standing with the British in what was sure to be a period of post-war political uncertainty.

For civil aviation, initially at least, the war proved to be a disaster. The All-Up Empire Air Mail scheme that had sustained them with subsidies had ended when the war had begun.³⁶ Indian National Airways air routes travelling through Burma were cut. As the state's appetite

³¹ TNA, AIR 23/2205, National Defence Council, 1943.

³² RAFM, AC 71/13/82, Report on the Expansion of the Air Forces in India by ACM R.E.C. Peirse.

³³ TNA, AIR 29/36, 5 Forecast Centre, IAF Jiwani, formed 10 July 1943.

³⁴ TNA, AIR 2/4912, Regarding the regulation of the grant of Honourary Commissions in the RAF.

³⁵ See for instance: TNA AIR 29/481, 1 IAF exhibition unit formed at New Delhi (India) in March 1942.

³⁶ P. Ewer, 'A Gentlemen's Club', pp. 75-92.

for aviation grew, both airlines and flying clubs were pressed into service. Civil airlines were required to carry out a series of tasks for the war effort. They were to carry military freight and passengers, help with repairs, scout routes to the Middle East and also to aid the military in certain forms of specialised training.³⁷ As the war proceeded and the military buildup of 1942 progressed Indian civil aviation was able to call on the resources of the Air Forces in India. Eventually, RAF planes and crews were lent to airline companies to help them continue their services.³⁸ Further, the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DCA) served as a major component of the GoI's war effort, in the air, overseeing much of the remarkable program of base construction that came to characterise the war, as well as, being the primary recruiter and repair source for the IAF at the beginning of the war.³⁹

By early 1943 India had over fifty squadrons either operational or in training, of which the IAF constituted seven. Allied air power made its return to Burma in the First Arakan campaign and the Wingate expedition. The arrival of the Spitfire later that year would lead to the destruction of what little aviation the IJAAF had committed to the theatre.⁴⁰ IAF planes played a small but critical part in operations. Squadron No.6 for instance flew over 1500 sorties during the Second Arakan campaign and took over 16000 photographic prints in seven months.⁴¹ IAF squadrons were tasked with photographic and tactical reconnaissance, dive bombing, and psychological warfare. They were used in some instances later in the war to drop salaries for tribal levies fighting the Japanese.⁴² One of the key functions of the IAF was

³⁷ J.R.D. Tata, 'The story of Air Transport', *The Journal of the Royal Aeronautical Society*, 65, (London, 1965), p 10.

³⁸ AVIA 2/2412, Director of Civil Aviation (India) to Director General of Civil Aviation (Air Ministry), 21st November 1942.

³⁹ TNA, AVIA 2/1490, Gurunath Bewoor to Undersecretary of State, 29 July 1943.

⁴⁰ R.C. Mikesch, (1993), p 23.

⁴¹ TNA, AIR 23/3426, History of the Royal Indian Air Force.

⁴² For an instance of the last see: MoD (I), 601/9621/H, ORB No.8 Squadron, 28 Oct 1945.

to wreck Japanese supplies and communications and it did this with some efficiency. Japanese forces caught in the open were liable to be strafed and Japanese troops learned to avoid exposed paths and travel by night. Flying Officer K.V. Nair who was taken prisoner by the Japanese noted, 'When there was open ground to be crossed they took immense pains to go around it and sometimes marched four to five miles extra.'⁴³ This did not stop the IAF from attacking the cattle trains, elephants and boats of the Japanese to deny them food, transport and beasts of burden.⁴⁴ Significantly IAF squadrons would see very little air-to-air combat. This was partly because most IAF squadrons went into action from late 1943 onwards, when the IJAAF was well past its prime. The IAF was also not equipped with the latest allied fighter, the Supermarine Spitfire, until October 1944. When an IAF squadron was finally equipped with Spitfires it was confined to covering landings at Ramree and defending Calcutta, both situations in which Japanese aircraft were unlikely to be encountered.⁴⁵ From 1943 the nature of the war had steadily begun to shift from one aimed at defending Indian bases from Japanese air attacks to one where aircraft's primary role was to support ground actions.

It is worth emphasising here, not just the unprecedented nature of the mobilisation that the GoI was undertaking, but also the extent to which the China-Burma-India front was witnessing a transformation in the way Allied forces fought. Roads were virtually non-existent in the jungles of Assam and Burma, and maintaining lines of supply was extremely difficult. The Japanese army had used this to its advantage when, early in the war, it had concentrated on cutting off roads resupplying Allied armies before defeating them in detail.⁴⁶

⁴³ RIAF Journal, Dec 1945, pp. 17-20 cited in R. Chhina, (2006), p 227.

⁴⁴ MoD (I), 601/9616/H, ORB No. 1 Squadron, 5 March 1944.

⁴⁵ MoD (I), 601/9621/H, ORB No. 8 Squadron, 3 March 1945.

⁴⁶ W. Slim, *Defeat into victory*, (London, 1972), p 45.

The Allied counter to this tactic took the form of concentrating on supplying surrounded forces from the air. For the GoI this meant committing to a new highly technologized war. If India was to field the RAF, IAF and United States Army Air Force (USAAF) it would not only have to play to its great strength embodied in its vast pool of 'unskilled' labour but also address its serious weakness in terms of skilled labour. In 1943 the size of the Air Forces in India continued to grow even as the supply of skilled personnel to man them diminished, making personnel shortages a key characteristic of the war years.

As the IAF grew in size it became necessary to regulate it more carefully. The Inspectorate General of the IAF was formed in February 1943 to 'inspect the IAF units... and advise on policy for the development and conditions of service of the Indian Air Force.'⁴⁷ It would, among other things, suggest the creation of a maintenance organization for the IAF once the war ended and would point to the need to keep a large number of RAF pilots and crews in the IAF in order to spare Indian personnel for more advanced training.⁴⁸ As 1943 wore on and personnel shortages continued to plague the Air Forces in India, the RAF turned to recruiting Indians. Under the new 'substitution' scheme the RAF would recruit Indian Air Force personnel to man twenty percent of vacancies in non-operational units. Doing so, somewhat ironically, reversed the key argument for the formation of the IAF advanced by the RAF leadership that a separate Indian air force was necessary since Indians could not hold posts in the RAF.⁴⁹ Five Indians were to be recruited for every four RAF vacancies 'to guard against loss of operational efficiency'.⁵⁰ Predictably this was a recipe for

⁴⁷ TNA AIR 23/5310, Report on work, 9 February 1943.

⁴⁸ *Idem.*,

⁴⁹ This position had already been significantly undermined by the induction of two dozen Indians into the RAF in Britain during the Battle of Britain. See for instance-G. Russell, *For King and another Country*, (Ifracombe, 2010).

⁵⁰ TNA, AIR 23/1973, Expansion...IAF, p 9.

demoralisation and may go some way to explain some of the post-war disturbances that were to rock the RAF.

By 1944 the balance in the air had shifted almost totally in favour of the Allies. When Japanese troops attacked Imphal and Kohima they did so without air cover and support. The first great Allied victories against Japan in Southeast Asia were remarkable for a lack of air-to-air engagements. In these circumstances IAF squadrons with their focus on ground attack and reconnaissance played a signal part in the battles.⁵¹ After the battles of Imphal and Kohima the Japanese army began its own long retreat through Burma. Most of the newly minted units of the IAF would go into action that year against the retreating enemy with impressive results.

⁵¹ See for instance- MoD (I), ORB No. 1 Squadron, 18 May 1944.



Image II: A Hurricane from No. 1 Squadron being prepared for operations at Imphal in 1944

On 12th March 1945, the IAF received the prefix ‘Royal’ from His Majesty the King Emperor. By any measure, the force had performed well in trying circumstances. Its air and ground crews had fought on from the first months of the war in the East until the end, when pilots from an Indian squadron were given the honour of escorting Lieutenant General Numata, head of the Japanese delegation to Rangoon to attend the surrender ceremony.⁵² At the end of the war the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) could boast 1 Distinguished Service Order, 22 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 1 bar to Distinguished Flying Cross, 3 Air Force Crosses, 2 Orders of the British Empire, 7 Members of the British Empire, 5 British Empire Medals, 45 Mentions in Dispatches and 285 *Jangi Inams* (War prizes).⁵³ The RIAF of 1945 fielded

⁵² S. Sapru, *Combat Lore*, (New Delhi, 2014), p 546.

⁵³ R. Chhina, (2006), p 236.

several of the latest aircraft and could claim to have matured with the experience of frontline combat. For the entirety of the war it had also shouldered the responsibility of operations on the Northwest Frontier. Perhaps the most impressive of the RIAF's achievements was its expansion from a single squadron force of 16 officers and 269 airmen in 1939 to a nine squadron force that in July 1945 included 1638 officers and 26,900 Other Ranks.⁵⁴ It had flown over 16000 sorties in 24000 operational hours, a major feat given the difficulties that it had been forced to contend with.⁵⁵

Casualty figures for the RIAF in the Second World War are difficult to confirm. A report titled 'History of the IAF' published in 1945 lists 688 killed, 367 wounded, 3 POW's and somewhat enigmatically, 231 as 'died in the field'.⁵⁶ Rana Chhina lists 711 dead using data from the Commonwealth Graves Commission though this figure also takes into consideration casualties until 1947, the official end of the war period according to the commission.⁵⁷ A perusal of Official Record Books of IAF squadrons indicates that most casualties among aircrew occurred from accidents rather than from enemy action.⁵⁸ Most casualties occurred on the ground among the IAF's enrolled followers and ground crews, and disease can be inferred to have been among the main causes of death given the unhealthy conditions prevailing on the front.

With the war over, a squadron of the Indian Air Force was dispatched to Japan to serve in the occupation force. IAF Squadron No. 4 would serve in the occupation of Iwakuni

⁵⁴ B. Prasad, *Expansion of Armed Forces and Defence Organisation*, (New Delhi, 1956), p 153. This figure does not include the 13,727 enrolled and 24,469 non-enrolled Indian followers since they were shared between the RAF and IAF.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p 117.

⁵⁶ TNA, AIR 23/3426, History of the Royal Indian Air Force.

⁵⁷ R. Chhina, (2006), p 236, 318.

⁵⁸ See for instance: MoD (I), 601/9616/H, ORB No. 1 Squadron, 9 June 1944.

principality, not far from Hiroshima.⁵⁹ IAF units in India in the aftermath of the war would, like much of the military in India, be rocked by a series of disturbances, mainly about poor working conditions, which will be returned to. For civil aviation, the end of the war was a boom period characterized by an abundance of aircraft, infrastructure and skilled personnel. For civil as for military aviation, the war had proven to be a watershed and there would be no returning to the pre-war days when Indian civil aviation's survival was questionable. The Indian states had played an important part in the air war and their rulers doubtless hoped that the loyalty they had displayed in the course of a war, during which the GoI had faced so much political opposition, would strengthen their position in whatever constitutional negotiations followed it.

Some of the difficulties that the IAF confronted persisted to the end of the war and beyond. Though the expansion goal for the IAF had been reduced from fifteen to ten squadrons, growth had been consistently slow. The tenth squadron of the IAF, had only been formed after the war on 1 December 1945.⁶⁰ In its attempt to mobilise all the aerial resources at its disposal, the GoI had expanded the IAF with little regard for the cause of Indianisation. Thus IAF squadrons in addition to having failed to expand to meet relatively modest goals, had also failed to fully Indianise. A large portion of the force continued to be drawn from outside of India. IAF Squadron Nos. 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 drew personnel from other Commonwealth air forces.⁶¹ In the instance of Squadron No 8, for example, an entire flight was drawn from the RAF.⁶² In addition to expanding relatively slowly and also failing to Indianise completely, the Indian Air Force was also afflicted by dependence on the RAF for training, administration

⁵⁹ R. Singh, *Post-war Occupation Forces: Japan & South-east Asia*. (New Delhi, 1958), p 125.

⁶⁰ J.J. Halley, (1988), p 524.

⁶¹ Doe, (2015), p 163.

⁶² MoD (I), 601/9621/H, ORB No.8 Squadron, 16 November 1944.

and above all maintenance organisation. The force to emerge from the war was thus highly imbalanced and likely to face serious difficulties in the absence of British assistance for several years. The problems that plagued the force; slow expansion, incomplete Indianisation and imbalanced organization can all be traced back to a serious manpower shortage. As a subsequent section will argue the manpower shortage was a consequence of a series of complex factors that can be traced back to the colonial structure.

II. Constraints on the Expansion and Indianisation of the IAF

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the GoI was forced to commence a great mobilisation of its resources for what would be its first air war. India had earlier come close to waging total war during the First World War when the government had raised troops for no less than five theatres.⁶³ However the outbreak of the Second World War placed demands of a different magnitude on the GoI. What differentiated the mobilisation of the Second World War from the first was the high reliance of the state on sophisticated systems of high technology to wage war. The Government of India was called upon to manage complex technical systems for all three of its armed forces. The Indian army required skilled technicians for its signals, armoured and engineering branches.⁶⁴ The Royal Indian Navy needed technicians for its growing fleet and for the network of coastal facilities that came to dot India's shores.⁶⁵ Needless to say the IAF depended on skilled personnel for its air and ground crews and for the battery of facilities necessary to enable air warfare such as

⁶³ V. Kant, *If I die here who will remember me?*, (New Delhi, 2014), overleaf. Indeed Vedica Kant has identified no less than 11 theatres in which Indian troops served between 1914 and 1918 including China and Russia.

⁶⁴ K. Roy, (2013), p 151.

⁶⁵ S. Singh, (1986), p 27.

meteorologists, balloonists and observers. While in earlier conflicts India had been able to rely on one of the world's largest caches of military labour, the GoI was confronted with enormous difficulties recruiting the skilled labour necessary to wage increasingly technologised warfare. The IAF in particular was confronted by severe shortages of trained manpower. This led to severe difficulties in the expansion of the force and also had an adverse impact on Indianisation. Recruitment remained a significant issue in the IAF till the end of the war and beyond it.

When the war broke out the key constraint on expansion for the IAF was the lack of access to equipment. As seen above the GoI had proposed to increase the size of the IAF to fifteen squadrons in 1940 under 'Plan A', even if this meant equipping the force with obsolescent equipment.⁶⁶ The British Empire however was at the time engaged in Europe and North Africa, meaning that no equipment could be spared for the expansion of the IAF. When the GoI acquired a shipment of Tomahawk planes they were diverted to serve in Iran by HMG.⁶⁷ As relations with Japan grew more strained, India was not only denuded of aircraft which were then deployed further East, but the IAF was de-prioritised as the RAF in India moved to consolidate what assets it continued to have in the country.⁶⁸ Through 1942 as the Japanese advanced through Burma and new RAF squadrons arrived in India there was nearly no expansion. The situation however began to change in 1943 as IAF units were equipped with Hawker Hurricanes and Vultee Vengeances. Throughout the war the IAF would sit low on the list of priorities of AHQ (I) for the provision of equipment. As production of aircraft increased in the United States and Britain in 1944, even the IAF was provided with the latest

⁶⁶ TNA, AIR 19/159, Governor General to Secretary of State, 22 December 1940.

⁶⁷ B. Prasad, (1956), p 142.

⁶⁸ TNA, AIR 23/1973, Expansion..IAF, p 5.

aircraft, the Supermarine Spitfire.⁶⁹ If anything, by the end of the war the shortage of aircraft had turned into a glut. As equipment became plentiful towards the end of the war the problem of manpower, which had always been a big one, grew increasingly stark.

Personnel shortages emerged as a problem that the IAF was never to fully surmount during the war. As early as 1940 shortages of manpower were holding back expansion.⁷⁰ The trouble with recruiting personnel in the right quantity and of the right quality only deepened as the war proceeded. J.M. Spaight noted in *Aeronautics* magazine in June 1941 that ‘There is little surplus of skilled labour in the country and competing demands of industry militate against the satisfaction of the needs of the IAF.’⁷¹ Indeed the competing demands of the other services also militated against the needs of the IAF as the army and navy rushed to recruit whatever skilled labour that they could. Inter-service rivalries for skilled manpower were heavily weighted in favour of the army, which by virtue of being the largest force, fielded the majority of recruiters.⁷² The IAF also found itself at a disadvantage on the questions of commissions and salaries. Educated recruits who could get commissions in the army were not likely to join the ranks in the IAF. Moreover, the pay rates of the IAF remained uncompetitive in the early years of the war when most of the best recruits were still available.⁷³

Recruitment was also affected by the fact that knowledge of English was a requirement for serving in the IAF. While the English speaking middle classes had protested the most loudly about their exclusion from the higher echelons of the armed forces they were also highly

⁶⁹ V. Seth, *The Flying Machines*, (New Delhi, 2000), p 30.

⁷⁰ B. Prasad, (1956), p 143.

⁷¹ *Aeronautics*, Vol. 6, No. 3, June 1941

⁷² TNA, AIR 23/1973, Expansion...IAF, p 6.

⁷³ TNA, AIR 23/2205, National Defence Council, 1943.

conflicted about the war's political objectives.⁷⁴ The shortage of skilled recruits proficient in English led the IAF to consider the possibility of hiring semi-skilled labourers who did not know the language. The measure, however, was not eventually taken by the IAF since if nothing else the knowledge of English was necessary to work with the many RAF personnel who were posted in IAF squadrons with no language training.⁷⁵ IAF personnel shortages were also exacerbated by the 'substitution' scheme in which IAF personnel were sent to serve in RAF units stationed in India. The scheme with its discriminatory logic of posting five IAF men for every four RAF posts no doubt contributed to the existing manpower shortages in the IAF.

The IAF vigorously tried to overcome the recruiting problems that it faced. An Indian Air Training Corps (IATC) was formed in 1942 to foster interest in the IAF in universities.⁷⁶ Aimed initially at training ground crews the emphasis shifted to turning out cadets who could join the air crews as it became clear that university students were not interested in entering the ranks. To attract cadets the IATC offered a uniform and a twenty rupee stipend. By the end of the war over twenty-four universities and their affiliated colleges had IATCs.⁷⁷

New efforts were made to co-ordinate with the recruitment directorate in order to limit the army's control of the recruitment process.⁷⁸ Attempts were also made to improve pay and conditions of work though these were not necessarily always successful. Serious personnel shortages in the IAF led Air Headquarters (India) to embark on the largest recruitment

⁷⁴ B. Prasad, (1956), p 181.

⁷⁵ *Idem.*,

⁷⁶ TNA, AIR 23/2205, National Defence Council.

⁷⁷ R. Chhina, (2006), p 81.

⁷⁸ TNA, AIR 23/1973, Expansion...IAF, p 18.

propaganda drive among the three Indian armed services.⁷⁹ Significantly the campaign would include an appeal to Indian patriotism through slogans like ‘Make India Strong’.⁸⁰

When recruits did volunteer for service they did not always successfully complete their training. Wastage was a serious problem in the IAF as recruits were not always capable of mastering required skills.⁸¹ When they were re-mustered or assigned to lower level trades than they had volunteered for recruits naturally felt they had been wronged. To counter the unacceptably high rate of wastage, the IAF set up Recruits Educational Wings in 1943, aimed at bringing recruits up to standard. Another equally worrying source of wastage was the loss of aircrew that the IAF suffered as new planes replaced old ones. When Squadron No. 8 converted from Vengeances to Spitfires, for instance, it lost all the ‘backseater’ co-pilots who had earlier flown in the two-seater aircraft. As training with the Spitfires continued it was found that many pilots who had earlier been able to handle the slower Vultees would not be able to fly Spitfires.⁸²

The single greatest factor retarding recruitment was the sheer suddenness of the demand for expansion. For years the GoI had done nothing to expand the IAF. As late as 8th February 1940 the Defence Secretary to the GoI, C.M.G. Oglivie was arguing against a modest resolution that Indian youth ought to receive air training and that the government set up an ‘auxiliary air force’ to be ‘manned by Indians’. Some of the Defence Secretary’s arguments such as the lack of skilled labour in India and the duration required to carry out technical training carried weight, but many of Oglivie’s other claims revealed the GoI’s unwillingness

⁷⁹ For a detailed analysis of the propaganda campaign see: A. Deshpande, (2016).

⁸⁰ ‘Make India Strong’ poster, <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/Galleries/History/WW2/Ads/IAFPoster.jpg.html>- accessed 17/6/15

⁸¹ See for instance: TNA, AIR 29/ 616, No 2 EFTS Jodhpur, July 1943.

⁸² MoD (I), 601/9621/H, ORB No.8 Squadron, 9 October 1944.

to carry out limited efforts such as the setting up of more training schools or even the spending of more money on the IAF. Oglivie claimed that “anything in the way of a vast expansion..., would be absolutely beyond our powers to attain.”⁸³ He asserted that for the moment India did not require a training school nor would it be economic to send Indian pilots to participate in the Empire Air Training Scheme, which had begun in Canada. Less than a year later Governor General Lord Linlithgow was writing to the Secretary of State, inquiring about the possibility of expanding the IAF to fifteen squadrons. Violent fluctuations in policy such as this one were not likely to be conducive to planning air force expansion in any country, let alone one where skilled personnel were likely to be scarce. Responding to the Defence Secretary in the assembly, M.S. Aney presciently observed that, ‘..invasion during the present war will be possible when the British Air Force and other air forces which are in Europe will be so engaged that the British government will not be able to divert any of them for the defence of this country.’ He went on to argue that the absence of a serious effort on the part of the government to tackle the issue showed that ‘it is certainly not preparing the country for dominion status or any kind of autonomous condition at all.’⁸⁴

The IAF was forced as such to take a series of desperate measures to deal with its manpower shortage. Six of ten IAF squadrons had to accept a significant foreign component to remain functional.⁸⁵ Recruitment standards had to be reduced and stop gap measures such as Recruit Education Boards had to be relied on. As physical standards were reduced the IAF was eventually forced to sanction the provision of milk to bring recruits close to the necessary physical standard.⁸⁶ There is also reason to believe that less savoury methods were used to

⁸³ CS, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, (New Delhi, 1940), p 213.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p 216.

⁸⁵ Doe, (2015), p 163; Also see for instance: MoD (I), 601/9621/H, ORB No.8 Squadron, 12 November 1944.

⁸⁶ *Air Force Instructions*, (New Delhi, 1940), p 75.

recruit IAF personnel. Several IAF General Duties tradesmen, for instance, were told that they would fly planes in the IAF despite the fact that they were by definition ground crew personnel.⁸⁷ The slow and incomplete expansion would have a series of destabilising political consequences especially once India was plunged into the uncertainties of the post-war political settlement. Eventually, both expansion and the lack thereof were to have significant political consequences within the RIAF in keeping with a broader trend of political unrest that had pervaded all of Indian society including the military.

III. Three cases of politics in the IAF

Instability accompanied the rapid passing of military control from British to Indian hands and provided men in the armed forces with opportunities for new forms of politics. Royal Indian Air Force men participated in a variety of political actions as the war progressed. These could range from tacit alliances of convenience with the colonial state to outright challenges to British rule. In this section I shall analyse three acts of politics in the IAF; nationalist resignations, the Lashio incident and the post-war RIAF strikes. In doing so I will show that IAF men located their political choices along a wide spectrum of politics that included the binaries of loyalty and nationalism and also transcended them.

The expansion scheme prompted by the war had sparked severe concerns at Air Head Quarters (India) that the educated, English speaking recruits, being inducted into the IAF, would be drawn ‘entirely from the Middle classes of India’ whose ‘political ideas are uniformly radical.’⁸⁸ This assessment, as events would prove, was not entirely mistaken.

⁸⁷ A.L. Saigal, *Birth of an Air Force*, (New Delhi, 1977), p 171.

⁸⁸ TNA, AIR 23/1973, Expansion...IAF, p 16.

Nevertheless the incidents of overt nationalist protest in the IAF are remarkable for their rarity as well as for the moderate manner with which they were dealt. In an extraordinarily polite letter aircraftsman Chandra Dutt tendered his resignation to the Officer Commanding, Vizagapatam Air Force Station on 18th August 1942. The letter, written following the commencement of the nationalist 'Quit India' movement earlier that month, said that India and Britain were now at war, albeit a non-violent one. Dutt claimed that he was willing to 'fight for the Emancipation (sic) of India from British clutches through non-hatred and grim determination.'⁸⁹ He also complained about the racial discrimination in the IAF, especially with regard to the differences between British and Indian Other Ranks. The next day Dutt was summoned by the Officer Commanding with whom he had a talk, in which while he refused to retract his resignation, he 'deported himself in a respectable and correct manner'.⁹⁰ After refusing to obey repeated orders to return to parade and continue his duty, Dutt was placed under close arrest. Group No, 225, in which Dutt served sent a signal to AHQ (I) suggesting that Dutt be discharged since no useful purpose would be served by a court martial which would likely make Dutt into a nationalist martyr. Air Headquarters (India) quickly agreed and on 28th August 1942, ten days after he resigned, Dutt was discharged.

Chandra Dutt's resignation is indicative of the moderate policy that the IAF had taken towards nationalist dissidents within its ranks. Even more striking is the decision taken after the Dutt case that, whereas IAF men who declared themselves to be enemies of Great Britain should immediately be discharged, 'The greatest care must be taken by Station and Unit Commanders to ensure that advantage is not taken of this policy by personnel, who do not,

⁸⁹ TNA, AIR 23/5423, Chandra Dutt to AHQ (I), 18th August 1942.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Officer Commanding, Vizagapatam to 225 Gp HQ, 21 August 1942.

in fact hold such political views'.⁹¹ AHQ (I) was thus not only prepared for overt nationalist protest but appears to have treated it in a manner that was least likely to make a spectacle of it. It would also appear that government authorities were closely surveilling IAF personnel to prevent any nationalist dissidence. Aircraftsman Kapila Chatterji's letters detailing how he intended to subvert other Indian Air Force men, at Lahore's Walton Air Force Station, in service of the nationalist agenda were intercepted by the Criminal Investigation Department in August 1943. He was then quietly discharged from the force.⁹² Like Chandra Dutt, he had earlier tried to resign but had been persuaded not to by his immediate superior Flying Officer Harjinder Singh. Resignations by IAF men on nationalist grounds appear to have been exceedingly rare and AHQ (I) quietly discharged personnel who sought to leave the IAF on grounds of ideology. This was the result of several factors. Nationalists of the overt variety were not likely to either join or be selected for the armed forces. Conflicting political beliefs were responsible for at least some of the lacklustre recruitment figures that concerned the IAF. Air Headquarters (India) was also keen to avoid any major confrontation that might fracture already tense relations between British and Indians in the Air Forces in India, leading to the establishment of a more moderate policy.

Whereas AHQ (I) could easily anticipate overtly nationalist actions and deal with them quickly, the internationalisation of the Second World War provided new opportunities to other brands of politics in the IAF. As seen above, the IAF remained unprepared well after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. When Japanese forces invaded Burma in January 1942 the IAF's sole full strength squadron was sent into action in a desperate bid to

⁹¹ Ibid. AHQ (I) to AHQ (Bengal), All Gps and Independent Units, 1 September 1942.

⁹² A.L. Saigal, (1977), p 181.

stem IJAAF attacks. Despite stiff resistance by the allied air forces, the IAF's No. 1 Squadron was forced to fall back to Lashio in Northern Burma by early February. With allied morale at its lowest ebb, IAF men began to lose faith in Britain's willingness and ability to defend India. Many of No. 1 Squadron's personnel, such as its commander Squadron Leader Karun Krishna 'Jumbo' Majumdar, had served in the IAF since its establishment, in the hopes that the force would grow into a credible military service, laying the path to eventual Indian independence. When it appeared that the British would not be able to fulfil these hopes, Majumdar turned to other sources. Squadron Leader Majumdar requested and received an audience with Generalissimo Chiang Kaishek on 18th February 1942 where he formulated an audacious plan. Instead of retreating towards India when the Japanese inevitably advanced on Northern Burma, No. 1 squadron would retreat to Nationalist China. There it would serve as the nucleus of an 'Indian Volunteer Group' (IVG), modelled on Claire Chennault's famous 'American Volunteer Group', using American aircraft to expand to ten squadrons and attack the Japanese from bases in China.⁹³ Indian airmen could be airlifted from India to train in China as part of the new IVG. Majumdar believed that if Chiang Kai-shek could secure permission for this plan from President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States then 'Mr Churchill would have to fall in line with the scheme.' After the war India would have 'a readymade IAF-which would otherwise take twenty years to build up.'⁹⁴ Elaborate plans were made for an eastward retreat of the bulk of the squadron while a small number of personnel were to head back to India where they could re-raise No. 1 Squadron. The Lashio

⁹³A.L. Saigal (eds), (1977) p 142.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p 139

scheme was only called off after General Wavell visited No. 1 squadron at Lashio, to congratulate IAF men on their stellar service and assure them of the expansion of the force.⁹⁵

The Lashio incident is revealing of the opportunities that the increasing internationalisation of the war offered to IAF men. Colonial military control could be subverted or even reversed when dealing with allied powers that did not always share Britain's perspective on colonialism. It is unclear whether the scheme thought out at Lashio had much chance of succeeding. Indeed, given the secrecy it entailed, it is impossible to verify whether the Lashio incident occurred at all, since only one source, the biography of then Flight Sergeant Harjinder Singh, recounts it. Nevertheless, it is possible to locate General Wavell and Generalissimo Chiang Kaishek at Lashio on the 26 of February, the date Singh claims Wavell persuaded IAF men to return to India, lending some credence to his claims.⁹⁶

Singh's account wrongly attributes the eventual expansion of the IAF to ten squadrons to the Lashio incident, though the April 1941 expansion plan had anticipated this and the earlier 1940 'Plan A' had called for a fifteen squadron IAF. There is also no doubt that Singh's biography written in independent India, sought to provide IAF actions in service of the empire with a patriotic gloss. Yet Singh's account is important not only for its emphasis on the opportunities of internationalisation but for its explicit statement of one of the key reasons for IAF loyalty to the colonial state. At least some IAF men, such as Majumdar and Singh, felt that the expansion of the IAF was key to securing India's sovereignty and saw the war as a clear opportunity for realising this goal. 'Loyalty' to the colonial state in these circumstances could be understood to in strictly provisional terms, both by IAF personnel

⁹⁵ Ibid., p 148

⁹⁶ V. Schofield, *Wavell*, (London, 2006), p 255.

and the colonial state which actively appealed to patriotic sentiments in recruiting propaganda.

The wartime colonial script of military control rested on a subterranean understanding between the colonial state and the men who came to serve in its air force. No longer able to rely on military tokenism to ensure colonial control, the Government of India portrayed service in the IAF as, among other things, a patriotic duty. At least some elements of the IAF accepted this contention, treating loyalty to the colonial state as provisional to the achievement of the substance, if not the form, of Indian sovereignty. The imperatives of wartime expansion, especially in the field of Indian Air Force recruitment, had moved the Government of India to champion the old Indian nationalist contention that Indianisation of the armed forces would place India on the path to self-rule. As the Lashio incident revealed at least some IAF personnel in turn saw loyalty to the colonial government as being provisional on the expansion of the Indian Air Force. Thus while overt nationalism of the sort advocated by Chandra Dutt was not permitted in the IAF, Air Headquarters (India) covertly signaled its willingness to not only permit but encourage Indian patriotism in return for wartime support. To be sure Indian recruits joined the IAF for a bevy of reasons ranging from prospects of post-war employment to the glamour of flying. Air Chief Marshall P.C. Lal who joined the IAF as a nineteen year old claimed, only half-jokingly, that he enlisted in the IAF instead of the Indian army because he felt that the blue IAF uniform would be more attractive to women.⁹⁷ It is also true that the colonial government kept propagandistic slogans like 'Make India Strong' deliberately vague. Nevertheless the IAF indisputably made patriotic appeals part of its recruiting propaganda and at least some IAF men saw their service

⁹⁷ P.C. Lal, (1987), p 12.

as a means to nationalise the Indian military. The IAF was not entirely exceptional in this regard since, as Daniel Marston has shown, the Indian army also recruited large numbers of Indian officers with nationalist sympathies who saw wartime military service as a route to eventual Indian independence.⁹⁸

As the war dragged on however a script of colonial military control based on a beneficial, if provisional, alliance between IAF personnel and the colonial state began to fray in the face of greater political radicalisation of IAF personnel, culminating in 1946 in a wave of Royal Indian Air Force strikes. The 1946 RIAF strikes occurred in a context of unprecedented indiscipline in both the British and Indian armed forces in India. The Royal Air Force would launch the largest mutiny in British military history, which saw some 50,000 RAF personnel revolt against the slow rates of demobilisation. The non-violent mutiny began at Drigh Road, Karachi on 19 January 1946 and spread to an estimated 60 RAF units from the Suez to Singapore.⁹⁹ It would see RAF personnel, usually under the rank of Flight Sergeant, refuse to perform services as part of a 'strike' protesting against the slow rates of repatriation. The strike spread so far and so fast in a short period of time, thanks in large part to the collusion of RAF wireless signals operators who sent out the strike calls to distant air stations, that it proved impossible for the British government to quell by force. Despite calls by Conservative politicians in the United Kingdom for the men to be 'crushed', only a few RAF 'ring leaders' were arrested and HMG acceded to the demands of the strikers for demobilisation by the end of the month.¹⁰⁰ Significantly the lenient treatment meted out to RAF strikers would be

⁹⁸ D. Marston, (2014), p 115.

⁹⁹ D. Childs, *Britain since 1945*, (London, 2001), p 20.

¹⁰⁰ J. Loveday, (2002), p 98.

identified by both contemporary observers and historians as a cause for the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Mutiny, which occurred only a month later.¹⁰¹

The Indian army and the Royal Indian Navy would also experience widespread destabilisation. In February 1946 Royal Indian Navy ratings at Bombay would mutiny against harsh working conditions. Like the RIAF, the RIN had also been expanded tenfold to meet wartime needs and much like the RIAF, RIN personnel by the end of the war were deeply disillusioned by their poor treatment. The mutiny would rapidly take on political undertones, melding with wider civilian unrest against wartime measures eventually engulfing over 10,000 RIN men and 66 ships and naval establishments throughout the country. The revolt was eventually put down by force, resulting in the deaths of several RIN ratings and perhaps over 250 civilians.¹⁰² The Indian army for its part had gone through a major revolt during the war when a little under 20,000 captured Indian army soldiers joined the *Azad Hind Fauj* (Indian National Army) which fought on the Japanese side.¹⁰³ When the rebels were brought back to India to stand trial for treason at the spectacularly ill-chosen location of the Red Fort in November 1945, where less than a century before Indian rebels had fought against British rule, they were feted as patriots and became the centre of a nationwide series of anti-colonial protests.¹⁰⁴ The famed Red fort trials resulted in the commutation of sentences of men accused and a reduction in the number of trials to be conducted following a large scale nationalist outpouring in support of the *Azad Hind Fauj*

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p 100; D. O. Spence, 'Beyond Talwar', p 501.

¹⁰² The exact number of RIN personnel and civilians killed during the mutiny is unknown due to its widespread nature and also because no real count was taken at the time by the GoI. A. Deshpande, (2016), p 60.

¹⁰³ P.W. Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, (Ann Arbor, 1993), p 1. I use the Hindi term *Azad Hind Fauj* instead of the English 'Indian National Army' here to avoid confusion with Indian National Airways with which it shares an abbreviation.

¹⁰⁴ G. Singh, (2014) p 158.

men that left hundreds dead and threatened to plunge India into civil unrest.¹⁰⁵ Both the Red Fort trials and the RIN mutiny played a role in destabilising British military control in India.¹⁰⁶ Both have also received substantial attention from historians, though the same cannot be said of the RIAF strikes, which were entangled with them in a number of complex ways.¹⁰⁷

The first serious strike by RIAF personnel occurred at RAF Station Headquarters, Vizagapatam on 6 January 1946. The trouble began when about a hundred RIAF Indian Other Ranks (IORs), seconded to the RAF refused to attend a concert on 2 January, citing its high costs. The next day the RIAF men were abused as ‘silly bastards’ and ‘black brethren’ by their British officers.¹⁰⁸ When the RIAF men went on hunger strike to protest racial abuse on 4 January they were forced to parade at the double in the afternoon heat during which many of them collapsed from exhaustion. On 6 January the IORs refused to report for duty. Indian army troops were called in to arrest the strikers who were held for three days. An RAF Group Captain was dispatched to inquire about Indian grievances and managed to allay these enough for IOR’s to return to work by 8th February. The Station CO was subsequently transferred and several RAF officers were reduced in rank for their inept handling of the affair. No action was taken against the ‘strikers’ despite the fact that they had flouted military rules.¹⁰⁹

The first RIAF strike at Vizagapatam coincided with the first RAF ‘strike’ at Bamrauli. The RAF Bamrauli strike of January 1946 was the first recorded instance of an RAF strike in the post war period , though an earlier RAF protest over a lack of beef at the Elementary Flying

¹⁰⁵ D. Marston, (2014), p 133.

¹⁰⁶ S. Sarkar, *Modern India*, (New Delhi, 1983). pp 418-425.

¹⁰⁷ See for instance: P.W. Fay, (1993); G. Singh, (2014); D. Marston (2014); A. Deshpande, (2016).

¹⁰⁸ J. Loveday, (2002), p 154

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p 157.

Training School had been put down by Jodhpur states troops.¹¹⁰ This was significant because it contradicts the implication by both contemporaries and historians, that the RIAF strikes could be collapsed with RAF strikes. A signal from Air Headquarters (India) tallying the ill effects of the RAF strikes later in January 1946 warned that, ‘Already their example is being followed by the RIAF.’¹¹¹ More recently Daniel Spence has, somewhat puzzlingly, referred to RAF and RIAF personnel going on strike at Drigh Road, Karachi.¹¹² This despite the fact that the source he uses to argue about common action between RAF and RIAF personnel, an essay by Norman Harding, makes no mention of the latter.¹¹³ While the RAF strikes no doubt influenced the RIAF strikes, it is important not to overstate the degree of this influence. RIAF strikes do not neatly follow in the wake of the RAF strikes. Some RIAF strikes, such as the 6 January Vizag strike, preceded the major RAF strike action begun at Mauripur on 19 January 1946. Moreover, the Vizag strike does not appear to have been linked in any way with the Bamrauli strike with which it coincided. While major RAF strikes lasted from 17 to 27 January, RIAF strikes, as shall be seen, occurred in sporadic bursts throughout the year.¹¹⁴ Moreover, RIAF personnel made use of a protest method that very clearly set them apart from their British colleagues; the hunger strike. From the Vizag strike onwards, RIAF men would routinely refuse food as a means to express their grievances. If British personnel were ‘skilled civilians in uniform’ drawing from the arsenal of industrial protest to dissent against poor working conditions then RIAF men were deploying methods gleaned from the arsenal

¹¹⁰ TNA, AIR 29/616, ORB No 2 EFTS Jodhpur, 7 November 1945.

¹¹¹ RAFM, X003-6159/001/001, ‘A Brief History of events associated with disaffection and “strikes” among personnel in RAF units, South East Asia Command’, p 16.

¹¹² D.O. Spence, ‘Beyond Talwar’, p 501.

¹¹³ N. Harding, ‘Odd Events: In 1945-6 and now’,

<https://stayingred.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/odd-events-labour-1945-63.pdf>, accessed 17/4/2017

¹¹⁴ D. Duncan, *Mutiny in the RAF*, (London, 1998), p 32.

of nationalist and even Gandhian protest.¹¹⁵ A subsequent chapter will argue that the post-war period saw the militarisation of Indian society. It also, as the RIAF strikes illustrated, saw the unprecedented politicisation of the Indian military. Perhaps the most damning evidence that the RAF strikes were not as closely linked to the RIAF strikes, as is often implied, is the fact that there were no instances of combined strike action by Indian and British personnel. When for instance RIAF Indian Other Ranks came out on strike at the same time as RAF British Other Ranks at Mauripur station on the 23 of January 1946, the latter were quick to distance themselves from the former claiming they ‘had not incited the IORs to strike and also that they (BORs) were not in sympathy.’¹¹⁶

The RIAF strikes had multiple causes, nearly all of which can be traced back, albeit in complex ways, to the hasty wartime expansion of the force. These included grievances over low pay and working conditions, racial discrimination occasioned especially by ‘substitution’ of RIAF personnel into RAF units and sympathy for the Royal Indian Navy mutineers. Some of the first strikes occurred at Trichinopoly and at the 228 Group where RIAF personnel demanded more rapid demobilisation. They also sought better leave conditions and demanded more railway concessions.¹¹⁷ A more serious wave of strikes broke out at Bombay, Jodhpur, Cawnpore and Allahabad in response to the RIN mutiny in late February 1946. In Bombay the rumour that RIAF men might be called upon to bomb the RIN sailors set off serious concerns and resulted in a peaceful laying down of tools and a refusal to work.¹¹⁸ Peaceful strikes in which RIAF men refused to combat RIN mutineers, occurred even at

¹¹⁵ N. Harding, ‘Odd Events: In 1945-6 and now’, <https://stayingred.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/odd-events-labour-1945-63.pdf>, accessed 17/4/2017.

¹¹⁶ RAFM X003-6159/001/002, ‘The Story of the Mutiny at “notorious” Mauripur’, p 2.

¹¹⁷ RAFM X003-6159/001/001, p 12.

¹¹⁸ RAFM X003-6159/001/002, Bad effect of RIN mutiny, p 4.

stations as distant from the scene of the RIN mutiny as Kohat in the North West Frontier Province and Madras.¹¹⁹ These seemingly exaggerated fears might well have been justified given the fact that RIAF planes had been used against Indian troops who had fought alongside the Japanese in the Second World War, precisely to demonstrate the costs of disloyalty.¹²⁰ Air Marshal Roderick Carr informed Lieutenant General R.M.M. Lockhart, the commander put in charge of confronting the RIN mutineers at Bombay, that he could only rely on RAF squadrons in case it became necessary to sink RIN vessels since RIAF units throughout India were in the midst of a 'sympathetic strike'.¹²¹ While this extreme measure did not ultimately prove necessary it is an indicator of the extent to which British military control in India had been hollowed out.

RIAF strikes were uniformly devoid of violence and usually consisted of a mix of labour grievances and 'mainly political' complaints.¹²² One of the largest strikes, the RIAF strike at Rangoon is indicative of this. When 140 personnel of the No. 2 Forward Equipment Unit (F.E.U) refused to work on 23 February they put forward a series of demands that were by then common; faster demobilization, higher pay and better working conditions. As a unit that was forced to work side by side with the RAF the airmen of the FEU also made a series of demands for more equal treatment. These included equal rights and an equal distribution of duties. When the men were assured that their demands would be taken into consideration, provided that they first returned to work, they assented to do so on 28th February.¹²³ Like nearly all other RIAF strikers, the Rangoon men couched their mutiny in the language of

¹¹⁹ M. Edwards, *Spitfire Singh* (New Delhi, 2016), p 283; J. Loveday, (2002), p 102.

¹²⁰ See for instance: MoD (I), 601/9616/H, No 1 Squadron, 3 June 1944.

¹²¹ RAFM X003-6159/001/002, Position in Bombay improves, p 3.

¹²² *Idem.*,

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p 5.

industrial protest rather than military mutiny and refrained from violence. This lack of violence in the RIAF strikes, even those like the Rangoon strike which coincided with the RIN mutiny, is perhaps best explained by the fundamentally different social composition of the RIAF. The highly technical nature of air force work required higher qualifications than those required for entry into the RIN and this conceivably exercised a restraining influence on RIAF personnel. Moreover, as I have contended above, RIAF personnel while no doubt influenced by RAF 'strikes', had already begun using strike actions as a means of expressing dissent as early as 2 January 1946, with some success. Finally it can be argued that the strikes were prevented from lurching into violence by the presence of a larger number of Indian officers in the RIAF in comparison to the RIN. As Daniel Spence has shown in the RIN case, vessels commanded by Indian officers were less likely to mutiny violently.¹²⁴ In the RIAF case, NCO-level personnel, like Harjinder Singh, could serve as a bridge between both British and Indians and between officers and men.

A grave cause for concern in the IAF was the degree to which the force itself was fragmented on the lines of rank. When Wing Commander Mukherjee, the highest ranking Indian officer visited RIAF men striking in Delhi for better pay since 15th February he was greeted with hostility. If the avowedly communist *People's Age* newspaper is to be believed, Mukherjee was unpopular with the men for opposing increases in their increment and was seen as a pro-establishment figure. The newspaper further alleged that Mukherjee threatened the men with 'reprisals, prison, beatings and the rest' to no avail. It was only after repeated entreaties from Congress leader Asaf Ali, and another more popular Indian officer that the men resumed work on 21 February. Increasingly, the divisions between high ranking officers and airmen

¹²⁴ D.O. Spence, 'Beyond Talwar', p 499.

was playing out in public, in a series of newspaper articles. *People's Age* ran articles praising the discipline of the strikers and lambasting Wing Commander Mukherjee for justifying British policies.¹²⁵ The 'Indiscipline and Discontent' of the ranks of the IAF was criticized in the pages of the *Bombay Sentinel*. The paper claimed that the need for armed forces discipline at a time when the nation was subject to cleavages on political and religious lines was of the utmost importance, and that while the government was considering increases in pay, service was of higher importance than pay.¹²⁶ An anonymous 'high ranking officer' interviewed by *The Evening News of India* stated that India would soon have its national government and its national army and in these conditions it was imperative that discipline be maintained. Blaming the 'insidious propaganda' on 'misguided and misinformed individuals' he went on to ask whether it was not a great pity that the men who had built up the IAF and 'are at the top of it are being maligned by their own countrymen'.¹²⁷ Cleavages on the lines of rank were also increasingly taking ideological undertones, with communist newspapers supporting RIAF strikes and Congress politicians like Asaf Ali urging patience. This was in keeping with the increasing tension between the Congress Party and the communists that resulted in a number of violent confrontations between the two parties from 1946 onwards.¹²⁸ Indeed the split between nationalist officers and communist ranks recalls the RIN mutiny where the Communist Party had supported the mutineers while the Congress had called on them to surrender.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ PC (JRN), *People's Age*, 6 October 1946.

¹²⁶ PC (JRN), *The Bombay Sentinel*, 11 July 1946.

¹²⁷ PC (JRN), *The Evening News of India*, 23 June 1946.

¹²⁸ See for instance; ToI, 30 January 1946.

¹²⁹ J.M. Meyer, 'The Royal Indian Naval Mutiny', pp 46-69.

The clash over working conditions, racial discrimination and pay reveals a growing gap between high ranking officers, who were prone to taking a longer term view about the need to establish the IAF as a strong national institution, and the ranks for whom this view was symptomatic of a leadership that had no sympathy for their more immediate needs. Harjinder Singh, because of his somewhat distinct position as an officer who had risen from the lowest ranks of the IAF, emerged as an intermediary between the upper echelons of the IAF and its ranks. At a meeting with the Air Officer Commander-in-Chief, Air Forces in India Air Marshal Sir Roderick Carr, Singh suggested a series of measures to combat disaffection among the ranks. He concluded that the airmen were of the 'right type' and needed encouragement from senior Indian officers. The lack of promotions, partly as a result of racial discrimination in mixed units, for Indian Non-Commissioned Officers had caused a breakdown in the chain of command. Further, he asserted that Indian officers 'had ignored the needs of the Indian airmen very badly' and would need to pay more attention to them. Singh also called for measures for greater racial equality including the raising of pay for Indian airmen which had fallen well below what their RAF counterparts received for the same work.¹³⁰

The RIAF strikes of 1946 had a complex series of causes. The struggle against racial discrimination and poor working conditions could and did turn into a conflict between ranks and officers whose agendas had, with the end of the war, begun to diverge. Though not as destabilising for the GoI as the Red Fort trials or the RIN mutiny, the RIAF strikes revealed the high degree to which the state was losing control of the armed forces which it had

¹³⁰ PC (JRN), 'Important points raised by Sq. Ldr. Harjinder Singh for discussion with AOC-in-C', 23 June 1946.

expanded with such difficulty. The RIAF strikes do not, however, lend themselves to an easy nationalist reading since they also witnessed hostile exchanges between high ranking Indian officers and airmen. Both sides, at different times, claimed that the other was anti-national. In many instances the RIAF strikes indicate a challenge to the tacit understanding between the state and parts of the RIAF; that loyalty would lead in the long term to the substance of independence. In a sense the imminence of independence by 1946 had outstripped the older argument for loyalty. The military script that had worked for the government during the war was showing signs of fraying in the face of the more radical politics that animated the RIAF strikes in 1946. The RIAF strikes also hint at the difference in perspective on racial discrimination. Whereas higher ranking officers either do not seem to have experienced the same levels of racism as the men, or did so but took the long view, the men sought more immediate redressal for their experiences of institutional and overt racism.

The wave of RIAF strikes did not end in 1946, so much as they became regular incidences. AHQ (I) evolved efficient methods to deal with these. As late as October 1947, a month after India attained independence, RIAF non-combatant personnel at Cawnpore went on a hunger strike to protest their poor pay and rations.¹³¹ Demobilisation in the RIAF may have contributed to the reduction in strikes as many personnel would shift from the RIAF to the civil aviation sector. The RIAF strikes, coming alongside other acts of indiscipline in both the British and Indian military in India, signaled the extent to which the Government of India could not rely on military force to remain in power, making the eventual transfer of power

¹³¹ *ToI*, 25 October 1947.

inevitable. Rapid IAF expansion had been necessary for winning the war but also served to rapidly erode British military control in India.

IV. Constraints and opportunities for Civil Aviation

Whereas the war was a period of great growth for the IAF, it was a time of adversity for Indian civil aviation. Though the war was a difficult period for India's airlines they played a small but important part and emerged from the war into a post-war period of great promise for the civil aviation sector. The war itself saw airlines run more routes to more places than before and helped establish the indispensability of civil aviation.

The first major detrimental effect of the war on civil aviation was the end of the Empire Air Mail Scheme. This cut Indian National Airways and Tata off from an important source of revenue that had for the first time made flying in India a profitable venture.¹³² Then with the retreat from Burma in 1942, INA lost major sections of its air routes.¹³³ Civil aircraft were put under state control and helped in the evacuation of thousands of refugees from Burma, and as the situation deteriorated in the West, from Arabia as well. Tata airlines carried out survey work to find an air route to the United Kingdom through Oman and Saudi Arabia and its planes helped at the new school for camouflage at Pune.¹³⁴ As the war progressed INA and Tata airlines were tasked with delivering military freight and vital passengers to various parts of the country. Thus INA for instance was made to operate services on India's North

¹³² NAI, 133/17/37/G, Empire Air Mail Scheme-General Note.

¹³³ TNA, AVIA 2/1490, Gurunath Bewoor to Under Secretary of State, 17 August 1942.

¹³⁴ R. M Lala, *Beyond the Last Blue Mountain: a Life of J.R.D. Tata* (New Delhi: 1992), p. 106.

West Frontier province from Lahore to Quetta and in the East from Calcutta to Dinjan.¹³⁵ Since civil aircraft were now dedicated to military communications there were serious difficulties in moving supplies to flood affected parts of India in 1942, a task normally carried out by civil aviation. The North India Flying Club, Karachi Aero Club, Bihar Flying Club, Bombay Flying Club and Madras Flying Club too began Army co-operation duties for war preparation. The Flying clubs of Hyderabad and Jodhpur, both princely states, were turned over to the RAF as Elementary Flying Training Schools.¹³⁶ Many members of the flying club were recruited into the IAFVR when it was established.

The Directorate of Civil Aviation served the war effort in a number of ways. It released aircraft to serve as light aircraft and trainers from its aircraft pool, which was a collection of aircraft that it maintained for the GoI.¹³⁷ At the beginning of the war the DCA, was responsible for the training of pilots for the Air Forces in India and was running training courses for the IAF as late as 1943 when it handed over training facilities at Guindy to Headquarters, South East Asia. Similarly it ran a civil Aviation Repair Establishment which was eventually transferred to the Department of supply to rationalize the war effort.¹³⁸

The GoI had realised the need for civil aviation to help with the war effort as early as 1941 when it had planned the establishment of two Civil Air Transport Units (CATU). The CATU's were to help with the transport of mail, freight and passengers in the country's hinterland to aid civil aviation.¹³⁹ Though the plan did not translate into action, resulting in severe shortages of air transport during the Japanese invasion of Burma, the GoI did try to

¹³⁵ AVIA 2/2412, Aircraft for Civil Aviation purposes in India.

¹³⁶ *Idem.*,

¹³⁷ TNA, AVIA 2/1490, Gurunath Bewoor to Under Secretary of State, 17 August 1942.

¹³⁸ *Idem.*,

¹³⁹ BL, IOR/L/WS/1/496, GoI to Secretary of State, 29 March 1941.

supplement its civil aviation resources through appeals to its British counterpart. When this failed, the Indian DCA asked for and received aircraft from the RAF, which by now was keen that certain Indian routes such as those from New Delhi to Calcutta be operated daily by civil aviation aircraft to aid with the prosecution of the war.¹⁴⁰ As the war continued the availability of aircraft for airline companies grew along with the number of air routes that they were operating. Though the war was initially not beneficial for commercial airline companies, the vast schemes of airfield construction and the needs of the war led to an unprecedented increase in the density of air routes they could operate. New aerodromes at places like Jiwani and Jorhat allowed them to penetrate further into the subcontinent and older aerodromes such as the one at Trichinopoly were reactivated for civil aviation use. The regularity and number of services also grew thanks to the demands of the war. Indian National Airways alone ran four different routes at least twice a week by 1944.¹⁴¹

When the war ended, civil aviation had opportunities for growth that would have been difficult to conceive of before the war. A large number of aircraft, personnel and aerodromes were suddenly available. The story of the expansion of civil aviation at the end of the Second World War is the subject of a following chapter. Here it is worth emphasizing that though the war was indeed a difficult time for civil aviation, it also saw an entrenchment of flying that was without precedent in Indian history. As the war continued civil aviation was increasingly backed by the RAF and tasked with flying more routes to more places. Though the war's effects on civil aviation were initially of a highly constraining character, its irreversible consequences in important ways made civil aviation indispensable.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, AVIA 2/2412, Aircraft for Civil Aviation purposes in India.

¹⁴¹ TNA, AVIA 2/1490, M.D. Bhansali to Undersecretary of State, 7 August 1944.

V. The contributions of the Indian States to the war in the air

A subsequent chapter will make a detailed study of the princely contribution to aviation. Nevertheless the story of Indian aviation in the Second World War would be incomplete without a brief discussion of the important part played by the Indian princes in the effort. The princely engagement with the aeroplane was an old one dating back to 1911 when the Maharaja of Patiala had become the first Indian to own an aircraft.¹⁴² The Nizam of Hyderabad had contributed funds for the establishment of an RAF squadron that was to bear the name of his state in the Great War.¹⁴³ In the 1930's the Indian princes had played a part in the establishment of civil aviation by setting up flying clubs and aerodromes in states such as Bhopal, Jodhpur and Hyderabad. When the Second World War broke out the princes made financial contributions to the war in the air. These could vary from small donations such as Sirmur state's 50,000 Rupees towards a Vickers Valentia to the extraordinary 100,000 Pounds paid by the Nizam of Hyderabad for one of three RAF squadrons he was sponsoring.¹⁴⁴ Mysore would become the site of India's first, and for a considerable period of time only, aircraft factory with the establishment of Hindustan Aircraft Limited. The factory was nationalised by the GoI early in the war and later handed over the United States Army Air Force to produce a number of aircraft including Harlow trainers, Curtiss Hawk fighters and Vultee Vengeance dive-bombers.¹⁴⁵ Several princes chose not only to contribute financially to the war but also to volunteer for it themselves. The Nawab of Bhopal and the Maharaja of Jodhpur, both of whom rose to the honourary rank of Air Vice Marshall in the

¹⁴² *Flight*, 23 December 1910.

¹⁴³ *Flight*, 27 June 1940.

¹⁴⁴ NAI, 8740/229/40/AIR, Donations by princely states.

¹⁴⁵ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 205, Walchand to Madhav Rao, 6 February 1942.

RAF, were highly visible during the war and played an active part in promoting the Air Forces in India.¹⁴⁶ At least one royal, Prince Paljor Namgyal of Sikkim state died in an air crash while serving in the IAF.¹⁴⁷

While a full survey of the contribution of the princely states to the war in the air is not possible here, the case of India's largest princely state, Hyderabad, is illustrative of the number of ways in which monarchical governments aided the war effort. The state of Hyderabad, under Nizam Asaf Jah VII, won the title of 'Faithful ally' for its contribution to the British Empire's wars. During the Great War, the Nizam had contributed towards the founding of an RAF unit, Squadron No. 110. During the Second World War, the Nizam paid one hundred thousand Pounds for the establishment of a Royal Air Force squadron in October 1939. In June 1940 he sent the Crown fifty thousand Pounds for the establishment of another squadron.¹⁴⁸ This brought the total number of squadrons contributed by the Nizam to three, the highest number of squadrons paid for by any Indian princely state and second in all of India only to the combined donation of four squadrons by the entire populace of Madras state.¹⁴⁹ RAF squadrons No 110, No. 152 and No. 253 were designated the Hyderabad squadrons and bore specially designed crests as a tribute to the Nizam and his state.¹⁵⁰

Besides providing money for squadrons Hyderabad state contributed in a number of ways. Hyderabad aerodrome, one of India's most advanced, was transferred to the DCA and later the RAF to run as an Elementary Flying Training School.¹⁵¹ The Kachiguda training centre

¹⁴⁶ TNA, AIR 2/4912, India: Regulations regarding the grant of honorary commissions in the RAF.

¹⁴⁷ MoD (I), 601/9616/H, ORB No 1 Squadron, 20 December 1941.

¹⁴⁸ A. Reddy, (2001), p 97.

¹⁴⁹ P. Singh, 'India's Gift Squadrons',

<http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/history/ww2/1203-gift-squadrons.html>, -accessed 19 June 2015

¹⁵⁰ A. Reddy, (2001), p 103.

¹⁵¹ See: TNA, AIR 29/616, No. 1 EFTS Secunderabad.

for flight trades also provided ninety *Mulki* or Hyderabad tradesmen to the IAF. These latter contributions were a result of the sophisticated aviation infrastructure that Hyderabad state possessed dating back to the years before the war. Employees of the Nizam State Railway gathered Rupees 1,77,280 to pay for a Spitfire aeroplane.¹⁵²

In addition to showering the Nizam with titles and praise His Majesty's Government also gifted him with a curious memento, the ruins of a downed enemy warplane. The Messerschmitt 109 in question had been shot down over the English channel and was sent to Hyderabad state both as concrete proof that Hyderabad's money was vanquishing the enemies of empire, as well as, in order to raise more funds through fetes and exhibitions that the plane's display was likely to occasion. The Deccan Chronicle advertised the plane as a 'masterpiece of devilish Nazi ingenuity'. The 'King Kong of Germany gone criminally insane' was displayed at Secunderabad for a fee, which was treated as a contribution to the war effort.

Indian princes contributed to the war in the air in a variety of ways. Their loyalty to the Empire was underpinned by a number of political considerations in addition to imperial pressure and martial tradition. Hyderabad is but one example of this, as the state moved to strengthen its position in post-war constitutional negotiations while simultaneously upholding its traditional role as the British Empire's 'Faithful Ally'.¹⁵³ Indian states saw wartime loyalty as a means to legitimate their regimes in both the eyes of their subjects and the paramount power. Contributions towards the war in the air especially were seen as imparting a sheen of modernity to regimes accused of being archaic by both nationalists and

¹⁵² A. Reddy, (2001), p 97.

¹⁵³ Hyderabad's title as the GoI's 'Faithful Ally', dated back to the nineteenth century. See: F. Hastings, *Our Faithful Ally, the Nizam of Hyderabad, a historical sketch*, (London, 1865)

the British.¹⁵⁴ Indeed the rush to pay for aircraft in Indian states was so great that the Political Department had to find new ways to convince smaller rulers that their contributions were at least as glamorous as their neighbours.¹⁵⁵ The princely hope that their commitment to the war would reap political rewards would be betrayed by HMG, whose imperial interests would long outlive the passing of the Indian princely order, a subject discussed in a later chapter. Nevertheless the Second World War in certain ways represented the last hurrah of the monarchical order.¹⁵⁶ With their nationalist opponents in jail, the princes enjoyed a period of harmony with the paramount power not seen since the Great War. Accusations that the native regimes lacked modernity were severely dented by these contributions to a total war in which the aeroplane remained the preeminent marker of modernity. In the circumstances the princes could with some justification look with optimism to a post-war scenario in which they would play a leading part in Indian politics.

VI. Conclusion

The Second World War was a watershed moment for aviation in India. As the colonial state mobilised the full measure of its resources to meet the needs of the war it transformed from one that constrained aviation to one that invested in it extensively. The GoI did continue to subordinate India's interests to those of Great Britain's especially at the beginning of the war. However when the war came to India's borders, imperial and Indian strategic interests converged. Radical changes that the GoI had first proposed at the outbreak of the war in

¹⁵⁴ B. Ramusack, (2004), p 270.

¹⁵⁵ NAI, 8740/229/40/AIR, Donations by princely states.

¹⁵⁶ I. Copland, (1997), p 187.

Europe were not only accepted but encouraged by HMG. This was to have a series of complex consequences.

The most obvious change in government policy was that towards Indianisation and expansion of the armed forces. When Indian political opinion demanded the cessation of total British control of the armed forces in the inter-war years, a policy of military tokenism was adopted. Under this policy Indian control of the military would be delayed through the transfer from British to Indian hands of smaller segregated formations such as the Indian Air Force. Indianisation would be delayed indefinitely and many in the Indian legislatures had come to realise that it was never meant to be completed.¹⁵⁷ When in 1940 it became clear that Britain would not be able to aid India in case of war, the GoI made a radical decision. Not only would the Indian Air Force be Indianised but it would be expanded further than any of the proposals made by pre-war committees, all of which the GoI had largely ignored. This plan came too late however and as Britain fought for its survival, India's modest needs were ignored. Only after the Japanese entry into the war did IAF expansion begin in earnest. However the speed of expansion meant that the IAF was plagued with equipment and personnel shortages. The Indian Air Force would remain the smallest of the Air Forces in India throughout the war. Though the IAF performed well in the war, it would continue to be tasked away from air combat and received new equipment last. Though Indians contributed to hundreds of 'Spitfire funds' the IAF would ironically be the last air force in the China-Burma-India theatre to receive the Spitfire aeroplane.¹⁵⁸ When Squadron Leader Arjan Singh was asked in October

¹⁵⁷ CS, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, (New Delhi, 1940), p 1076.

¹⁵⁸ P. Singh, The Indian Gift squadrons, <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/history/ww2/1203-gift-squadrons.html> accessed 19/6/2015

1944 by visiting Indian legislators why the IAF was not getting Spitfires he noted ruefully ‘What is the answer anyway?’¹⁵⁹

As a consequence of the war, the terms of military control had to be amended to appeal to the patriotism of IAF recruits. The new logic of the war recognised that Indians saw colonialism as temporary but nonetheless urged Indians to serve in the armed forces to secure the substance of independence. When the war ended, politics in the IAF had grown so radicalised, as a result of hurried expansion and racial tensions that even this subterranean understanding would no longer suffice. A new generation of airmen mostly recruited during the war prioritised immediate concerns over long term political outcomes. They were increasingly open about their nationalist sympathies and intolerant of racial discrimination. In a series of strikes throughout 1946 they made it clear that British military control had been eroded severely by the war. Moreover, they also demonstrated a lack of patience with senior Indian officers whom they regarded as the myrmidons of high command. The strikes were largely peacefully resolved but not before it became clear that colonial military control of the IAF, like in the rest of India’s armed forces, was under serious pressure.

For civil aviation the war was initially a catastrophe. Lucrative subsidies, air routes and even the ability to operate freely were lost. India’s premier civil aviation companies -Tata Airways and Indian National Airways- played an important part in rescuing refugees, delivering mail, surveying new routes and completing several other war related tasks. India’s small but efficient Directorate of Civil Aviation was also mobilised for the war effort and made a series of signal contributions, as did its flying clubs. The outbreak of the war would be beneficial

¹⁵⁹ MoD (I), 601/9616/H, ORB No. 1 Squadron, 27 October 1944.

for civil aviation in the long run. Even in the short run the war helped increase the number and density of India's air routes. The exceptional importance of civil aviation was eventually borne out by the fact that the RAF actively provided civil aviation with its own aircraft to expedite the war effort. Though during the war the distinction between civil and military aviation blurred to the point of disappearance, it is possible to argue that the war established civil aviation by pointing to its utility.

The princes represent an under-researched third dimension to Indian aviation in the Second World War. Their presence in this chapter is meant to highlight the extent to which the colonial Indian state was a complex series of competing power alliances. The term 'colonial state' is deceptive not only for the singularity of actions and interests that it falsely portrays but also because this elides over its engagements with over five hundred political entities under its indirect control. India's princes supported the war effort in contrast to its largest political party, the Indian National Congress. Hyderabad, India's largest state, proved to have a sophisticated understanding of its means to shape policy. Hyderabad's policy makers planned to deploy its immense wealth to begin pushing for assurances of autonomy from the colonial state and its successors during the war. It assumed, correctly as events were to prove, that it needed to cultivate British support for any bid for independence following the lapse of paramountcy. HMG's decision to support large national states in South Asia springing from Cold War was still a year away in 1945 when the war ended and is the subject of a subsequent chapter. Hyderabad and other Indian states could at the end of the war reasonably conceive a post-war order, which they would be at the forefront of shaping.

The war left behind a series of complex legacies, many of which were not apparent at the time. It was clear however that the stresses of wartime transformation had resulted in the

irreversible decline of the colonial state, not least because of the destabilisation of its armed forces. The imminent demise of the colonial state created an atmosphere of grave uncertainty that was to have enduring consequences on aviation.

Ittehad Mein Shakti (Strength in Unity): Aviation and the Partition of India 1946-47

Some of the most striking images that convey the scale of the Partition of colonial India into the dominions of India and Pakistan were taken from the air; photographs taken from the sky show sprawling rehabilitation camps and winding refugee columns. The aeroplane was an important presence in the story of Partition and features prominently. Just as in the aerial photographs, the aeroplane is a constant albeit unexamined presence in the wider historiography of Partition. There are a number of reasons for this. The sheer scale of Partition which saw twelve million people displaced from their homes and perhaps as many as two million killed means that several historical perspectives remain to be explored.¹ The immensity of Partition also marginalises the scale of aviation's contribution to shaping events. Of the twelve million refugees who fled from India and Pakistan the overwhelming majority travelled on the ground, vastly dwarfing the 41,000-50,000 who were flown out.²³ This means that aviation accounts for less than one percent of the total number of those who were evacuated from one dominion to another during Partition. In this context it worth asking why a study of the role of aviation in Partition should be undertaken?

This chapter argues that the elite nature of aviation is uniquely revealing of the actions and anxieties of states dealing with a catastrophe of almost incomprehensible magnitude: the

¹ U. Butalia, *The Other Side of Partition*, (New Delhi, 1998), p 3.

² Idem.,

³ The total number of Indians and Pakistanis evacuated by air is difficult to calculate with certainty. Three major evacuations occurred between 31 August and 30 November. RAF aircraft evacuated approximately 9,200. 'Operation Pakistan' involved the evacuation of 6,300 people. 'Operation India' resulted in the evacuation of 35,000. It is not possible to make a total however since RAF aircraft took part in both Operation India and Operation Pakistan. Some overlaps are therefore likely to have occurred. Further, there is some variance in the figures themselves due to the often ad hoc nature of the mass evacuations.

violence of Partition. Aviation offered a relatively safe and rapid means of transport to the governments of India and Pakistan. However it remained both limited and expensive meaning that both governments had to carefully prioritise who was evacuated. Moreover, the versatility of aircraft meant that refugee evacuation was only one of many tasks to which limited aviation resources had to be assigned. Consequently, while the role of the aeroplane in Partition was relatively small it was also highly important. Control of aviation was critical in the struggle of the newly independent states of South Asia to emerge as legitimate governments with a monopoly on violence. The extensive use of aircraft in the restoration of order in the face of mass violence in 1947 would inextricably intertwine aviation technology with novel centripetal notions of sovereignty in both India and Pakistan. If the aviation sector affected Partition in important ways then it was fundamentally reconstituted and transformed by the events of 1947. Partition created the post-colonial Indian and Pakistani air forces and put the private aviation sector on the path to terminal decline.

This chapter is divided into two broad sections. First it will look at the consequences of the politics of Partition on both civil and military aviation. The politics of Partition in 1946 served to undermine carefully laid post-war plans for the regulation of civil aviation and is indicative of the opposing visions of post-colonial South Asia held by the Congress and the Muslim League. Once the decision to partition the subcontinent was taken in June 1947, the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) was ‘reconstituted’ into two air forces over the course of a three month period. This reconstitution had not been completed at the time of independence and the speed at which it was undertaken would create significant complications for the militaries of both dominions. The second half of this chapter will focus on the role played by aviation in Partition. The RIAF would be put to a variety of uses in quelling disorder and

aiding refugee evacuation. It would serve as an important force multiplier for a state confronted with increasingly militarised mass violence. Civil aviation meanwhile was pushed to breaking point by the mass evacuations made necessary by Partition. The eventual decision by the governments of India and Pakistan to hire foreign airlines in 1947 to expedite the transfer of government officials critical to the refugee evacuation effort, was as much a grudging acceptance of the failure of Indian civil aviation as it was of the unforeseen need to exchange populations as a consequence of Partition.

The subject of Partition is among the most researched subjects in modern Indian history.⁴ As Faisal Devji has pointed out, much of this focuses on the negotiations between Indian and British elites as well as the broader consequences of Partition for millions of ordinary Indians.⁵ This chapter does not deal in detail with the elite political negotiations that led directly to Partition. While accepting the highly contingent nature of the eventual decision to Partition colonial India into independent dominions, not least because of the speed with which it was carried out, it treats Partition as a given. Instead this chapter attempts to draw out the links between elite decision making and its often indirect impact on the multitude of stakeholders affected by Partition. In doing so it seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of the ways in which Partition played out by recovering the centrality of aviation in both technological and institutional terms.

⁴ See for instance: G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning*, (Oxford, 1989); K. Roy Eds, *Partition of India: Why 1947*, (Oxford 2012); Y.Khan, *The Great Partition*, (London, 2007); A. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, (Cambridge, 1985); J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided* (Cambridge, 1994); S. Wolpert, *Shameful Flight*, (Oxford, 2006); U. Butalia, (1998), H. Roy, *Partitioned Lives*, (Oxford 2012); I. Talbot and Singh, *The Partition of India*, (Cambridge, 2009).

⁵ F. Devji, (2013), p 13.

Aviation played a small but critical role in the state-making that accompanied independence and Partition. Little work has explicitly dealt with this aspect of Partition despite the constant presence of the aeroplane in literature on the subject. This chapter will as such attempt to trace the ways in which aviation transformed South Asia and was itself reconstituted in 1947. In order to understand these processes however the aeroplane must be located in the post-war context of increasing instability.

I. Prelude to Partition: The failure of the Tymms plan

The Second World War was a period of difficulty for civil aviation companies since their planes and pilots were effectively commandeered by the Government of India (GoI) to serve the war effort. Wartime conditions placed severe strains on airlines as planes and the personnel to operate them became increasingly scarce. The war absorbed nearly all pilots and trained ground personnel and the suspension of flying training meant that it became difficult to replace them. However, as seen in the previous chapter, the GoI would come increasingly to understand the importance of civil aviation as an important pillar of communications in wartime. Consequently, the GoI dedicated resources to ensure that the civil aviation sector remained functional. Steps were taken to provide the two largest civil aviation companies, Tata Air Lines (TAL) and Indian National Airways (INA), with additional aircraft and personnel before the end of the war.⁶ An aviation wing of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) was set up exclusively to provide infrastructural support for civil

⁶ TNA, BT 217/32, DCA to Secretary for Posts and Air, 31 August 1945.

aviation. By the end of the war INA and TAL were flying more routes with more planes and personnel than they had ever before.⁷

When the war was over, Indian airline companies had access to cheap aircraft left behind by the departing United States Army Air Force and a large pool of experienced aviators being demobilised by the Royal Indian Air Force. A key legacy of the war was the acquisition of the Douglas DC-3 Dakota transport aircraft from the departing United States Army Air Force. The Dakota, or ‘Dak’ for short, was a remarkable twin engine passenger aircraft that had taken part in the famous ‘Hump’ operations, aimed at flying supplies over the Himalayas from India to Nationalist China.⁸ Designed to fly long distances at high altitudes, the Dakota would become ubiquitous in India after the war partly because of its relative cheapness and partly because of its durability. It would, as shall be seen, play a critical role in the history of the subcontinent over the next decade. In 1946 the GoI purchased all aircraft and equipment designated as surplus by the United States Army and Navy Liquidation commission. Tata Aircraft Ltd were then designated as Government Agents for the sale of aircraft to companies and individuals. Dakotas rapidly replaced Beechcraft C-45 Expeditors and De Havilland 89 Dominies in the inventories of Indian airline companies on most air routes in 1946.⁹ TAL now rechristened as Tata Airlines, purchased twelve DC-3 aircraft for itself from the liquidation commission in January 1946 and placed an order for ten more.¹⁰ Later that year Tata Airlines went public with a capital of fifty million Rupees (3.75 million Pounds) and

⁷ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-A2-2, Wartime Operations.

⁸ J.D. Plating, *The Hump*, (College Station, 2011), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3037902>, -accessed 18/4/17.

⁹ *Flight*, 5 December 1946.

¹⁰ These included orders for a number of variants of the aircraft including eight C-47s, two C-53s and two C-58s. *Flight*, 10 January 1946.

was renamed Air India Ltd.¹¹ INA meanwhile not only acquired a fleet of Dakotas but commenced an ambitious program of expansion by ordering six Vickers Viking VC 1 aircraft from Britain. With its twenty four passenger capacity the Viking could carry nearly double the number of passengers as the 14 passenger Dakota. The first of six Viking aircraft christened *Jumna* was dispatched to India in August 1946.¹² Its purchase is indicative of the highly optimistic, even bullish, outlook for civil aviation at the time.

At the end of 1946 India's four major airlines were operating over fourteen routes totalling 11,608 miles. This marked an unprecedented expansion of the number of air routes being operated by Indian companies. Below are two tables of air routes operated by Indian airline companies. Table I covers air routes operated in 1939, the year before the outbreak of the war and arguably the zenith of pre-war Indian aviation.¹³ Table II is a summary of air routes operated by Indian commercial airline companies in 1946, the year following the war.¹⁴

Table I

Air routes operated by Indian airline companies in April 1939

Air Services of India: Bombay-Kathiawar and Bombay-Poona-Kolhapur.

Indian National Airways: Karachi-Lahore and Lahore-Delhi.

Indian Transcontinental Airways:¹⁵ Karachi-Jodhpur-Delhi-Allahabad-Gaya-Calcutta.

¹¹ TCA, Tata Sons Air India Formation Papers.

¹² *Flight*, 15 August 1946.

¹³ *Flight*, 27 April 1939.

¹⁴ TNA, BT 217/32, Joint Secretary (GoI) to Undersecretary of State, 11 October 1946.

¹⁵ Indian Transcontinental Airways was owned partly by Imperial Airways and partly by Indian National Airways as a link of the trans-imperial air route.

Tata Sons Ltd: Karachi-Bhuj-Ahmedabad-Bombay-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Madras-Trichinopoly-Colombo, Trivandrum-Trichinopoly, Bombay-Goa-Cannanore-Trivandrum and Bombay-Indore-Bhopal, Gwalior-Delhi.

Table II

Air routes operated by Indian airline companies in June 1946

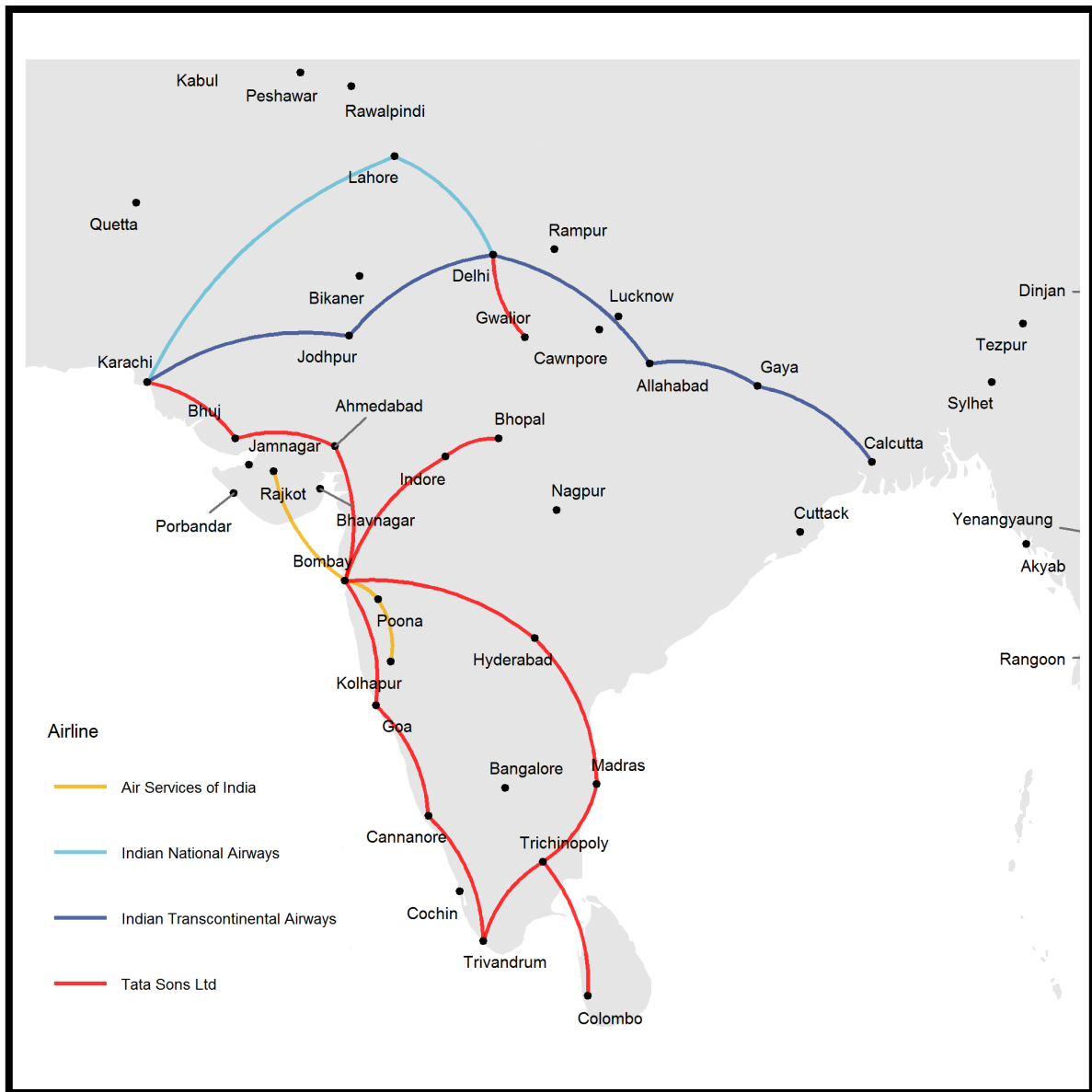
Air India: Karachi-Ahmedabad-Bombay, Bombay-Hyderabad-Madras-Colombo, Delhi-Ahmedabad-Bombay and Bombay-Nagpur-Calcutta

Indian National Airways Ltd: Calcutta-Allahabad-Cawnpore-Delhi, Delhi-Lahore-Rawalpindi-Peshawar, Delhi-Jodhpur-Karachi, Lahore-Quetta-Karachi, Lahore-Jodhpur-Bikaner-Ahmedabad and Delhi-Rampur-Lucknow

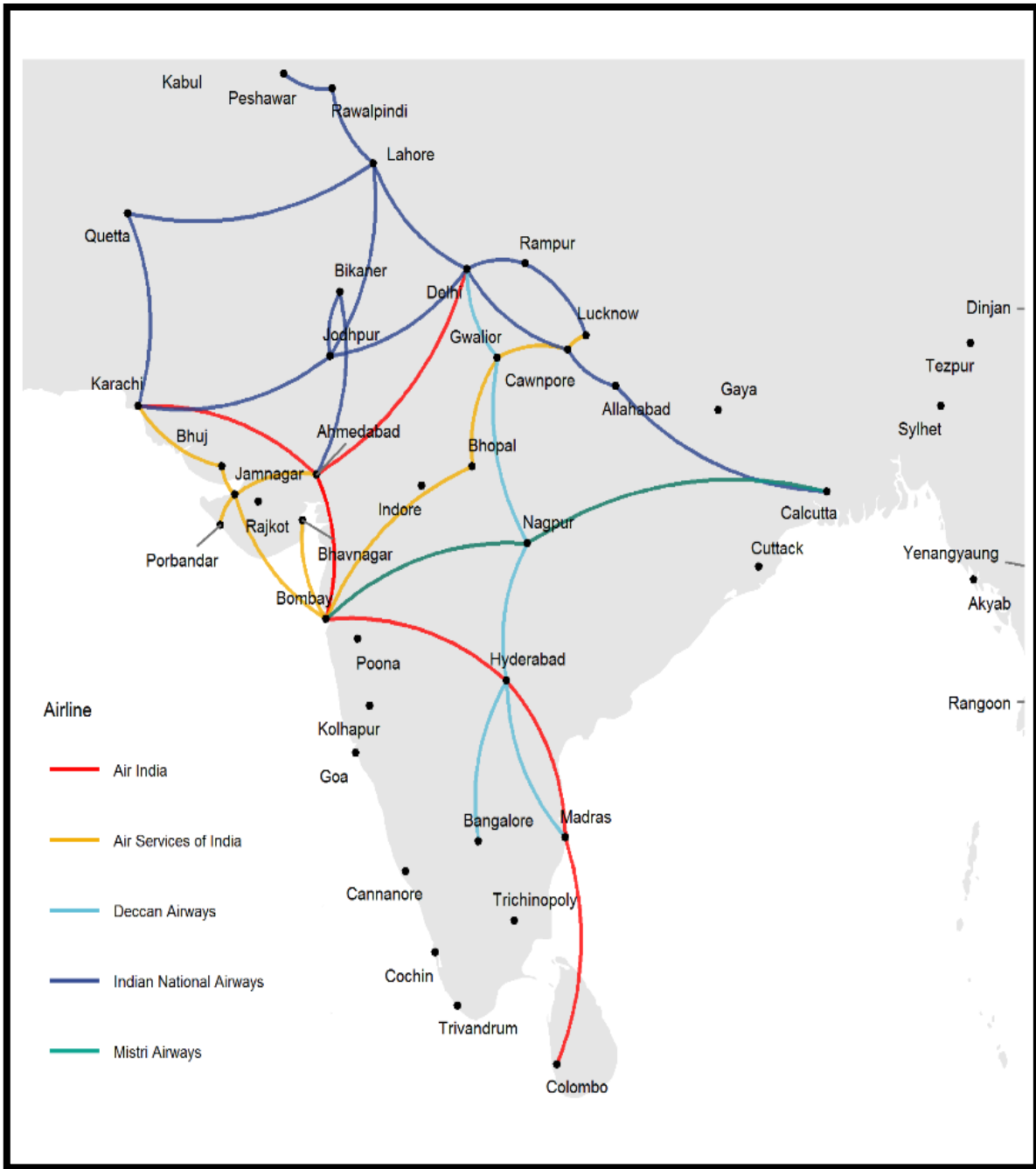
Air Services of India: Bombay-Jamnagar-Bhuj-Karachi, Bombay-Bhopal-Gwalior-Cawnpore-Lucknow, Porbandar-Jamnagar, Jamnagar-Ahmedabad and Bombay-Bhavnagar

Deccan Airways: Delhi-Gwalior-Nagpur-Hyderabad-Madras and Hyderabad-Bangalore.

Mistri Airways: Bombay-Nagpur-Calcutta



Map I: Air routes operated by Indian airline companies in April 1939



Map II: Air routes operated by Indian airline companies in 1946

Clearly the number of routes under operation had grown greatly from 1939 to 1946. The frequency of flights also increased. Bombay emerged as India's leading air hub with flights twice daily to Karachi and Delhi. A passenger boarding at Juhu aerodrome could fly with Indian airlines to destinations as varied as Calcutta, Karachi and Madras. Indian National Airways made a beginning in flying passengers to foreign destinations by flying 34 Hajj pilgrims from Karachi to Jeddah in late 1946 under an agreement with the Government of India.¹⁶ This marked a break with the GoI's pre-war policy of limiting the services of Indian airline companies to India and Burma. It is likely that the GoI granted permission for this since Indian civil aviation had in any case been used during the war to ferry British personnel to West Asia.¹⁷ While Air India and INA remained the premier airlines with some 63 percent of all Indian air traffic, Deccan Airways, founded in 1946 to represent Hyderabad State, also became prominent along the North-South route.¹⁸

Indian airline companies were not the sole beneficiaries of the end of the war. The GoI's Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) came to possess aerodromes, equipment and greater regulatory authority following the war. The DGCA was offered its pick from the vast network of aerodromes constructed during the war. It took over 28 aerodromes in 1946 bringing the total number of aerodromes at its disposal to 50. These included 2 international, 7 major, 14 intermediary and 27 minor aerodromes.¹⁹ Radio stations along the trans-India route, which had been controlled by the British Overseas Airways Corporation, were handed over to the DGCA as the British personnel manning them were repatriated. Indeed the DGCA

¹⁶ TNA, BT 217/32, Secretary (GoI) to Undersecretary of State, 21 May 1947.

¹⁷ R.M. Lala, (1992), p 107

¹⁸ The airline receives detailed treatment in a subsequent chapter and as such it will suffice to state here that the Tata's had a stake in Deccan Airways and that it was founded as a department of the Nizam's State Railway. See: A. Reddy, (2001).

¹⁹ *The Aeroplane*, April 7 1947.

came into possession of so many communications facilities, aerodromes and navigational aids that it simply did not have the personnel to man them. Consequently, staff from the Department of Posts and Communications were transferred to help the DGCA in its new responsibilities.²⁰ As the DGCA grew in size it took on new responsibilities including the establishment of an Air Transport Licensing Board in order to bring aviation in India in line with international standards.

Deciding which airlines would be permitted to operate which routes was critical to ensuring the continued profitability and therefore the viability of civil aviation. This had been at the centre of the DGCA's post-war planning. The increasing profitability and falling costs of investing in commercial aviation drew a number of new players. Several of these were established industrial magnates looking to invest wartime profits made in fields other than aviation.²¹ These included established business families not unlike the Tatas, such as the Dalmia Jain family and the Birlas who had prospered greatly during the war. Also represented were much smaller operators such as the proposed Varadaraja Airways based out of Tiruppur in Southern India and Kalinga Airways based in Cuttack. The Air Transport Licensing Board which came into existence in October 1946 was flooded with applications for the establishment of airline companies, receiving a total of 97 applications from 20 companies for 78 proposed routes. In the normal course of affairs most of these would have been rejected by the DGCA in keeping with what came to be called the Tymms plan.

When he retired in 1947, Sir Frederick Tymms had headed India's Civil Aviation Directorate for over fifteen years. Tymms had begun flying with the Royal Flying Corps in the Great

²⁰ TNA, BT 217/32, Secretary (GoI) to Undersecretary of State, 21 May 1947.

²¹ For a discussion of wartime fortunes see: Y. Khan, (2015), p 118.

War in 1918 and had worked for the Air Ministry after the war where he had among other things helped set up air routes in Africa.²² Arriving in India as Director of Civil Aviation in 1931 he had played an active part in encouraging the growth of civil aviation in the country and was particularly close to both J.R.D. Tata and Neville Vintcent of Tata Airways.²³

As early as 1943, while the Second World War was still raging, Tymms had taken eighteen months leave from the post of Director of Civil Aviation in order to begin planning for the future of civil aviation after the war.²⁴ The result of his efforts was a paper entitled 'Post-War Civil Aviation in India', usually referred to as the Tymms Plan.

The plan aimed to reduce operating costs so that the thus far unprofitable commercial aviation sector could becoming self-supporting. This was especially important because until airlines became self-sustaining, the government would have to bear not only the costs of maintaining aviation infrastructure such as aerodromes, signals and meteorological facilities but also have to pay subsidies to keep aeroplanes flying. Though post-war profitability was certainly rising airlines continued to lose money and continued to require government support. The Tymms plan called for four key measures to be taken to reduce costs. First, airlines would have to conduct more frequent operations, flying at least daily on routes designated as trunk routes and operating by night whenever possible. Second, airlines would have to operate the largest and most modern aircraft that they could. This would allow them to adopt the most recent technical methods that enabled cost reduction. The durability and relatively low maintenance costs of the DC-3 Dakota aeroplane which was being widely adopted at the time could play a role here. Third, airline companies would have to operate a series of essential air routes

²² E.A. Johnston, *To Organise the Air*, (Cranfield, 1995), p 29.

²³ CUL, RCS/RCMS/1/2/1/6, Neville Vintcent, CBE, DFC.

²⁴ E.A. Johnston, (1995), p 97.

ranked according to priority as Trunk, links between Trunks and local air service routes listed as follows:²⁵

I) Trunk routes

1-Karachi-Bombay-Madras-Colombo

2-Calcutta-Allahabad-Cawnpore-Delhi-Peshawar-Kabul

3-Delhi-Nagpur-Hyderabad-Madras

4-Calcutta-Cuttack via Madras-Colombo

5-Bombay-Nagpur-Calcutta-

6-Karachi-Jodhpur-Delhi

7-Bombay-Ahmedabad-Delhi

8-Bombay-Indore-Bhopal-Cawnpore-Lucknow

9-Calcutta-Akyab-Yenangyaung-Rangoon

II) Essential links between trunk Air routes

10-Karachi-Quetta-Lahore

11-Calcutta via Sylhet-Tezpur-Dinjan

12-Madras-Bangalore-Cochin-Trivandrum

III) Local Air Services

²⁵ NMML, G. Rajadhyaksha et al, Report of the Air Transport Enquiry Committee 1950, (New Delhi, 1950), p 8.

a) Ahmedabad-Kathiawar States

b) Hyderabad Bombay

c) Hyderabad-Bangalore

d) Lahore-Srinagar

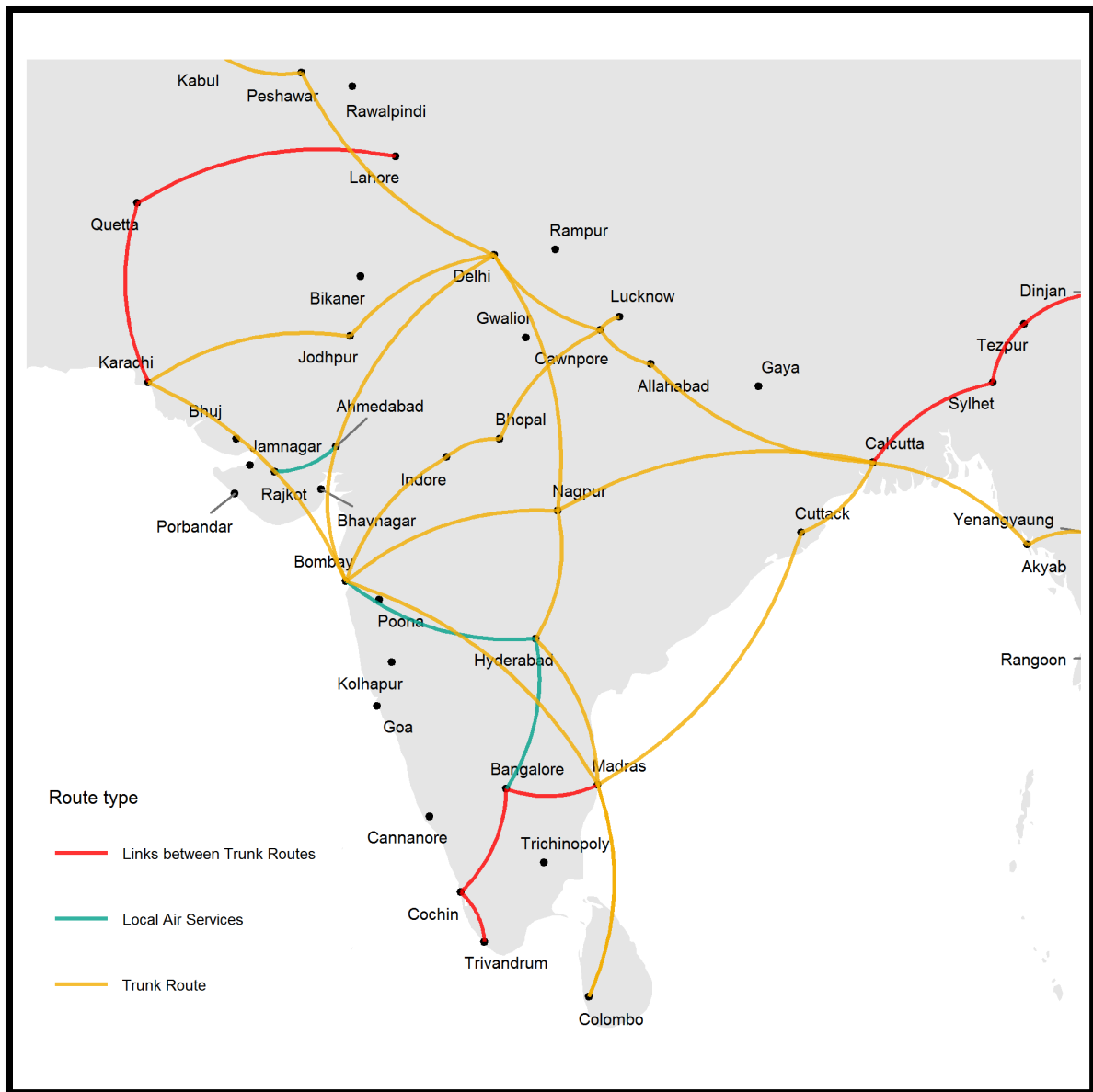
This would 'constitute a route mileage of 11, 280 miles involving a total capacity of approximately 17 million ton-miles a year', significantly reducing costs.²⁶

Perhaps most importantly for the ton-miles being envisioned as ideal the total air fleet would need to consist of no more than 35 planes, 60 to 70 aircrews and 400-500 engineers and mechanics.²⁷ While other planes could be accommodated, particularly in short hops or taxi flying, it was important to keep the number of routes limited to the above number. This, combined with the eventual adoption of better aircraft and the prioritisation of passengers, mail, and freight in that order, would mean that within a period of five years the cost per ton mile could be reduced from Rs 2 to Rs 1/8/-. Airlines could thus reasonably expect to move from a combined loss of Rs. 160 lakh to a profit of Rs. 13 lakh in five years; more than doubling revenue.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., p 9.

²⁷ CUL, GBR/00115/RCS/RCMS 20/1/2/1/6, F. Tymms, *Post War Civil Aviation in India*.

²⁸ NMML, G. Rajadhyaksha et al, *Report of the Air Transport Enquiry Committee 1950*, (New Delhi, 1950), p 8.



Map III: Air routes proposed by the Tymms Plan 1946

Finally Tymms advocated continued private control of commercial aviation with adequate safeguards, since he felt that it afforded the still young aviation sector a fair degree of flexibility. In order to technically and commercially regulate private commercial aviation, he proposed in 1944 the formation of an Air Traffic Licensing Board which would eventually be formed in 1946.²⁹ This final point of the Tymms plan was remarkable for the foresight with which it approached the difficulties likely to occur from the grant of excess licenses. In the words of Tymms' biographer:- 'In report after report, paper after paper written in the decades to follow, tribute was paid to the eminent soundness of these plans;..'.³⁰ However the Tymms plan was aimed at services in a united India and did not reckon with the possibility of the partitioning the subcontinent into two dominions.

Even as Tymms was busy drafting his plan, tectonic shifts had occurred in the political landscape of India. The Second World War fundamentally changed Indian politics in three broad ways. His Majesty's Government's will to maintain colonial rule was severely dented by the war and its ability to do so was eroded, as seen in a previous chapter, inter alia by indiscipline in both British and Indian militaries. The Congress party was effectively silenced by the war and had to scramble to make up for lost political capital. By contrast the Muslim League had been enormously strengthened and embraced the goal of a separate Muslim state. Elections held in March 1946 revealed an unprecedented divide between Hindus and Muslims with the latter voting overwhelmingly for the Muslim League and the former voting for the Congress.³¹ Negotiations, between the British, the Congress party and the Muslim

²⁹ CUL, E.A. Johnston, GBR/00115/RCS/RCMS 20/1/3, Life and Tymms, (Manuscript), p 553.

³⁰ Ibid., p 563.

³¹ For an accessible introduction to Indian politics in 1946 see: S. Sarkar, *Modern India*, (New Delhi, 1983).

League, failed to yield a consensus on the constitutional future of India. The need for such a consensus became greater as communal violence on an unprecedented scale erupted in several parts of Northern India from August 1946 onwards. An attempt at a compromise between the Congress and Muslim League was made in October 1946, with the entry of Muslim League politicians into the Congress led interim government that had been formed to govern India as British rule was brought to an end. The entry of Muslim Leaguers into the interim government proved fateful for aviation as Abdur Rab Nishtar, a Muslim League politician, was made minister for Posts and Air. Nishtar's entry into office in October 1946 coincided with the establishment of the Air Transport License Board and he therefore became responsible for overseeing the Tymms Plan.

According to the plan, air services which existed on 1 July 1946 were to automatically receive route licenses for the routes operated by them from the ATLB on 1 October, the date from which the ATLB began functioning. The Tymms plan's requirement for about four airlines had thus been largely catered to by the existence of INA and Tata Airways as well as the formation before July 1946 of Air Services of India, owned by Walchand Hirachand, and Deccan Airways.³² Nishtar however granted licenses to 21 companies with an authorised capital of 42 crores and a government authorised issue of 97 crores.³³ Instead of the compact fleet of 35 aircraft that Tymms had visualised, India by early 1947 had 115 aeroplanes operating a plethora of routes run by eleven companies including those that existed in July 1946.³⁴ These included:

³² Walchand also has the distinction of starting India's first aircraft, automobile and ship building factory. He features prominently in chapter 4.

³³ NMML, G. Rajadhyaksha et al, *Report of the Air Transport Enquiry Committee 1950*, (New Delhi, 1950), p 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p 13.

- 1) Air India
- 2) Indian National Airways
- 3) Air Services of India
- 4) Deccan Airways
- 5) Dalmia-Jain Airways
- 6) Bharat Airways
- 7) Airways (India)
- 8) Mistri Airways (Later Indian Overseas Airways)
- 9) Orient Airways
- 10) Ambica Airways
- 11) Jupiter Airways

Aviation became a zone for speculation and profits dropped so greatly in future years that both Jupiter and Ambica Airways were forced to shut down by bankruptcy.³⁵ To point to just one example of how steeply operating costs had risen, Ambica Airways which was liquidated in 1947, estimated that it spent Rs. 3/9/6 per mile greatly diverging from Tymm's hope that costs would decrease from Rs. 2 per ton mile to Rs. 1/8/-.³⁶ Nishtar's decisions as minister for Posts and Air disregarded the Tymms plan and plunged the aviation sector into a long term crisis.

³⁵ Idem.,

³⁶ Ibid., p 20.

Nishtar's reasons for doing so are impossible to establish with certainty. It is possible that Nishtar was attempting to keep airlines from earning excessive profits and establishing monopolies. His predecessor as Minister Syed Ali Zaheer had argued that the interim government would attempt to curb monopolies. Unlike Nishtar however Zaheer had warned against the proliferation of airlines and warned that permission to set up an airline was by no means a guarantee of being assigned a route.³⁷ It is also possible that Nishtar was concerned about the low number of 'Muslim companies' and sought to prepare for the eventuality of Partition which might necessitate airlines to serve Pakistan. Mohammed Ali Jinnah had met with Mirza Ispahani in June 1946 to discuss the possibility of the establishment of an airline that could later serve as Pakistan's flag carrier. Orient airways was provided with a license in June 1947 and went into operations on the Calcutta-Akyab-Rangoon route in 1947 with two DC-3 Dakotas. This tiny airline would form the nucleus of the flag carrier of independent Pakistan; Pakistan International Airways.³⁸ It, along with Pakistan's fledgling air force, would constitute the air bridge between the two units of the new state, East and West Pakistan, separated by over 1000 miles of Indian territory. What cannot be ignored, however, is the context of extreme distrust and violence in which Nishtar served as minister. The Muslim League-Congress coalition was underpinned by extreme distrust as Hindu-Muslim violence swept North India. When Nishtar discussed in the legislature, the possibility of nationalising private airlines, he was confronted by fellow Muslim Leaguer A.R. Siddiqui, who inquired what nationalisation might mean when the nation was a yet undefined entity. As the *Times of India* reported 'Mr A.R. Siddiqui confessed that nationalisation created a

³⁷ *ToI*, 1 October 1946.

³⁸ 'PIA History',

http://www.piac.com.pk/pia_about/pia-about_history.asp, accessed 18/4/15.

terror in him, because it raised among other things questions about the meaning of a nation and so on.³⁹ Nishtar served in a government that many in his party saw as representing Congress and therefore Hindu interests. It is not as such unlikely that Nishtar sought to undo the Tymms plan in order to cause deliberate damage.⁴⁰ Certainly he had strained relations with Tymms and refused to designate a successor for the critical office of the Director of Civil Aviation when the latter retired. Nishtar also refused to fill in other critical DGCA posts such as those of two deputy generals.⁴¹

The failure of the Tymms plan was a serious blow to the profitability and hence the viability of private commercial aviation companies in India. The failure to adopt it severely hurt the prospects of a profitable civil aviation sector for India. However it is important here to note that the plan was rigidly conceived to reflect Frederick Tymms' pre-conceptions of the post-war order. It refused to consider the possibility that colonial India might be divided into several successor states as evidenced by Tymms' insistence in 1945 that an independent Hyderabad could not be accommodated. It assumed that private operators were most well suited to conduct commercial aviation in India. This was partly a result of Tymms closeness to private operators such as the Tatas with whom he had worked in 1942 on an abortive project aimed at setting up an aircraft factory in India.⁴² Tymms opposition to nationalisation was also underpinned by his fifteen years of experience in India, during which the government had made minimal investments in aviation. Tymms could simply not have conceived of the enormous state investment in aviation that the Congress Party would

³⁹ *ToI*, 18 November 1946.

⁴⁰ This is the view of Tymms biographer E.A. Johnston who in turn attributes it to J.R.D. Tata. See: E.A. Johnston, (1995), p 129.

⁴¹ CUL, GBR/00115/RCS/RCMS 20/1/2/1/6, Tymms to Nishtar, 27th March 1947.

⁴² E.A. Johnston, (1995), p 96.

undertake after independence. Still the failure of the plan as a side effect of the politics of Partition was indicative of the dysfunction that had come to characterise relations between India's two largest political parties. In late 1946 and early 1947 it was unclear what shape a post-colonial state or states might take, though it was increasingly certain that India's two greatest parties, and the communities they claimed to represent, were heading for a confrontation.

II. The reconstitution of the Royal Indian Air Force

Dysfunction among India's leading parties and mass violence between its largest religious groups convinced the newly appointed British Viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten on 3 June 1947 to announce the Partition of colonial India into two independent dominions. Both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League had been persuaded to accept the 'Mountbatten plan' in an effort to avoid further bloodshed. This would lead to the creation of two new states and two new air forces on the Indian subcontinent. Before discussing the process of the reconstitution of the Royal Indian Air Force into two separate air forces, it is important to locate the process in its wider historical context.

The end of the Second World War was a period of both great promise and great instability for the RIAF. As seen in a previous chapter, 1946 was characterised by a number of 'strikes' and a widening rift between officers and the ranks revealed itself. If the force had been affected adversely in certain ways by the war, it was also larger and more entrenched than ever before. The RIAF had grown from one to ten squadrons between 1939 and 1946. A paper put forward to the consultative committee on the defence of India in September 1946 outlined plans to maintain and build upon this growth. While it was optimistic about the

prospects of nationalisation and expansion, the paper also noted that this expansion would be impossible without the RAF's help. Because of the speed of its wartime expansion the RIAF had been unable to develop its own maintenance organisation. The short period of time available as well as the quality of recruits to the RIAF during the war prevented this.⁴³ The RIAF's 15000 strong force of airmen hid the fact that it was desperately short of skilled Group I tradesmen and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs).⁴⁴ If the RAF withdrew from the subcontinent the RIAF would find it difficult to maintain even one of the ten squadrons it had.⁴⁵ As such the paper suggested that the nine RAF squadrons present in India at the time be liquidated and their personnel transferred to help train the RIAF. The committee hoped that the RIAF would be able to help turn out Group I tradesmen and NCOs in about five years. It recommended that an apprentice school should be opened in India and Indian personnel ought to be sent to England for training. India would publish terms of service for RAF personnel who chose to stay on after independence. If not enough volunteers were found Britain would have to consider forcing its personnel to stay on in India.

Not unexpectedly the RAF response was one of shock and dismissal. Service in India was 'intensely and universally unpopular' in the RAF, Air Chief Marshall John Slessor wrote to Hugh Walmsley the Air-Officer-Commanding, Air Forces in India. Only a year earlier some 50,000 RAF personnel had staged perhaps the largest military mutiny in modern British history by going on strike in order to protest the slow rate of demobilisation.⁴⁶ As seen in

⁴³ Good recruits had been hard to come by during the war due to the low rank and amenities offered to skilled personnel especially when compared to the Army and to a lesser degree the Navy. A recruit with the qualifications necessary to enter the RIAF's lowest ranks could easily get a commission in the Indian Army. See: B. Prasad, (1956).

⁴⁴ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Slessor to Ismay, undated.

⁴⁵ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538/1, Paper presented to the defence consultative committee, undated.

⁴⁶ See: D. Duncan, (1998).

the previous chapter this mutiny was highly successful in speeding up the rate of repatriation of British personnel from India while making it clear that RAF personnel had no appetite to police the empire. Once the state of war with the Axis powers which was in force was repealed there would be no way to force RAF personnel to serve in India.⁴⁷ There was also the pressing need to redeploy the available RAF personnel at a time when the force was rapidly demobilising.⁴⁸ Nevertheless the RAF in particular and HMG were not totally unresponsive to the needs of the Royal Indian Air Force. Recognising that 'India has no hope whatever of building an Air Force without outside assistance' Slessor emphasised the benefits and indeed the necessity of supporting the RIAF through its transition.⁴⁹ HMG's attitude to the Indian proposal 'must be governed by the fact that it is very much in our interest to link India to us strategically and to see that she looks to the RAF to help her in building the RIAF.'⁵⁰ Central to the British stance on helping train the RIAF was the hope that India would stay in the Commonwealth and would continue to provide Britain with the same military support that it had before independence.⁵¹ British military planners plainly saw the Commonwealth as a military alliance in which the Dominions would continue to serve Britain's needs.⁵²

⁴⁷ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Slessor to Walmsley, 21 January 1947.

⁴⁸ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15553, Mountbatten to Ismay 9 October 1947.

⁴⁹ *Idem.*,

⁵⁰ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15553, Mountbatten to Ismay 9 October 1947.

⁵¹ C. Dasgupta, *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir*, (New Delhi, 2002), p 13. Undivided India's strategic Western airfields were especially attractive to British strategists since they offered facilities at which to base aircraft to attack the USSR.

⁵² BL, Part I (b), Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Defence of India and Pakistan.

India would provide airbases to the United Kingdom and provide troops for Commonwealth military operations. In return she would could use British scientific knowledge, resources and experience. British planners were especially concerned about the possibility of a future Soviet nuclear weapons attack against a badly defended India.

Moreover, HMG was especially concerned about the possibility of leaving Indian defences weak. Undivided India abutted the Soviet Union, sparking a British Cold War fears. If the 'ludicrously small' RIAF was unable to protect India it might well fall on the RAF to send its own squadrons to protect India from Soviet aggression.⁵³ British fears of the Soviet Union intervening were fundamentally misplaced as a later chapter will show but they shaped policy nevertheless. Thus while the scheme to volunteer a large part of the RAF in India for training the RIAF was rejected the RAF had good reasons to provide support to the RIAF for several years after independence.⁵⁴ India would not receive large numbers of RAF personnel, particularly since it was believed that this would only perpetuate the existing imbalance of expertise in the RIAF.⁵⁵ However the RAF would take what measures it could to support the growth of the RIAF.

Any plans to expand the RIAF had to be shelved when, in June 1947, Field Marshall Claude Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army, was ordered to preside over the division of the armed forces of colonial India. Auchinleck had been a proponent of the widely held view in British Indian military circles that if Partition were to occur the armed forces ought not to be divided for a period of a few years since the logistical challenges of separating the Indian military between the dominions would be formidable.⁵⁶ He would later turn down a peerage for his role in dividing the armed forces since he considered this to be a

⁵³ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Slessor to Walmsley, 21 January 1947.

⁵⁴ *Idem.*,

⁵⁵ Harjinder Singh, who would later rise to the rank of Air Vice Marshall vehemently contested this view and believed that Indian ground crews were capable of maintaining their own aircraft. The fact that independent India's first RIAF commander-in-chief Air Marshall Sir Thomas Elmhirst requested a contingent of no more than 7 RAF personnel to help organize the RIAF indicates that Singh may not have been mistaken. See: A.L. Saigal (eds), (1977), p 227.

⁵⁶ S. Hamid, *Disastrous Twilight*, (New Delhi, 1993), p 163.

fundamentally dishonorable task.⁵⁷ Moreover, there were compelling reasons from the British perspective to oppose the division of the Indian military. A united Indian military would be better able to defend the subcontinent from the Soviet Union. It would be able to serve as a more cohesive expeditionary force for the Commonwealth, which British military planners saw as a military alliance.⁵⁸

The prospect of dividing the RIAF was particularly unappealing given its still relatively small size. In the words of the Air Vice Marshal Robert Blucke, Mountbatten's acting air officer:⁵⁹

It is considered that the Partition of the RIAF into two forces to serve the independent states of Pakistan and Hindustan will lead to the disintegration of the RIAF as it now exists to an extent that will leave India well-nigh defenceless against air attack for a period of years which cannot be estimated.

The non-communal organisation of RIAF units down to the lowest levels meant that it would be hard to reform units with any level of functionality after they were separated.⁶⁰

The communal composition of the force presented distinct problems, especially to Pakistan.

The following table is demonstrative;

Composition of the RIAF on 1 March 1947:⁶¹

	Officers	Men
Hindu	588	9657
Muslim	230	3041

⁵⁷ Ibid., p 258.

⁵⁸ S. Singh, *Partition of the Indian armed forces between India and Pakistan*, (unpublished PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University [hereafter JNU]), 1994, p 84.

⁵⁹ Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Planning for partition-Armies of Hindustan and Pakistan.

⁶⁰ This was in contrast to the Indian army which due to the martial races doctrine featured 'class' based units that could be more easily divided on communal lines. See: S. Wilkinson, *Army and Nation*, (Cambridge, 2015).

⁶¹ Idem.,

Sikh	142	790
Non-Muslim (Anglo-Indians, Parsees etc)	320	3205
Total	1380	16693

Only 28 percent of the officers and 24 percent of the airmen were Muslim. Assuming that all Muslims would opt for Pakistan, far from a certainty, it was unclear how many Sikhs and Hindus would opt for Pakistan. The position of the ‘non-Muslims’ such as the Anglo-Indians was also ambiguous. Pakistan was unlikely to be able to possess the personnel required to man equipment allotted to it. This was especially bound to be the case when taking into consideration the skill of the ground crews available. Pakistan could at most count on the services of 3 Engineering officers, and 4 signals officers. There were no Muslim armament officers. India by comparison could count on considerably larger reserves of Hindu, Sikh, and other ‘non-Muslim’ technical personnel available.⁶²

The ultimate decision to split the armed forces in time for independence was taken at the insistence of the Muslim League once the overarching principle of Partition was accepted. Writing to Mountbatten in April 1947, Liaquat Ali Khan had opposed the scheme of nationalisation of the armed forces on which the interim government had embarked, arguing that this would lead to a reduction of Muslim personnel in the army even as Muslim representation in the RIAF and Royal Indian Navy (RIN) remained low. He famously said that, ‘Without its own Armed Forces Pakistan would be a house of cards.’⁶³ Khan would later

⁶² Idem.,

⁶³ Liaquat Ali Khan to Mountbatten, 7 April 1947, loc cit, P. Moon eds, *Transfer of Power*, vol X, (New Delhi, 19070-83), p 151.

circulate a plan that he had written for the division of the armed forces. Mohammed Ali Jinnah insisted to Mountbatten that ‘the begin all and end all’ for Pakistan was to have its own army, and nothing short of this could possibly satisfy them. At least one historian has argued that the demand for the division of the military was a stratagem aimed at securing tacit British acceptance for the principle of separate states and perhaps it was.⁶⁴ However it is also worthwhile remembering that Muslim League leaders came from a broader Indian political tradition that saw control of the armed forces as the ultimate marker of sovereignty. They had witnessed and taken part in the Indianisation debates of the inter-war years and understood the armed forces to be both symbolic and instrumental embodiments of the sovereignty of India. Jinnah had, along with Motilal Nehru, been one of the key members of the 1926 Sken committee which had recommended, among other things, the entry of Indians into the air force as a means to guarantee eventual self-rule in India.⁶⁵

There was considerable opposition to the partition of the Indian armed forces from both the Congress and the British, as represented by Lord Mountbatten. A united Indian military would be better equipped to aid Britain in its confrontation with the Soviet Union as part of the Commonwealth.⁶⁶ Congress for its part opposed any plans for partition of the armed forces until Partition itself was finally agreed upon. Jawaharlal Nehru compared the division of the army to the failed dyarchy system that had caused administrative dysfunction during

⁶⁴ S. Singh, *Partition of the Indian armed forces between India and Pakistan*, (unpublished PhD thesis, JNU, 1994), p 89.

⁶⁵ BL, A. Sken et al, *Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee*, (London, 1927).

⁶⁶ S. Singh, *Partition of the Indian armed forces between India and Pakistan*, (unpublished PhD thesis, JNU, 1994), p 84. Not all British policy makers opposed the division of the armed forces. Sir Francis Tuker, perhaps the commander with most experience of combating communal violence in India drew up a Partition plan as early as 1946. See: M. Wainwright, ‘Keeping the peace in India 1946-47; The role of Lt General Tuker in Eastern Command’, C.H. Philips eds *Partition of India: Policy and Perspectives 1935-47*, London 1970, p 127-147.

the war.⁶⁷ The decision to partition the armed forces was only arrived at during a meeting on 25th April 1947, following the acceptance of the principle of the principle of Partition by both Mountbatten and the Congress leadership.⁶⁸ The armed forces of colonial India would cease the process of nationalisation and begin to be divided on the lines of ‘class’ a euphemism for religion. Significantly, Jinnah was adamant that personnel ought to be permitted to opt for which dominion they wished to serve, regardless of religion, with the sole caveat that a Hindu from India could not serve in Pakistan and a Muslim from Pakistan could not serve in India.⁶⁹ This was in keeping with Jinnah’s belief that Pakistan would be a multi-religious state as well as the fact that even as late as June 1947 no exchange of populations had been seriously envisioned. Since the RIAF was expected to suffer heavy losses to civil aviation a questionnaire regarding RIAF personnel’s plans was sent out and the government considered compelling men to stay if it felt there was going to be too large an exodus. RIAF personnel, like other government servants were asked whether they would serve the dominion of India or Pakistan.⁷⁰ In order to prevent the demoralization of the Indian military, the expert committee that would oversee the division of the armed forces was euphemistically named the Armed Forces *Reconstitution* Committee (AFRC) rather than the Armed Forces Partition Committee.⁷¹

The reconstitution of the RIAF under the AFRC has been the subject of scholarly attention.⁷² As such a summary of the negotiations followed by a brief analysis will suffice. The AFRC

⁶⁷ S. Singh, *Partition of the Indian armed forces between India and Pakistan*, (unpublished PhD thesis, JNU, 1994), p 91.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p 93.

⁶⁹ S. Hamid, (1993), p 185.

⁷⁰ MoD (I), 601/14476/H, *Partition Proceedings*, vol. V, Third meeting of Partition council, 5 July 1947.

⁷¹ S. Singh, *Partition of the Indian armed forces between India and Pakistan*, (unpublished PhD thesis, JNU, 1994), p 97.

⁷² See: *Idem.*; B. Kumar, (2007); S.S. Hussain, *History of the Pakistan Air Force*, (Karachi, 1982).

was set up under the chairmanship of Field Marshall Auchinleck and consisted of four committees dealing with the army, the Royal Indian Navy, the RIAF, and financial details. Chaired by Air Vice Marshal Perry Keene the Air Force reconstitution committee's members included Air Commodore G.W. Birkenshaw, Air Commodore S. Mukherjee, Group Captain A.M. Engineer, Wing Commander M.K. Janjua and Squadron Leader M.A. Khan. It also included Wing Commander Arjan Singh and Flight Lieutenant H.U. Bhatti as Joint Secretaries while S. Jayashankar and Mumtaz Mirza were recruited as advisers for the committee later.⁷³

The subcommittee decided that on 15th August 1947 two new air forces, the Royal Indian Air Force and the Royal Pakistan Air Force (RPAF) would be created with separate headquarters based at New Delhi and Rawalpindi.⁷⁴ Air Headquarters, Supreme Command based at New Delhi would continue to administer a number of joint subjects until they could be devolved piecemeal to the air forces of the Indian Union and Pakistan. Since both dominions would retain specialised maintenance facilities it was agreed that the Indian Union would continue to repair its Tempests in Pakistan while Pakistan would be permitted to have its Dakota aircraft repaired at Bangalore.⁷⁵

However disagreements cropped up over the division of equipment for fighter squadrons. Indian Union representatives on the sub-committee claimed that India was due eight out of ten squadrons' shares of equipment, in keeping with the communal composition of the RIAF in which non-Muslims outnumbered Muslims 80:20. Pakistani representatives argued that

⁷³ B. Kumar, (2007), p 14.

⁷⁴ The RPAF did not actually move to Rawalpindi and its Air Force Headquarters remained at Peshawar well into the 1970's. S.S. Hussain, (1982), p 26.

⁷⁵ B. Kumar, (2007), p 15.

Pakistan ought to receive enough equipment to constitute five squadrons since Pakistan would have to defend the vulnerable North West Frontier. At the heart of the dispute was the question of whether squadrons ought to be divided on the basis of the communal make-up of the forces that they were drawn from or whether strategic necessities should dominate redistribution of the forces. G.S Baljia, the Additional Defence Secretary, stated that communal ratios should ultimately determine the division of equipment though details could be negotiated. Pakistani representatives countered by stating that the communal ratio represented nothing other than the composition of the RIAF in 1947 and that this was hardly immutable.⁷⁶ Vice Admiral Geoffrey Miles who chaired the naval sub-committee weighed in by pointing out that the Royal Indian Navy had received more ships than the numbers of her non-Muslims merited because of the fact that India had a larger coastline and hence needed vessels for strategic reasons.⁷⁷

A committee comprising Wing Commander Janjua, Air Commodore Mukherjee and Group Captain Barnett found the problem intractable. Hence it was sent to the Provisional Joint Defence Council (PJDC) to resolve. A series of solutions to Pakistan's vulnerability on the North West Frontier were considered by the PJDC including the possibility of India lending two squadrons to Pakistan in case of an emergency. This proposal, brought by Mountbatten before Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Vallabhbhai Patel, failed when Patel insisted that RIAF squadrons could not be used to bomb tribals in the North West Frontier since Congress was opposed to this policy. Jinnah responded by pointing out that ammunition from Indian ordnance factories, which Congress had agreed to provide Pakistan, would doubtless be used

⁷⁶ MoD (I), 601/14476/H, *Partition Proceedings*, vol. V.

⁷⁷ B. Kumar, (2007), p 17.

against the tribesmen.⁷⁸ Eventually the impasse around the division of equipment was resolved when Mountbatten suggested that Pakistan be allotted enough equipment for one transport and one fighter squadron. In addition to this, equipment would be gathered for it from all-India stores for a third fighter squadron. While this was bound to reduce the overall amount of spares that were available it would allow Pakistan to field three squadrons while India would receive eight.⁷⁹

Negotiations conducted around the reconstitution of the RIAF are remarkable for their inconsistency. Once Partition was accepted in principle, Indian negotiators jockeyed to maximise the military resources their state could gain from the negotiations. A consequence of this is the inconsistent negotiating positions adopted by Indian representatives. In the case of the RIN where the presence of a large number of Muslim seamen made communal ratios relatively disadvantageous as a basis for reconstitution, Indian representatives argued that India's large coastline meant it should receive more sloops, mine sweepers and survey ships. In the RIAF where Muslim representation was low the communal ratio was treated as the key basis for arguing for a larger share of squadrons. This was representative of the widespread inconsistency that characterised much of Partition from the negotiations around office supplies to those around princely states. The absence of agreed principles governing the division of assets meant that bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan had to proceed without the benefit of either precedent or mediation. Needless to say this was a recipe for conflict since it meant that both India and Pakistan could make competing claims to an asset with little regard to consistency. Whereas the vast majority of bilateral negotiations between

⁷⁸ MoD (I), 601/14476/H, *Partition Proceedings*, vol. V

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p 20.

the two nascent states, including those over the RIAF, produced acceptable resolutions, when deadlocks occurred there was simply no mechanism to resolve these amicably. The future confrontation between India and Pakistan over Kashmir would see states ruled by former lawyers arguing over the finer points of a non-existent law.

Whatever the relative gains, both air forces suffered as a consequence of reconstitution. The independent RIAF would not have access to the majority of pre-independence equipment depots since these were based in Pakistan. The Royal Pakistan Air Force would be unable to use its old training bases, with the exception of the Chaklala parachute training school, since these were based in India. That these two air forces proved ready for operations in the coming months is a tribute to both their professionalism and improvisational skills.



Image III: Royal Air Force B-24 Liberators take part in Indian Independence Day fly-past.

III. Independent Air Forces

The day of India's independence, 15 August 1947, was suffused with deep ambiguity for the men of the two newly created air forces. The process of completely separating the two air forces had not been completed and many of the newly re-designated Indian and Pakistani airmen found themselves in the wrong country. The ceremonial fly past over India Gate and the Red Fort, a symbolic assertion of Indian independence and sovereignty, was not solely an Indian affair. Photographs from that day show what appear to be B-24 Liberator bombers flying over the Red Fort.⁸⁰ The RIAF had no heavy bombers in its inventory at the time, meaning that British planes with British crews played an important part in India's Independence Day ceremony. The British presence in India was far from ended by the grant of formal independence and as later chapters will show decolonisation took considerably longer than is understood. More remarkably a number of planes flown over New Delhi as part of the Independence Day parade were piloted by Muslim pilots from Ambala air station, who were waiting to be sent to Pakistan. Some of these made up part of a 'JAI HIND (Victory to India)' formation flown overhead millions of cheering Indians.⁸¹

The date 15 August 1947 not only marked the creation of a new dominion but also the creation of two new successor air forces. The RIAF and RPAF were new air forces with new staff headquarters. Though the RPAF is treated as a new air force, partially as a consequence of Pakistani exceptionalism, the post-independence RIAF is treated as being the same institution as its pre-independent progenitor.⁸² This is in keeping with a narrative that emphasizes the continuities between independent India and the colonial state. According to

⁸⁰ See Image III.

⁸¹ Z.A. Chaudhury, *Mosaic of Memory*, (Lahore, 1985), p 14.

⁸² For RPAF claims to exceptionalism see: S.S. Hussain, (1982).

Patha Chatterjee the post-colonial state appropriated the ‘universal rationality’ enshrined in the colonial state by retaining ‘in a virtually unaltered form the basic structure of the civil service...and the armed forces as they existed in the colonial period.’⁸³ Independent India in this view was essentially an Indian takeover of the colonial state with the addition of a new program of ‘development’ which legitimated the new state and differentiated it from its colonial predecessor. There is no doubt that the post-independence RIAF, like the RPAF, inherited personnel, equipment and doctrine from the pre-independence RIAF. However it can be argued that the post-independence RIAF was a new institution. Though the post-independence RIAF would remain arguably the most inclusive of the Indian armed forces, the proportion of Muslims in it would remain very low in proportion to the Muslim population of the country in the period after independence.⁸⁴ It is possible to argue that the inclusiveness of the force underwent a qualitative change. This is demonstrated by the change of the motto of No 1 squadron IAF.

As a result of Partition No.1 squadron IAF was allotted to the RPAF. The squadron was the first and for long the only squadron of the colonial RIAF. It had served two tours of duties with distinction in the Second World War. Instead of adopting the squadron after independence however Pakistan disbanded it on 14 August 1947 the day before the RPAF was created, in a deliberate attempt to distance itself from the RIAF. The story of No 1 squadron did not end there however since independent India redesignated No. 15 squadron as No 1 Squadron in 1953 with much of the same regalia. One minor change however was

⁸³ P. Chatterjee, (1997), p 203.

⁸⁴ The first post-independence study of figures for the number of Muslims in the Indian Air Force was conducted in 2006. The Sachar committee report’s findings on Muslims in the Indian armed forces were withheld on the request of the Ministry of Defence. See: Rajinder Sachar et al, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India: A Report*, (New Delhi, 2006) p xiii.

revealing. The pre-independence No 1 Squadron's motto had been *Ittehad mein Shakti* or 'Unity in strength'. This combined the Urdu *Ittehad* meaning strength with the Hindi *Shakti*. Urdu being a Persianised language often associated with Muslims and Hindi being a Sanskritised language often associated with Hindus, the motto captured the unity and equality of India's two largest communities. Indeed the motto served as a subtle rebuke to the Hindi-Urdu debates that had polarised Hindus and Muslims on linguistic lines at the time.⁸⁵ When No 1 Squadron was raised after independence its motto was changed to *Ekta mein Shakti*.⁸⁶ While the meaning of the motto remains the same, the complete shift to Sanskritised Hindi is revealing of the less inclusive nature of the independent Indian Air Force even at the peak of Nehruvian secularism. By extension it is also illustrative of the ruptures between the post-colonial Indian state and its predecessor of the same name.

Indian independence, as a result of Partition, was imbued with an inescapable poignancy for air force men that statistics barely capture. RIAF personnel had been given a choice in July 1947 to choose which dominion they wished to serve with. The Royal Indian Air Force was opted by 896 officers, 10,350 airmen and 820 non-combatants while 224 officers, 2189 airmen and 407 non-combatants chose the Royal Pakistan Air Force.⁸⁷ Not all men went where their communities were larger. Idris Latif, a Hyderabadi chose to stay in India even though his Muslim colleagues told him he would be unsafe in India and would receive great promotions in Pakistan.⁸⁸ He would later hold the distinction of being the first and only Muslim commander of the Indian Air Force and indeed any Indian armed service. Two

⁸⁵ S. Bandopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*, (New Delhi, 2004), p 242-243.

⁸⁶ Squadron No 1 RIAF, <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/units/squadrons/1-squadron-tigers.html>, accessed 8/12/2016.

⁸⁷ S.S. Hussain, (1982), p 21.

⁸⁸ A. Reddy, (2001), p 92.

Hindus remained in the RPAF.⁸⁹ For many of the smaller ‘non-Muslim’ communities it was unclear as to which country to choose. In at least one case two brothers from an Anglo-Indian family opted for different air forces.⁹⁰ Parsees however overwhelmingly chose to serve India and one of them, Aspy Engineer would become the second Indian to hold the position of Chief of the Air Staff in the IAF.

Partition often had a personal impact on RIAF and RPAF personnel. It was near impossible even for men in the armed services to avoid being affected by the violence that by August 1947 had engulfed much of North India. Zafar Chaudhury, was stationed as a flying instructor at Ambala air station in September 1947 while awaiting the move to Pakistan. He was instructed by his family to travel to Calcutta to extricate his aunt and her three daughters, one of whom was his fiancé, from the riots that were affecting the city. Chaudhury flew to Allahabad from where he took the train to Calcutta. He was relieved that although the passengers aboard the train, ‘endlessly talked of the racial violence in India and Pakistan and gave accounts of what they had seen and heard, the journey itself was uneventful.’⁹¹ The newly married Sergeant A.L. Saigal, aged 24, had to leave his native city of Lahore along with his wife as the communal situation worsened in August 1947. After a short 20 mile journey, during which Saigal feared the worst, they arrived in Amritsar to find that the red brick railway station had transformed into a refugee camp.⁹² S.M. Ahmad’s plane would crash land at Halwara on his way to Ambala. There he would find himself stranded in a Muslim village ‘where the injured, maimed and mutilated bodies were pouring in at

⁸⁹ B. Kumar, (2007), p 34.

⁹⁰ ‘Derek O’Brien on minorities of India and Pakistan’,
<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/derek-obrien-minorities-of-india-and-pakistan/1/212816.html>, -accessed 20/4/15.

⁹¹ Z.A. Chaudhury, (1985), p 15.

⁹² M. Edwards, (2016), p 303.

intervals'. For four days Ahmad would organise the village defences and himself conduct patrols armed with a *danda* (big stick), before being rescued.⁹³ No doubt many men lost loved ones in the Partition in violence and the fear of violence poisoned communal relations.

The increasingly embittered communal relations in the force manifested themselves in a variety of ways in the period between independence and the total separation of the two air forces. Wing Commander M.K. Janjua invited six RIAF officer cadets to a party on the 14th August 1947 at Risalpur. When the same six cadets approached the officers mess the next morning they were allegedly confronted by Janjua and two sten gun wielding guards. Janjua ordered the Indians off the base exclaiming 'Gentlemen! The officer's mess of the Pakistan Air Force is off limits to Indian PIGS.' If the men had left Risalpur by train they would very likely have been attacked. The tense situation was only defused by the arrival of Wing Commander Asghar Khan. Asked what was happening RIAF officer Verghese Kurian responded, 'Sir, We would prefer to be killed right here on the airbase rather than be butchered on the way back in the trains.' Khan had the Indians airlifted back to India that day.⁹⁴

Pakistanis would complain that the RIAF never quite delivered all the aircraft and equipment that had been allotted to the RPAF by the AFRC. Of the 35 Tempest aircraft assigned to Pakistan five never arrived. Three aircraft were found to be unserviceable and two simply disappeared.⁹⁵ Multiple sources talk of RPAF plane engines being filled with sugar by RIAF ground crews as they made their way to Pakistan.⁹⁶ Communal divisions embittered by

⁹³ S.M. Ahmad, *A Lucky Pilot*, (Lahore, 1997), p 25.

⁹⁴ B. Kumar, (2007), p 22.

⁹⁵ S. Singh, *Partition of the Indian armed forces between India and Pakistan*, (unpublished PhD thesis, JNU, 1994), p 133.

⁹⁶ BL, MSS Eur D670/6, Diary entry, 21st September 1947; M. Ahmad, (1997), p 30.

Partition created a rift between Muslim and non-Muslim personnel who had served together in a force that had emphasized its diversity. One of the reasons disentangling the majority of Muslims from the RIAF was difficult, was because the force unlike the army had no separate 'class units'. Indeed the inclusivity and diversity of the RIAF had been advertised during the Second World War to ensure recruitment.⁹⁷ To be sure claims of inclusivity in the RIAF had always papered over politico-religious differences. Harjinder Singh, related an instance where he was forced to complain about an Indian officer who was maligning a particular religion, most likely Islam, for being 'nothing but barbarism'.⁹⁸ Politico-religious differences in the force that had always simmered in the force came to the surface with the drawn out reconstitution of the air forces. These circumstances make those instances when the men from the air forces aided each other all the more remarkable.

Asghar Khan was living with his wife in Ambala air force station awaiting his transfer to Pakistan in late August 1947. A south Indian technical officer named Nair was allotted Khan's house and pending Khan's departure for Pakistan agreed to live with Khan as his guest. The Khans spent a few pleasant days with Nair and his wife before preparing to depart on 23 August 1947. Nair insisted that trains were too unsafe for Khan to take and personally requested RPAF chief Air Marshal Perry Keene to fly Khan and his wife out of Ambala. Khan would later learn that Muslims evacuated by train on 23 August had been massacred and that in insisting that he be flown out Nair had almost certainly saved his life.⁹⁹ Even more remarkable is the story of Harjinder Singh's journey to Pakistan to pick up spares for Indian aircraft in October 1947. RIAF Tempest aircraft lacked critical tools to service their

⁹⁷ See for instance: NFAI, *Planes of Hindustan*, (Film, 1940); NFAI, *Cavalry of the Clouds*, (Film, 1941).

⁹⁸ A.L. Saigal (eds), (1977), p 31.

⁹⁹ A. Khan, *My Political Struggle*, (Oxford, 2008), pp 5-6.

Centaurus engines which had not yet been moved to Karachi. Singh therefore rang up his RPAF counterpart M.K. Janjua, who agreed to permit Singh to fly in and take the tools he needed. When Singh flew in to Karachi on 22 October however Janjua met him at the air field and warned him that tribal raiders had invaded Kashmir. War could very well break out between the two dominions and Singh was not safe in Pakistan. Instead of sending Singh back to India empty handed however, Janjua merely asked Singh to send his plane back. Singh was then locked in a hangar where he spent the day dividing the tools. His RIAF plane would return in the evening to fly him back to Amritsar that evening with critical equipment that would then be used in the conflict in Kashmir between India and Pakistan.¹⁰⁰ While the incident is remarkable in itself, what makes it nearly incredible is the fact that Janjua was the same RPAF commander alleged to have ejected Indians from Risalpur air station the day after independence. Given Janjua's co-operation with Singh in the matter of the Centaurus tools it appears unlikely that he did indeed eject the RIAF cadets from Risalpur in 1947. However there is no way to establish this and given the contradictory nature of much of Partition it is possible that the same man who threatened Indians the day after independence was willing to provide them with military equipment for use against his country at a later date.

Reconstitution of the two air forces would give way to war in October 1947 and this is the subject of a later chapter. Much of the writing on Partition, perhaps rightly, emphasises the shift from unity to war when discussing the Indian military in 1947.¹⁰¹ However it is also worth emphasising that the division of institutions was a longer process with often

¹⁰⁰ A.L. Saigal (eds), (1977), pp 230-1.

¹⁰¹ For a sentimentalist instance of this see: D. Lapierre and L. Collins, *Freedom at Midnight*, (London, 1983), p 234.

contradictory results. India and Pakistan continued to remain in the Joint Defence Council well into 1948, not least to ensure that reconstitution was a success. The governments of both countries were forced, partly as a result of reconstitution, to work together despite deep mutual hostility. Another factor that compelled the governments to co-operate was the threat of being consumed in chaos by the communal violence accompanying Partition and it is to this that we now turn.

IV. Indian Aviation in Partition

There is a growing consensus in recent scholarship emphasising the continuities between Partition and the Second World War. This strand demonstrates how the Second World War militarised Indian politics and society and shaped the violence accompanying Partition. Daniel Marston convincingly argues that the demobilisation of the Indian Army led to the release of thousands of men with military experience who came to be closely associated with ‘various political militias’.¹ Mary Wainwright has shown that rioters in 1947 could count on vast stocks of arms and ammunition, much of which was left behind by the departing allied armies.² William Gould has shown how religio-political militias, better armed than ever before, inflicted unprecedented levels of mass violence on the ‘Other’ in pursuit of explicitly political goals. Militias such as the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, the Muslim League National Guard, the Khaksars, the Akalis and the Ahrars had been drilling to ‘defend’ their communities in the political uncertainty that followed the war.³ It was only a matter of time before the many political agitations that rocked India in 1946 gave way to widespread

¹ D. Marston, (2014), p 279. There is also evidence that a number of rioters were serving personnel in the military of the princely states, many of whom actively abetted mass violence. S. Hamid, (1993), p 163.

² M. Wainwright, ‘Keeping the peace’, p 127-147.

³ W. Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of belonging in India*, (Cambridge, 2004), p 165, 235.

communal violence, in August that year. Heavily armed militias conducted organised campaigns aimed at cleansing their regions of minorities. This had the effect of embittering and accelerating constitutional negotiations. The final acceptance of the decision to partition colonial India by Indian parties would in large part be explained by their hopes that this would stem the flow of violence that by June 1947 was already dangerously widespread.

The division of the subcontinent led to unprecedented violence as majorities in both India and Pakistan turned on minorities in order to ethnically cleanse their states. Little stopped them from doing so. As a consequence of decisions taken considerably before Partition, British forces were not used in order to maintain law and order in the dominions. This was ostensibly because the dominions were independent and the use of British forces would be seen as an attempt to prolong imperial rule.⁴ Civilian organs of the state such as the judiciary and the police were often too overwhelmed by the violence to deter it on those occasions when they did not actively sympathise with the mob. In these circumstances the independent Indian state was reduced to those of its organs that continued to function, the largest of which was the Indian military. As a contemporary observer would note, the Indian Army was now the 'Super Police Force'.⁵ It was a designation that might well have suited the RIAF.

Over the course of nearly three months the RIAF would perform a number of critical roles from protecting refugee columns to dropping leaflets on rioters. If the riots were akin to civil war then the RIAF played a crucial role in successfully conducting a series of military operations that helped retard the spread of violence and bring about a return of order within a relatively short span. Due to its small size and the relatively sophisticated nature of many

⁴ It has been suggested that this was not the case. See for instance: Y. Khan, (2007), p 128.

⁵ S. Hamid, (1993), p 163.

of the tasks it performed however the RIAF has thus far received little attention from scholars. This section will therefore point to the critical role of the RIAF in Partition and its saving of thousands of lives.

The first RIAF aircraft to be deployed to aid the army during Partition were a flight of Auster aircraft from the 659 Artillery Observation Post Squadron, stationed in August 1947 as part of the short lived Punjab Boundary Force. The planes were reconnaissance aircraft whose task was to scout disturbances and relay news of them to ground troops who could then rapidly move in to restore order. Punjab was an ideal space in which to use aircraft since landing spaces were easy to find meaning that pilots could liaise with ground troops very quickly after performing reconnaissance.⁶ In the acclaimed Hindi novel *Tamas* (Darkness) by Bhisham Sahni the arrival of the aeroplane saves the lives of Sikhs whose Gurudwara is about to be torched:

‘The plane flew over the village thrice before it went away.

The atmosphere of the village changed. People ventured out. The fighting seemed to have stopped and dead bodies were being disposed of. People went back to their houses to assess their losses in terms of clothes and ornaments....

The villages over which the plane had flown stopped beating their drums.’⁷

There may be some truth in fiction since early on the ‘mere presence’ of aircraft was found to have a deterrent effect, dispersing mobs and giving villages time to prepare their defences. A similar effect was observed with the deployment of tanks and wheeled personnel carriers.⁸ In circumstances where large bodies of men acted as militias in order to violate the state’s

⁶ MoD (I), 601/14185/H, R. Singh, *Draft History of the Military Evacuation Organisation*, p 120-21.

⁷ B. Sahni, *Tamas*,

<http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/tamas.pdf>, Jai Ratan translation, accessed 9/12/2016.

⁸ MoD (I), 601/14185/H, R. Singh, *Draft History of the Military Evacuation Organisation*, p 120.

monopoly on violence, a potent means to restore order was through the deployment of the high technologies of violence. The democratisation of violence that characterised Partition could effectively be resisted by the state through a demonstration of its ability to resort to technologised forms of violence on which it had the monopoly. Aviation resources deployed by the Indian state until August 1947 however were grossly inadequate to stem the tide of carnage.

The possibility that Partition might lead to an exchange of populations had not been considered, let alone planned for by the governments of the two new states. Consequently, measures to combat mass violence on an unprecedented scale as well as to expedite the transfer of minority populations from affected regions were grossly inadequate. Mass violence moved from Punjab to consume New Delhi itself. Levels of violence were so great that they imperiled the continued functioning of states that were still recovering from the division of nearly all their assets and personnel. Nehru later wrote to the chief ministers of provinces that the disturbances might well have spread from the western United Provinces to engulf all of India. If that happened then apart from the butchery and the destruction of property they would face, 'the wholesale disruption of communications, disorganisation of food supplies and the spread of epidemic diseases.'⁹ Fears that India might be overwhelmed by Partition were reflected in the aviation world with the British Overseas Airways Corporation's 'Operation By-Pass' which aimed to fly aircraft around India rather than land in the chaos.¹⁰ In order to pacify the violence the governments of India and Pakistan were forced to concede that millions of citizens would have to be evacuated as part of an exchange

⁹ Nehru to Chief Ministers, 15 October 1947, in G. Parthasarathi eds, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-64*, (Oxford, 1985), p 2.

¹⁰ TNA, BT 217/1887, Appendix 'A'.

of populations. This would entail working together on a very large scale and led to the raising of the Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO) on 1 September 1947.¹¹

The MEO had its headquarters in Lahore in order to liaise between the Pakistani armed forces and East Punjab Area Command which included the entirety of the 4th Division under General K.S. Thimayya with a larger RIAF contingent. The MEO represented a much larger military and diplomatic commitment than the Punjab Boundary Force. Aeroplanes would begin flying every morning at dawn to provide tactical reconnaissance and would be sent out every three hours to overfly railway tracks on which trains were scheduled to travel. Aeroplanes were used to ensure that trains were not ambushed by mobs in a variety of ways. Planes would search for breaks or obstructions in the tracks. They would look out for armed men and would report on the progress of the mobile columns of troops that often travelled alongside the train to protect it. RIAF planes could communicate with trains in a number of ways. The most conventional of these was the use of wireless radio transmissions. However if this was not available planes could use flare guns to communicate with engine drivers. Red flares would signal the train to stop, green would signal 'GO' and white flares were used to acknowledge messages from the train. If for whatever reason the pilot was unable to communicate with the train through these means then he could use more physical methods. To indicate a mob or obstruction a pilot could dive over a point multiple times before flying towards the train to signal it to halve speed until reinforcements could arrive. This might be followed with a message dropped near the engine. To stop the train pilots were ordered to fly

¹¹ MoD (I), 601/14185/H, R. Singh, *Draft History of the Military Evacuation Organisation*, p 14.

low over the train twice from rear to front. In order to make trains easy to spot from the air they were painted with white Xs on the front bogey of each train.¹²

Pilots flying over Punjab in September 1947 reported spotting foot columns of 20-30,000 refugees extending 17 to 25 miles. Reconnaissance by RIAF aircraft acted as force multipliers by spotting mobs waiting to ambush refugees on foot and reporting their positions to military patrols.¹³ The RIAF had specialised in tactical reconnaissance during the Second World War and was therefore well suited to this task, especially on the flat terrain of Punjab.¹⁴ Pilots flying over the region at the time reported seeing pillars of black smoke rising from scores of burning villages.¹⁵ If one flew low enough it was possible to see the bodies floating through Punjab's famous canal system.¹⁶ Some of the photographs of refugee camps spreading out as far as the eye can see could only have been taken by aircraft at relatively high altitudes.¹⁷

In addition to tactical reconnaissance RIAF aircraft performed a number of other critical tasks. RIAF planes flew one and a half million doses of cholera vaccine from Delhi to Karachi in September 1947.¹⁸ That widespread disease did not follow on the heels of mass violence despite the squalid conditions in refugee camps is owed partly to the speed with which aircraft could deliver vaccines. Dakotas from the RIAF's No 12 squadron flying from Delhi and Amritsar air dropped cooked food, sugar, and oil for refugee columns at Joranwalla, Lyallpur, Churkhana, Dhabhansinghwala and Bhai Pheru.¹⁹ When the Government of Pakistan (GoP)

¹² Ibid, p 77.

¹³ Ibid, p 34.

¹⁴ See for instance: MoD (I), 601/9621/H, ORB No.8 Squadron.

¹⁵ Z.A. Chaudhury, (1985), p 20.

¹⁶ S.M. Ahmad, (1997), p 25.

¹⁷ BL, *Millions on the Move*, (New Delhi, 1948), p 72.

¹⁸ MoD (I), 601/14476/H, *Partition Proceedings*, vol. V, Emergency committee meeting, 12 September 1947.

¹⁹ BL, *Millions on the Move*, (New Delhi, 1948), p 5.

proved unable or unwilling to feed non-Muslim refugees in refugee camps in its territory RIAF aircraft air dropped food supplies at Wah, Jaranwallah, Balloki, Khudian and Chunian.²⁰

Partition is often understood as being a conflict between North India's largest religious communities. Yet by September 1947 it was increasingly a confrontation between the governments of India and Pakistan on the one hand and violent elements of the majority communities within their own territories on the other. The Indian state thus faced militant sections of the Sikh and Hindu communities, while the Pakistani government had to in large part confront Muslim extremists since these represented the greatest threat to the maintenance of order. Restoring order in India increasingly meant using the Indian military against non-Muslims whose violence was beginning to erode state power, while Pakistan had to militarily suppress elements of its majority Muslim community. This is not to deny that the hybridity of the MEO sometimes meant that Pakistani forces might be stationed in India and vice versa but rather to point to the fact that state power increasingly had to be wielded against the very communities which the dominions represented, implicitly or explicitly.²¹ This was because, as seen above, both states risked being overwhelmed by the violence which, apart from wiping out the minorities, threatened the state's monopoly on violence and the order that flowed from this. The only way to order was for the Indian and Pakistan governments to work closely with each other despite their differences. Both India and Pakistan agreed to the

²⁰ Ibid., p 12

²¹ Vallabhai Patel, the Indian Home Minister, would invite Sikh leaders of Delhi to a meeting where he would ask them to ensure that attacks against Muslims in the city ceased. When the leaders protested that they had no idea who was carrying out the attacks, Patel threatened to place the entire Sikh community in concentration camps unless the attacks were stopped. BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Emergency committee of the cabinet, Part I, 6 to 14 September 1947.

use of aircraft to drop leaflets warning rioters to cease violence or face dire consequences.²² Given the small size of the RPAF and the increased co-operation between the dominions in the MEO it is not unlikely that RIAF aircraft dropped leaflets in both dominions.

The extent to which the crisis of Partition pushed the state's resources to breaking point is revealed by the decision to use RIAF personnel for law enforcement in New Delhi. Air Marshal Elmhirst promised the deployment of a hundred and fifty armed airmen at Palam airport where Muslim refugees were boarding flights for Pakistan.²³ These would have served alongside a motley collection of forces put together by the Indian government to restore order in New Delhi drawn from the military, the police, the Home Guard and irregular volunteers. RIAF personnel were also posted to ground duties with relatively little connection to aviation. As thousands of Muslim refugees flocked to Purana Quila and Humayun's tomb to escape the violence, the Government of India came to rely on loud speakers to organise the refugee camps. The wires to these speakers were repeatedly cut by anti-Muslim elements in order to cause chaos in the camp. RIAF men were deputed to protect and operate the speakers, a task they accomplished despite wires being repeatedly cut.²⁴

Dakotas from No 12 Squadron RIAF would take part in refugee evacuation operations alongside the RAF, Indian and foreign chartered aircraft. These operations are discussed in detail below. However it is important here to point out that the RIAF's final contribution to Partition relief was the evacuation of non-Muslims from distant pockets of Pakistan such as Multan, Bannu and Peshawar upto November 1947.²⁵ These relatively distant communities

²² Idem.,

²³ Idem., It is unclear if the airmen were deputed since, as I will show, airfield security in Delhi was disorderly at best.

²⁴ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Emergency committee of the cabinet, Part I, 13 September 1947.

²⁵ MoD (I), 601/14185/H, R. Singh, *Draft History of the Military Evacuation Organisation*, p 82.

were often too far away from railway lines and their evacuation, often from regions that had experienced relatively little communal violence, represented India's commitment to the evacuation of as many non-Muslims from Pakistan as possible. A near complete exchange of populations, on the western frontier, was effected in less than three months, between the acceptance of the principle of population exchange in September and the final flights out of Pakistan in November 1947.

V. The limits of Indian civil aviation in refugee evacuation

The prospect of rapidly exchanging populations in circumstances of extreme danger was complicated by the incomplete disentanglement of government personnel in both India and Pakistan. Whereas aviation would account for less than one percent of evacuees, a significant proportion of these would be government officials and their families. These officials included an entire plethora of public servants who were critical to successfully overcoming the logistical bottlenecks involved in moving eight million people to the dominion of their choice. Indian civil aviation companies would play a critical role in this process, often risking planes and pilots to move as many people as they could. However the sheer numbers of people who needed to be evacuated as well as the lack of facilities in the cities in which they were functioning would force civil aviation companies to scale down refugee evacuations. The governments of India and Pakistan eventually employed a fleet of foreign aircraft to complete the most urgent refugee evacuations. This had important long term effects.

The earliest crisis facing the GoI in East Punjab was the restoration of communications in August 1947. Air services were organised between Delhi, Amritsar and Jullundur, all of which were in Indian territory, in order to efficiently co-ordinate state efforts. Subsequently

an attempt was made to speed up the evacuation of refugees by air from Pakistan through the establishment of daily services to Quetta, Rawalpindi and Peshawar as well as additional services to Lahore and Karachi. Charter facilities were provided for private individuals to hire aircraft to move them from Sialkot, Sarghoda, Lyallpur and Dera Ismail Khan.²⁶ A Controlling Air Transport Authority for refugees was appointed to co-ordinate air services under Rai Bahadur N.C. Ghosh.²⁷ A major decision that confronted the governments of India and Pakistan with regard to using aircraft in refugee evacuation was whether scheduled flights ought to be continued in light of the emergency. A precedent for controlling civil aviation did exist in the form of controls placed on Indian commercial airline companies during the Second World War. The Emergency Committee of the Indian cabinet briefly discussed the possibility of diverting flights from Pakistan to Ambala rather than New Delhi in order to avoid the gathering of large numbers of refugees in the capital, since these often served to exacerbate the communal situation and placed pressure on relief facilities. However the committee concluded that most passengers who came by plane were wealthy and therefore did not stay in camps. Indeed many of the passengers on planes did not even stay in New Delhi but rather moved on to other destinations. A move to divert scheduled services to Ambala would also mean that aircraft would have to return to Pakistan empty. Consequently, scheduled services which had operated before 14 August 1947 would be permitted to continue.²⁸ Non-scheduled services however would now be diverted to Ambala. Air services were to be intensified between Delhi on the one hand and Quetta, Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar on the other. All available civil aircraft that were not

²⁶ BL, *Millions on the Move*, (New Delhi, 1948), pp 3-4.

²⁷ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Emergency committee of the cabinet, Part I, 9 September 1947.

²⁸ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Emergency committee of the cabinet, Part I, 8 September 1947.

plying scheduled routes were used to ferry refugees from Pakistan to India. Ten planes became available for government use and on most days seven of these flew from Delhi to Sarghoda, Lyallpur, Multan and Rawalpindi.²⁹

A number of measures were taken to expedite air evacuation. A subcommittee of the cabinet for air was formed under the joint leadership of the DGCA and the Air Marshal Commanding RIAF. The sub-committee was tasked with centralising the evacuation effort and effectively subsuming the Controlling Authority for Air Transport of Refugees. Indian Air Liaison officers were appointed at Pakistan aerodromes in order to better co-ordinate refugee evacuation.³⁰ Two Royal Air Force transport squadrons deployed in India to evacuate British nationals were pressed into service by Lord Mountbatten, for the evacuation of Indian government officials from Pakistan.³¹ A total of 12,000 people would be transported between India and Pakistan by these aircraft along with the tiny RAF communication flight in India. Only 2,790 of these would be British personnel. The rest were government personnel including railway, post, telegraph and military personnel with their families.³²

The airfields of Delhi and Punjab became scenes of great danger and desperation in August 1947. Typically refugees would be confined to camps abutting the airfield and would rush the planes as soon as they were permitted, crowding the airfield. More often than not the number of passengers who could be carried on aircraft was limited and passengers desperate to be flown out of danger offered aircrews bribes in the form of money, gold and jewels for a chance to board the plane.³³ A photograph from the period depicts a Dakota aeroplane in

²⁹ BL, *Millions on the Move*, (New Delhi, 1948), p 6.

³⁰ *Idem.*,

³¹ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15553/2, Royal Air Force Dakota Squadrons (September 1947-January 1948).

³² *Flight*, October 23 1947, p 484.

³³ A. Reddy, (2001), p 157.

Multan surrounded by refugees with different kinds of luggage. Some have large trunks, while others stand next to sacks and mats while a man in uniform, presumably a pilot, attempts to deal with a large group of people right next to the plane's wing.³⁴ Flight tickets were expensive and it was not uncommon for passengers to be charged 150-200 Rupees for a one way journey. Black market sales of marked up tickets were not uncommon.³⁵ Strict restrictions on luggage, usually restricted to 44 pounds, permitted passengers to carry only a fraction of their possessions. Forced to prioritise what she would carry, Alia Hyder, a Muslim from Hyderabad carried only her Koran with her to Pakistan.³⁶ Other refugees are reported to have carried a 'small and rather battered child's cane chair; a moth-eaten-looking- parrot' and a 'length of fine suit material worn round the shoulders like a shawl.'³⁷ Refugees attempting to board planes were particularly vulnerable to being harassed and robbed by the police who would check their belongings before they got onto flights. While it was not uncommon in India for 'unauthorised persons' to search Muslim refugees before they boarded planes, harassment of refugees in Pakistan was particularly pronounced. In one case refugees belongings were stolen by a district magistrate.³⁸ Searches continued to be seen as necessary by authorities in both governments however especially since refugees had on occasion been spotted smuggling weapons.³⁹ When refugees got past the searches and boarded the planes they were subjected to enormous overcrowding. Aircraft had seating and

³⁴ BL, *Millions on the Move*, (New Delhi, 1948), p 74.

³⁵ 'From Orient to PIA', <http://defence.pk/threads/frm-orient-to-pia.232677/> accessed 19/4/2015.

³⁶ L. Collins and D. Lapierre, (1997), p 373.

³⁷ PC (AR), *Indian Aviation*, 'Operation India', April 1948, p 116.

³⁸ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Meeting between representatives of Air Operating Companies and GoI, 9 September 1947.

³⁹ BL, MSS Eur 670/23, Cunningham papers, Fortnightly report, 15 October 1947. There had been considerable concern in both states about refugees bearing arms. What no doubt seemed to be a survival strategy for refugees was seen by the governments to be another barrier to the restoration of law and order. See: B.R. Nanda eds, *Selected Works of Ballabh Pant*, (New Delhi, 1993), p 88.

carpets removed to accommodate as many refugees as possible. Dakota DC-3 aircraft meant to carry 21 passengers often carried five times that number. Deccan Airways technician Allen Joseph Francis was issued with a pair of knuckledusters by his pilot for crowd control. When the plane had been filled Francis would punch his way to door collect the under carriage pins of the plane and punch his way back into the plane before firmly locking it. Only once the doors were firmly closed the engine would start. Then the ‘crowd would automatically vanish due to the slip stream of the engines.’⁴⁰ Despite all the travails of flying however, once refugees were aboard an aeroplane they could be certain of reaching their destination quickly and without any of the dangers of the millions making the journey on land.

It is remarkable that no major crashes were reported despite the massive overcrowding of aircraft. Refugees often crowded airfields before planes landed because of the lack of security.⁴¹ Matters were not helped by the hostility authorities displayed to air crews of the ‘other’ country. Pakistan officials, for instance, refused to provide ground crew support to Indian planes flying out refugees forcing them to carry their own technical crews. This degraded the efficiency of the plane and reduced the number of refugees that could be evacuated. Indian air crews were often not allowed to deplane in Pakistan and when they did were treated with extreme suspicion.⁴² Ground crews and pilots were often threatened and as a group of airline representatives explained to the government were ‘definitely in danger.’⁴³

⁴⁰ A. Reddy, (2001), p 152.

⁴¹ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Meeting between representatives of Air Operating Companies and GoI, 9 September 1947.

⁴² A key reason why Deccan Airways was able to function longer in Pakistan than other airlines was because of its white and Muslim personnel. A. Reddy, (2001), p 150.

⁴³ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Meeting between representatives of Air Operating Companies and GoI, 9 September 1947.

Even in Delhi which by all accounts was the most well organised site of evacuation, airport security could be remarkably lax. Palam airport, which had a large Muslim staff was woefully unprotected at the height of Partition. The chaos of Partition meant that forces to protect vital zones like airfields were stretched thin. A company of Royal Scots Fusiliers officially in New Delhi to protect British lives was posted at the airport on the 6th of September 1947.⁴⁴ Matters would be so dire that the airport would be closed down the next day.⁴⁵ The tiny platoon defending Willingdon airport was withdrawn forcing ground crews to absent themselves. Burmah Shell petroleum complained, 'The a/c (aircraft), the petrol installations and the staff on duty are at the mercy of unruly mobs.'⁴⁶ Refugee evacuation to and from the city was further complicated by the absence of facilities to house and feed air service personnel. Trains carrying food were having difficulty getting into Delhi forcing Indian National Airways staff at Palam to live on hard rations.⁴⁷ It was also far too unsafe for Muslim personnel to live in private accommodation as Deccan Airways learnt when its Muslim technicians had to be moved out of Lodhi colony opposite Willingdon airport.⁴⁸ Various attempts were made to properly house air service personnel based in New Delhi for refugee evacuation numbering 500, including an attempt to house them at Constitution house where only a month earlier India had been declared independent.⁴⁹

Just as pressing as worries about crews were concerns about the sustainability of the tempo of operations due to the serviceability of the aircraft. The continued lack of servicing facilities provided to planes at many of the airfields they visited, especially in Pakistan, severely

⁴⁴ S. Hamid, (1993), p 246.

⁴⁵ Idem.,

⁴⁶ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Emergency committee of the cabinet, Part I, 9 September 1947.

⁴⁷ PC (AR), *Indian Aviation*, 'Operation India', April 1948, p 116.

⁴⁸ A. Reddy, (2001), p 153.

⁴⁹ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Emergency committee of the cabinet, Part I, 9 September 1947.

affected their serviceability. Engines were not being serviced as often as needed and it was likely that the continued tempo of operations might well result in crashes or at the very least the grounding of aircraft. If this state of affairs continued India could well risk the gains that had been accrued in civil aviation over the last decade. Airline companies felt that the ‘conservation of aircraft and personnel for civil aviation and communications in India as whole was a matter of greater importance than this attempt at tackling a problem which was really a problem of mass evacuation which can only be done by rail and road.’⁵⁰ The sheer size of the problem confronting the airline industry was crushing. Evacuation by air had ‘utterly failed’ to achieve any tangible results. It had ‘not even touched the fringe of the problem when lacs (sic) of people had to be evacuated’.⁵¹ While Indian aircraft would continue to take part in refugee evacuation operations well into December 1947, operators became increasingly reluctant to risk aircraft and personnel for what seemed like an increasingly impossible task. It became clear that Indian aviation alone could not carry out air evacuations.

The Government of Pakistan (GoP), perhaps because of its much smaller aviation sector, had realised early on that it would need foreign help in order to move the relatively large numbers of government officials and their families. An urgent request was sent to the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) for aircraft and crews to evacuate government officials and their families totaling seven thousand from New Delhi to Pakistan’s new capital Karachi. A BOAC Lancastrian arrived in Karachi the following day while other aircraft were mobilised for this effort from BOAC itself as well as a number of other British companies including

⁵⁰ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15538, Meeting between representatives of Air Operating Companies and GoI, 9 September 1947.

⁵¹ *Idem*.

Scottish Airlines, Silver City Airlines and Westminster Airways. After briefly calling off the request, most likely to consider the costs of the operation, the Pakistani cabinet gave what came to be called 'Operation Pakistan' the go ahead. In order to maximise the speed of operations the arriving British aircraft carried as many extra crews as possible.⁵² Over the next fifteen days twenty one British aircraft working nearly non-stop would move about 6300 people from Delhi to Karachi. They also carried 45,000 kilograms of food, tents and vaccines for refugees stuck at Delhi's aerodromes.⁵³ On their way back to India aircraft also brought 1500 fare paying non-Muslim passengers. The breakneck pace of operations can be gauged from the fact that these non-Muslims were often dropped off at the airport before planes taxied back 500 yards to prepare to take off again.⁵⁴ Operation Pakistan was extraordinarily successful and there is no doubt that its success played a critical part in ensuring that GoP personnel were in place to commence the task of organising the exchange of populations.

By October 1947 the GoI had come to realise that it too needed an airlift of its government personnel who were in danger of being massacred. It also saw the need to evacuate non-Muslims in distant pockets of Pakistan's Northwest in order to protect them from the violence they would likely face on the long land journey to India. The GoI also knew by this point that Indian civil aviation, even with the aid of the RIAF and RAF, could not complete these tasks with speed. However there appears to have been a certain measure of reluctance on the part of the GoI to request British aid. In early October 1947 GoI officials inquired with the US Ambassador to India Henry F. Grady if the United States could provide India with aircraft and crews for the evacuation of 50,000 non-Muslims from the North West Frontier Province.

⁵² *Flight*, 2 October 1947.

⁵³ Several accounts at the time cite 7000 as the number of people evacuated. However 6300 is the official BOAC estimate. TNA, BT 217/ 1793, Chairman to Brackley, 17 September 1947.

⁵⁴ *The Aeroplane*, 1947, p 507.

The US State Department responded that it was willing to do so on the condition that the GoP was willing to acquiesce to the scheme and also that full protection be provided for its air service personnel.⁵⁵ American conditions would multiply over time to include the demand that all violence cease before any evacuation was undertaken. It is likely that the State Department was making impossible demands largely as a means of staying out of operations the United States did not, at this point, have any interest in undertaking.⁵⁶ This does not explain Indian reluctance in calling on the services of BOAC however. The Indian Ministry of Refugees and Rehabilitation resented the possibility of having to pay over a million Pounds a month to British companies to carry out relatively small evacuations at a time when the money was badly needed.⁵⁷ The GoI's reluctance to rely on British airlines was further entrenched by the belief that BOAC would charge India more than it had Pakistan.⁵⁸ The pressing need for evacuation of Indian government personnel as well as non-Muslims stranded in remote regions in Pakistan however eventually compelled the GoI to accept an offer to assist in refugee evacuation from BOAC.

⁵⁵ TNA, BT 217/ 1793, Secretary for Commonwealth relations to United Kingdom High Commissioner (UKHC) India, 12 October 1947.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) to UKHC India, 11 November 1947.

⁵⁷ Ibid., UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 22 October 1947.

⁵⁸ Ibid., UKHC India to CRO, 23 October 1947.

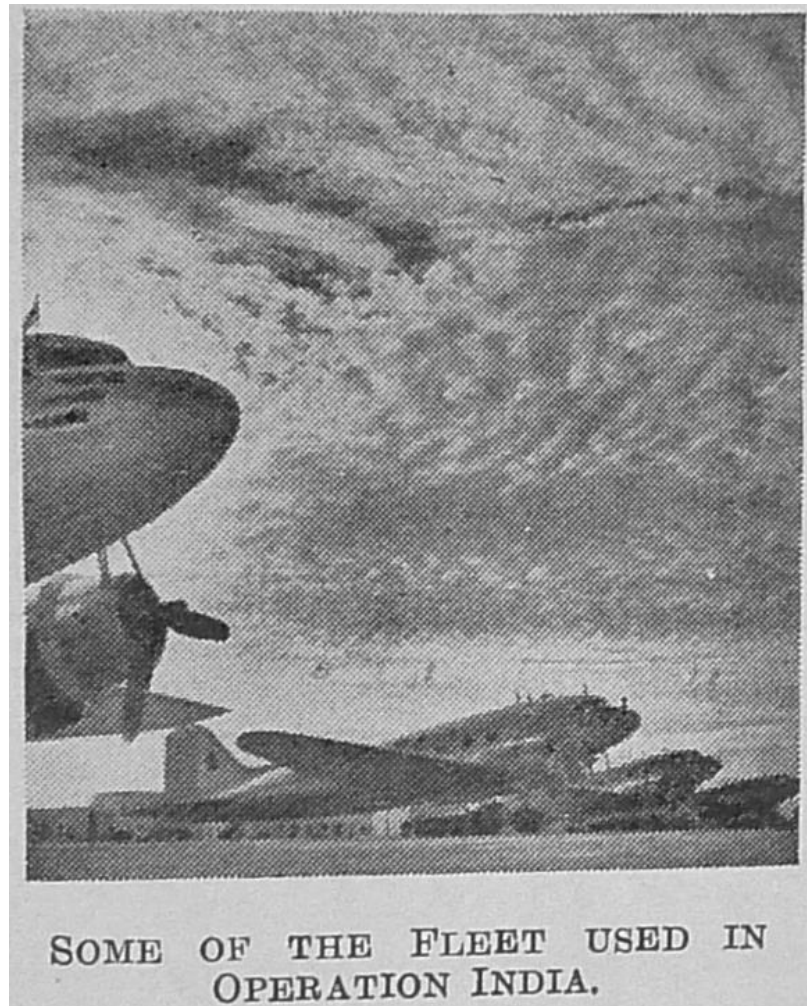


Image IV: Dakota aircraft used by British air fleet in Operation India. Special permission was taken from the British Ministry of Civil Aviation to replace seating with mattresses in order to accommodate as many refugees as possible.

‘Operation India’ was conducted under the leadership of Air Commodore H. G. Brackley, assistant for Special duties to the chairman of BOAC, who had conducted ‘Operation Pakistan’. As BOAC refused to lend any aircraft plying its famed ‘Speedbird’ routes several British companies- Westminster Airways, Air Contractors, Air Charter, Sieverwright Airways, Scottish Aviation, Channel Islands Air Transport Charter, Kearsley Airways and

Silver City Airways- had to be approached for aircraft and crews.⁵⁹ Brackley would eventually successfully assemble an air fleet consisting of twenty Dakota and one Wayfarer aircraft. Over the course of six weeks between 19 October and 30 November 35,000 people and over 1,500,000 lb of baggage were flown between Pakistan and India.⁶⁰ The British companies used the same tactics used with great success during ‘Operation Pakistan’. British airlines brought their own personnel with them to Palam aerodrome. Some 170 air service personnel were flown in from Britain and two barrack blocks were taken over from the RAF. The DGCA also handed over a terminal building to serve as offices. Still there was simply no food and furniture available. Two hundred camp beds, 40 wardrobes, 30 dressing tables, 250 chairs, linens and even charcoals for fires were flown in from Calcutta and Karachi.⁶¹ Eggs from Quetta, cigarettes from Karachi and poultry from Calcutta were flown in for British air crews.⁶² The GoI directed operations by deciding everyday where planes would be sent, since aircraft often needed to serve distant regions. They would then be sent from Palam aerodrome in New Delhi to pick up points all over India and Pakistan. These included Peshawar, Risalpur, Rawalpindi, Chaklala, Multan, Der Khan, Quetta, Lyallpur, Khanpur, Amritsar, Ambala and Lahore. Aircraft would land in groups and each plane’s captain would then let as many passengers as he felt his plane could handle on board. A photograph from the period shows a British captain screaming at a Dhoti clad villager, most likely about luggage permitted on board the aeroplane in the background.⁶³

⁵⁹ PC (AR), *Indian Aviation*, ‘Operation India’, April 1948, p 113.

⁶⁰ TNA, BT 217/ 1793, H.G. Brackley, 1 December 1947.

⁶¹ *Flight*, 25 December 1947.

⁶² PC (AR), *Indian Aviation*, ‘Operation India’, April 1948, p 116.

⁶³ *Flight*, 25 December 1947.

Some 14,000 people flown out during Operation India were transported to Pakistan from India, while some 21,000 were flown from Pakistan to India. There are three reasons for the relatively low number of people flown out to Pakistan. The first of these is technical. Planes had to take off with full fuel tanks due to the lack of refueling facilities. Much of this would be burned on the journey making the plane lighter. This meant that they could carry fewer loads flying out than when flying in.⁶⁴ Secondly ‘Operation India’ followed ‘Operation Pakistan’ during which the most urgently needed Pakistan personnel had already been flown out of India, meaning that the need for more Pakistan personnel had reduced. Third and perhaps most important was the fact that Pakistan was beginning to be overwhelmed with refugees. As the head of the BOAC wrote ‘They have little space for and limited resources with which to feed their greatly swollen population.’⁶⁵ The exchange of populations, while accepted by both dominions in principle could never actually be total. Pakistan could never evacuate India’s vast Muslim population with the same thoroughness with which India evacuated West Pakistan’s non-Muslim minorities. Pakistan was never meant to be a refuge for all Muslims and the view that India was attempting to overwhelm Pakistan with waves of Muslim refugees began to take root with the GoP with grave consequences for the later conflict in Kashmir which it saw as an iteration of this.⁶⁶ Significantly the GoI held similar views about East Pakistan. While refugees were evacuated en-masse from West Pakistan similar attempts were not made in East Pakistan. There were several reasons for this but perhaps the most significant was the sheer numbers of evacuees this would have involved. The GoI found it extremely challenging to resettle the millions evacuated from West Pakistan

⁶⁴ BT 217/ 1793, Evacuation in India-Proposal to waive safety regulations.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Head of BOAC, undated; For a detailed view of Pakistan’s difficulties accommodating Muslim refugees see: V. Zamindar, (2007).

⁶⁶ BL, L/WS/1/1144, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 18 November 1948.

and would have found it impossible to also settle those from East Pakistan. The GoI would instead attempt to coerce Pakistan into protecting its Hindu minority and this, as shall be seen in a later chapter, would nearly plunge the two states into war.

Operation India is illustrative of the difficulties faced by the GoI. Indian civil aviation could simply not conduct evacuation operations on the same scale as British companies which could deploy far greater resources. British companies could deploy white personnel who did not have to fear for their lives because of their religious identities. Nonetheless it is critical to point out that Operation India took part with the aid of the RIAF, the DGCA and INA all of whom made important contributions.⁶⁷ The Indian Ministry of Refugees and Rehabilitation and the GoP were critical to getting evacuees to aerodromes safely. The Indian and Pakistani states despite their hostility, which at this point was plunging them into war, understood the need to co-operate in order to prevent being swept away by violence unleashed by their majorities. Further, the experience of Operation India would inculcate an understanding of the importance of mobilising a national aviation sector. This would have critical implications for the next major airlift; the Bengal airlift of 1950 as well as for the nationalisation of Indian airline companies in 1953.

⁶⁷ TNA, BT 217/ 1793, H.G. Brackley, 1 December 1947.

VI. Conclusion

The two years after the Second World War were characterised by dysfunction in high politics and mass violence at the local level. There is an argument to be made that the instability unleashed by the Second World War in India ultimately manifested itself in mass violence between three of the subcontinent's largest religious communities. Nationalist histories of the decade often drew a straight line from the Quit India movement of 1942 to Indian independence.⁶⁸ Perhaps a better way to understand Partition is to draw a shorter line from 1945 to 1947. The Second World War led to a crisis of legitimacy in the colonial military not seen since 1857. Indian army soldiers had defected to the Axis and subsequently became national heroes after the war, ratings of the Royal Indian Navy mutinied in 1946 and the RIAF staged a series of 'strikes'. Even as the colonial military was haemorrhaging legitimacy, militia groups organised on military lines were mobilising to 'defend' their communities. That they could draw on demobilised military personnel and abandoned weaponry to do so is incidental to the broader democratisation of violence based off the increasing loss of state legitimacy. Organised violence drove high politics into dysfunction as India's two leading parties, the Congress and the Muslim League failed to come to agreement on the constitutional issue.

The two parties were unable to work together in the short-lived interim government to implement plans towards long-term profitability and viability of Indian civil aviation. The Indian civil aviation sector though initially hamstrung by the war benefitted enormously from equipment and demobilised personnel in its aftermath. However if it was to remain profitable,

⁶⁸ See for instance: B. Chandra, *India's Struggle for independence*, (New Delhi, 1989).

the number of airlines would need to be carefully regulated. The Tymms plan aimed to fulfil precisely this objective but failed to be implemented due to cabinet dysfunction as well as its own rigidity. The failure to implement the plan would have critical long term implications and set the private airlines of India on a course that would lead eventually towards nationalisation. As mass violence increased in a context of constitutional deadlock British and Indian politicians became convinced of the need to Partition colonial India into two dominions. Muslim League politicians echoing an old view would insist that the creation of separate militaries was a pre-requisite to state sovereignty. This would lead to the reconstitution of the colonial RIAF into two new air forces, the RIAF and the RPAF. Negotiations round the reconstitution of the forces revealed the inconsistent ad hoc nature of the politics of Partition. India, though it emerged with the larger air force effectively found itself with a new institution that only imperfectly embodied the pre-independence RIAF's ethos of inclusivity. Though like the state which it represented, the RIAF would employ a rhetoric of continuity, there is reason to believe that 1947 was the moment of the replacement of a necessarily multiethnic imperial state with an implicitly ethnocentric nation state.

The RIAF, which was itself in the throes of a difficult reconstitution, was deployed to assist with the refugee crisis of 1947. RIAF planes were employed on a variety of tasks including protecting railway trains, tactical reconnaissance, refugee evacuation and the restoration of communications. The aeroplane acted as a force multiplier to significantly magnify the capabilities of the Indian military. It certainly saved innumerable lives not least through aiding in the prevention of cholera, which was notably absent. Through the deployment of high technology the Indian state sought to reclaim its monopoly on violence from militias. The reliance on aviation technology by the GoI to dominate its majority communities through

violence irreversibly intertwined the new state won by the party of Mahatma Gandhi to the successor institutions of the colonial military. To be sure the Congress party had always had an ambiguous stance regarding the military and a highly centralised vision for the nation-state it hoped to create. However the sheer extent of the Partition violence, which in September 1947 threatened to overwhelm the Union government, cultivated anxieties about centrifugalism and entrenched a militarised technocratic vision of the state. Mass violence also forced the governments of independent India and Pakistan to reluctantly join hands and work with each other to confront majorities and evacuate minorities even as they began a conflict in Kashmir.

The evacuation of refugees by air has received marginal attention in the historiography surrounding Partition. Yet the evacuation of some 41,000-50,000 people by air was critical to facilitating the exchange of populations and indeed the survival of the state as a functioning entity. Military and railway officials as well as those from the telegraph and postal departments needed to be airlifted in order to clear transport bottlenecks that were affecting millions on the ground. Indian commercial operators worked to breaking point endangering men and aircraft. Ultimately however the sector proved to be too small to handle the magnitude of the evacuation, though they did continue evacuations well into December 1947.⁶⁹ The governments of India and Pakistan chartered British aircraft for Operation Pakistan and later Operation India, which saw the evacuation of 6,300 and 35,000 people respectively. The combined resources of the RAF, RIAF, DGCA, Indian and British charter companies proved necessary to carry out the badly needed evacuations of 1947. This would

⁶⁹ A. Reddy, (2001), p 154.

serve as a key lesson for the GoI about the importance of aviation in general and state control of it in particular.

War in Kashmir 1947-8

Indian aviation literally shaped both India and Pakistan in the 1947-48 Kashmir war. The present day 'Line of Control' between India and Pakistan represents the furthest point that Indian aircraft could keep advancing ground troops supplied during the war. The war confirmed and deepened the hostility between the Congress and the Muslim League and the dominions that they had come to rule. Though a relatively modest conflict by the standards of the twentieth century the war came to define the self-image of India and Pakistan. As an ideological struggle between Indian secularism and Pakistani two nation theory the war nationalised the dispute between the Congress and the Muslim League over the shape of post-colonial South Asia. It also unravelled British plans to closely integrate the Indian and Pakistani militaries in service of the Commonwealth in the broader context of the Cold War.

The role of Indian aviation in the conflict was substantial. The Kashmir conflict signalled the elevation of the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) to the national stage. Whereas in World War II the RIAF had played a junior role to the Allied air forces operating against the Japanese, in Kashmir it was second in importance only to the Indian Army. Indian aviation in general, and the Royal Indian Air Force in particular, helped initiate, sustain, and escalate the conflict. Indian aviation effectively initiated the Kashmir conflict by enabling independent India to rapidly deploy its army in the mountainous Kashmiri terrain in the winter of 1947. This allowed the Indian government to contest what Pakistani planners hoped would be a military *fait accompli*. Subsequently the Indian government's small fleet of civilian and military aircraft would enable the Indian government to sustain a conflict in which India suffered from grave logistical difficulties. Limited aviation resources and nearly unlimited military

needs meant that the Indian government led by Jawaharlal Nehru had to carefully strategise the use of aircraft in ways that best fulfilled Indian political objectives. This prioritisation of the use of scarce aircraft helps improve our understanding of Indian political objectives in a conflict where these have often been occluded by controversy. Aviation also gives us an insight into the independent Indian and Pakistani governments' notions of their newly won sovereignty. Over the course of the conflict air power would emerge as an important component of the calculus of escalation that the Indian and Pakistani leaderships were required to manage. The Kashmir war was a conflict that both states had an interest in limiting. I argue here that the escalatory potential of air power in the Kashmir conflict has been misunderstood both by historians and contemporaries. Whereas much of the writing on escalation has focused on the possibility that the Indian and Pakistani air forces would drag the two states into a wider full-scale war by clashing in the air, I argue that this was not in fact the case. The true danger of escalation emerged instead from the possibility of continued conflict in a theatre which the Pakistani government, saw increasingly, in existential terms. This chapter then is, in part, an attempt to understand the escalatory role of air power in the Kashmir war.

This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive account of air operations in the Kashmir war. Part of the reason for this is the existence of well researched operational histories.¹ Rather it builds on existing operational histories in order to situate air power in the broader politics and diplomacy of the war through an analysis of three events during the war in which

¹ S.N. Prasad, *Operations in Kashmir 1947-48*, (New Delhi, 1987); S. Singh, *India's wars since independence*, (New Delhi, 1980); A. Lamb, *Incomplete Partition*, (Hertingfordbury, 1997); A. Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir* (New Delhi, 2007); S.S. Bloeria, *The Battles of Zojila*, (New Delhi, 1997); C.B. Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, (London, 1956); C. Dasgupta, (2002); M.N. Gulati, *Military Plight of Pakistan* (New Delhi, 2000); S. Nawaz, *Crossed Swords*, (Oxford, 2008); S. Ganguly, *The Origins of War in South Asia*, (Oxford, 1994); L.P. Sen, *Slender was the thread*, (New Delhi, 1969).

air power played a significant role; the Srinagar airlift, the siege of Punch and the bombing of Palak. This analysis reveals the degree to which the conflict was an exercise in the management of escalation. Both the Indian and Pakistani governments along with their British military commanders, sought to prevent the war from developing into a broader conflict that might prove ruinous. This makes a more political and holistic reading of military actions, not adequately scrutinised in operational accounts, necessary.

The war was limited for a number of reasons. The Indian and Pakistani governments were well aware of the catastrophic consequences of full-scale war.² An increase in the scope of the conflict, by its spread to West Punjab for instance, would severely affect armed forces recently divided between two dominions. It would also potentially provoke great power intervention against the side seen as the aggressor. Both India and Pakistan were reliant on Britain, and to a lesser extent the United States, for military and diplomatic support meaning that they could not afford to antagonise them. Moreover, Cold War paranoia meant that Britain and the United States were deeply concerned about the possibility of Soviet interference in the subcontinent and might have intervened actively to prevent it.³ The most pressing reason for India and Pakistan to avoid full-scale war, however, was due to the need to protect minorities in both countries. When war broke out in October 1947, the transfer of populations was still in progress and violence had yet to be brought totally under control. As I will demonstrate the war was in many ways an extension of the ethnoreligious violence of partition. Neither the Indian nor the Pakistani governments were willing to unleash the mass violence that had so recently convulsed their heartlands. Aviation therefore had to be utilised

² S. Raghavan, (2010), p 121.

³ R.K. Jain, *US-South Asia Relations 1947-1982*, (New Delhi, 1983), p 5. We now know that Joseph Stalin did not prioritise South Asia and left it in a state of benign neglect until his death in 1953.

in ways that enabled both states to impose their sovereignty over Kashmiri territory while simultaneously avoiding the outbreak of a conflict that might irreversibly damage their nascent polities.

There were also other reasons why the war was limited. The highest echelons of both dominions' forces were incompletely indigenised as a consequence of the slow pace of nationalisation as seen in a previous chapter. Independent India and Pakistan simply did not possess officers of an appropriate level of seniority to conduct sophisticated military operations since Indians only began to enter the higher echelons of the officer corps in both the army and air force during the Second World War. Consequently, the highest commanders of both dominions' armed forces were British and large numbers of British officers continued to serve in technical and staff positions.⁴ This was to have the effect of eventually pitting British officers against each other, as will be discussed subsequently in this chapter. More immediately however the reliance on both sides of British officers provided the British government with a great deal of power to influence the war. Both dominions were also handicapped in their own ways. Pakistan suffered the worst effects of partition on its armed forces. Not only did it receive a smaller proportion of the armed forces than its Indian counterpart but Pakistani authorities often complained that their rightful share of armaments was being withheld by the Indian government.⁵ India's problems are best encapsulated in a single word; overextension. The Indian military though larger and better organised than its Pakistani counterpart had myriad commitments that stretched it to breaking point. When war broke out in Kashmir, Indian troops were committed to a variety of other duties which

⁴ A. Whitehead, (2007), p 204. In 1948 the Pakistani military fielded about 800 British officers while India employed around 350.

⁵ TNA, DO 134/1, AH Reed to H.S. Stephenson, 21 March 1948.

detracted from larger deployments in the Kashmir theatre. Indian forces were concentrated on the Punjab border to prevent Pakistani forces from attacking East Punjab in case of the outbreak of a wider conflict.⁶ They were also deployed around Hyderabad to project power against the Nizam who had not acceded to India after independence. As will be seen in a later chapter the RIAF was at the time deployed to prevent weapons from being flown into the state by gun runners. Further, Indian troops were committed to internal security, which was a pressing requirement in order to restore peace and disarm the bevy of private armies that had emerged as a result of Partition.⁷

The Kashmir war would thus emerge as an archetypally limited war, fought in fits and starts, as the Indian and Pakistani leaderships did their best to attain their political goals without provoking a larger conflict. Both sides sought to impose their sovereignty on the entirety of the princely state of Kashmir for strategic and ideological reasons. This shaped the way that they utilised military power in general, and air power in particular, in the course of the conflict. While it remained a limited regional conflict between two newly decolonised states, the Kashmir conflict is reflective of the emergence of a new global order following the Second World War premised on nation-states rather than on older forms of organising sovereignty such as the semi-autonomous princely rule represented by Kashmir state. The following chapter deals with the collapse of the princely order in the context of the new order of nation-states. What is worthwhile pointing out here however is the extent to which in engaging with each other, even through the mode of conflict, the Pakistani and Indian states

⁶ NAM, 7901-87-6-1, Bucher to H.M Patel, 15 March 1948.

⁷ Ibid., Chiefs of Staff Paper 48/1.

recognised each other's sovereignty while ignoring that of the princely state they each ostensibly laid claim to.

I. The Srinagar Airlift

The state of Kashmir was created as a consequence of the sale of a number of territories, including the Kashmir valley, to the *Raja* (King) of Jammu, a Dogra Rajput named Gulab Singh, by the British East India Company in 1846.⁸ Like several other princely states, Kashmir saw the emergence of popular movements in the twentieth century which aimed to limit the power of its monarch. Led by Sheikh Abdullah, the National Conference party began an agitation in 1931 demanding greater rights for subjects of the state.⁹ Politics in Kashmir state, was complicated by the fact that the ruling dynasty was Hindu, while the majority of the populace, some 78 percent, was Muslim.¹⁰ Moreover, opposition to Dogra rule was informed by the view that the Dogras were only the latest in a line of occupying powers dating back to Mughal rule. Between 1931 and 1947 popular agitations against Dogra rule were routinely met with state repression, further widening the gulf between the Kashmir government and its people.¹¹

By 1947, the prospect of independence was beginning to have its impact on the state. Both India and Pakistan sought to integrate Kashmir. Jawaharlal Nehru the soon-to-be Prime Minister of India was making overtures to Ram Chandra Kak, Prime Minister of Kashmir as early as June 1947 well before independence.¹² Sumit Ganguly has shown the Indian

⁸ M. Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, (London, 2004), p 19.

⁹ A. Bhattacharjee, *Sheikh Abdullah*, (New Delhi, 2008), p 3.

¹⁰ S. Das, *Kashmir and Sindh*, (Kolkata, 2001), p 28.

¹¹ M. Rai, (2004), p 294.

¹² A.G. Noorani, *The Kashmir Dispute*, (New Delhi, 2013), p 15.

government was aware of the immense strategic importance of Kashmir, a state with several international frontiers that would also be critical to India economically.¹³ When Kashmir offered India a standstill agreement on the same lines as it was offering Pakistan in 1947, the Government of India (GoI) made signing of the agreement conditional on accession.¹⁴ The Pakistani leadership, for its part, assumed that Kashmir would be integrated into Pakistan due to its Muslim majority and its contiguity to Punjab. When by independence the state had not acceded, Pakistan signed a standstill agreement with Kashmir agreeing to continue to provide services for which the state had earlier relied on British India.¹⁵ Relations between Pakistan and Kashmir however severely deteriorated after independence once the Kashmir government accused Pakistan of blockading it in order to force it to accede to Pakistan.¹⁶ Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Governor-General of Pakistan responded by accusing the Kashmir government of trying ‘to join the Indian Union by coup d’etat’.¹⁷

Caught between having to choose between Indian rule, which would most likely see a hollowing out of his not inconsiderable power in Kashmir, and accession to the Muslim dominion of Pakistan, Maharaja Hari Singh gave serious consideration to the possibility of independence. In order to entrench Dogra rule, the Kashmir government embarked on a campaign of mass violence aimed at the states’ Muslim majority. Claims that up to two hundred thousand Muslims were killed are impossible to establish though there is little doubt that violence in the state became entangled in the wider partition conflagration and resulted

¹³ S.Ganguly, (1994) p 50.

¹⁴ A.G. Noorani, (2013), p 17.

¹⁵ A. Lamb, (1997), p 122.

¹⁶ At least one scholar has argued that the transport situation in Pakistan was dire in Pakistan due to both partition violence and disorder in Kashmir itself. However given the bitterness of exchanges between the two governments at the time it is not unlikely that a blockade was in fact in place. V. Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict*, (London, 2000), p 45.

¹⁷ *White Paper on Kashmir* (New Delhi, 1948), Jinnah to PM Kashmir, 19 October 1947.

in mass migrations out of the state, which in turn destabilised the region.¹⁸ Dogra repression in Punch district resulted in the outbreak of an armed rebellion in August 1947. Evaluations of the success of the rebellion vary with some historians claiming that it was crushed quickly by the Dogras while others have claimed that Punchi rebels controlled the countryside trapping Dogra forces in the towns.¹⁹ Whatever the rebellion's military consequences, politically it would become implicated with the tribal invasion of Kashmir.

Alarmed by the prospect of Kashmir's possible accession to India and certain that it could achieve a military *fait accompli* in Kashmir the Government of Pakistan organised a military operation codenamed 'Operation Gulmarg' aimed at overrunning the state. The invasion of Kashmir began on 22 October 1947. Tribesmen from Pakistan's Northwest Frontier province and beyond descended from West Punjab onto the Kashmir Valley. The tribal force was well armed, travelled in trucks at a time of petrol rationing and had faced no resistance traversing the length of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and West Punjab to reach Kashmir. The GoP would maintain the position that the invasion was not in fact supported by it until May 1948, though planning for the invasion was largely carried out by the provincial government of the NWFP with Jinnah's tacit acceptance.²⁰ The resort to irregular forces to impose Pakistan's will on an increasingly hostile Kashmir government was a consequence of Pakistan's own military weakness.²¹ Its army was yet to be properly reorganised, stores

¹⁸ C. Snedden, 'What happened to Muslims of Jammu? Local identity, "the massacre" of 1947 and the Roots of the "Kashmir Problem"', *South Asia*, 2001, 24.2, pp 111-34.

¹⁹ For an instance of the Punch rebellion being treated as a success see- C. Snedden, *The Untold Story of the people of Azad Kashmir*, (London, 2012). For the claim that the rebellion was quickly suppressed see- S. Raghavan, (2010).

²⁰ When he discovered plans for the invasion Jinnah is alleged to have said, 'Don't tell me anything about it. My conscience must be clear.' BL, MSS Eur D670/6, (Cunningham papers).

²¹ The decision to invade was by no means unanimous and prominent GoP leaders such as States Minister Agha Shahid Bad Shah correctly predicted that invasion would drive Kashmir into acceding to India. A.G. Noorani, (2014), p 8.

due from India were yet to arrive and Jinnah's own control over the armed forces was limited.²² The decision to use the tribal forces in the conflict signalled its internationalisation as for the first time a number of tribes from Afghanistan were inducted into what had essentially been mass violence between rival South Asian religious communities. This can be seen as both a departure from and an expansion of the partition violence that had fed into the increasing instability of the Kashmiri state at the time of independence.

The tribal raiders were supported by a motley assortment of forces. This included a number of regular Pakistani army officers sent to oversee and direct them, former members of the *Azad Hind Fauj* (Indian National Army), Muslim deserters from the Kashmir state forces and the Gilgit scouts.²³ The last of these were a militia raised by the British to protect the Gilgit agency and had under the leadership of one Major William Brown revolted against the governor of the state and declared their allegiance to Pakistan. In the months of fighting to follow they would prove to be formidable opponents to the Indian army.

The tribal forces streamed down the valley seizing Domel, Uri and Muzzafarabad. Their immediate objective was the capture of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar though in the longer term they hoped to push all the way South to Jammu. At Baramullah tribal forces engaged in an orgy of rape, looting and violence. Though Indian works such as the 'White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir' have been shown to have exaggerated the extent of tribal depredations, especially with regard to the sacking of the Catholic mission at Baramullah, to justify Indian intervention it is clear that the town was sacked.²⁴ In Baramullah and elsewhere

²² Ibid., p 10

²³ O.P. Sharma, 'How Pakistan Occupied Gilgit: A First Hand Account', in M.L. Kumar (ed), *Maharaja Hari Singh*, (New Delhi, 1995), pp 115-132.

²⁴ A. Whitehead, (2007), p 231.

the lack of discipline of the raiders led to indiscriminate violence though it is clear that non-Muslims were the prime targets. The sacking of the town would significantly slow down what was meant to be a rapid advance.

Srinagar was important for a number of reasons. It was the summer capital of the Dogras and the heart of the most populous region in Kashmir state, the valley of Kashmir. Perhaps more important in the context of the tribal invasion however is the fact that it had the sole airstrip in the Kashmir valley. Interestingly the fair weather airstrip had been constructed for the private use of the Maharaja and is representative of the significant if understudied contribution of the princely states to aviation in India. This was especially important given the lack the lack of connections between Kashmir and Indian territory which consisted solely of a road from Pathankot to Srinagar.

The Indian government's reaction to the tribal invasion of Kashmir was swift. The Indian Defence committee met on 25th October and decided to dispatch V.P. Menon, the Secretary of the Ministry of States, to Kashmir. Menon would later claim that he was flown to Kashmir in a BOAC aircraft chartered to fly British refugees out of Srinagar where he was alarmed by the 'atmosphere of impending calamity'.²⁵ Air Marshal Hari Chand Dewan however claimed to have personally arranged for Menon's aircraft and flown it to the city.²⁶ If both these claims are in fact true then Menon was flown to Srinagar by a BOAC plane piloted by an RIAF officer, a highly unorthodox measure but not one that was unlikely given the urgent circumstances. Menon returned to Delhi with the Kashmiri Prime Minister M.C. Mahajan after urging Maharaja Hari Singh to leave Srinagar for Jammu- his winter capital. The

²⁵ V.P. Menon, *Integration of the Indian Princely States*, (New Delhi, 1985), p 273.

²⁶ B. Kumar, (2007), p 41.

Maharaja's haste to vacate Srinagar was such that he did not leave behind transport for Menon and Mahajan so that they and their air crew had to be bundled into an old jeep to travel to the airfield.²⁷ The process of Kashmir's accession was expedited by the use of aircraft to quickly transport negotiators from Delhi to an Indian State capital.

The tribal invasion had driven Kashmir to accede to India and Mahajan informed the Indian cabinet of this. The decision was made on 26 October to airlift troops to Kashmir. The accession of the state on the wishes of the Maharaja would be accepted 'provisionally' with a plebiscite to be held in the state to ascertain its people's wishes once the *lashkars* (Pathan columns) were driven out. Moreover, the Maharaja was instructed to form a provisional government with Sheikh Abdullah, who had until September 1947 been imprisoned, as its head. Menon would once again be flown to Kashmir to receive the signature of the Maharaja on the instrument of accession though this was almost certainly signed on 27 October shortly after the first Indian troops had landed in Srinagar.²⁸ India's reasons for accepting the accession were manifold. As seen above the Indian leadership had strong integrationist ambitions in Kashmir for strategic reasons and India's ruling party, the Congress, had strong affinities with the National Conference. A further factor prompting Indian intervention in Kashmir was the need to maintain communal harmony in India. Nehru was keenly aware that the fall of Kashmir and the atrocities against non-Muslims that would most likely follow it would have catastrophic consequences in India, leading almost certainly to large scale reprisals against India's substantial Muslim minority. As V.P Menon would later note 'the

²⁷ V.P. Menon, (1985), p 274.

²⁸ S. Raghavan, (2010), p 108.

only alternative to sending troops would be to allow a massacre in Srinagar, which would be followed by a major communal holocaust in India'.²⁹

Even as Menon was gauging the situation in Srinagar on 25th October an Army Airlift Committee (AAC) was formed to make preparations for the airlift of Indian army troops to Srinagar on an emergency basis. By the time orders were received to airlift troops to Srinagar the next day RIAF planes had been begun to ferry much needed ammunition from Jabalpur to New Delhi and arrangements for the airlift had been finalised. Oxford training aircraft, the only planes available for reconnaissance, were sent to scout the airfield on October 26. The AAC included Air Chief Marshal Thomas Elmhirst, Air Commodore Subroto Mukherjee, Group Captain Mehar Singh, the defence secretary and significantly the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).³⁰ As seen the in the previous chapter the DGCA had served not only as the primary government officer responsible for civil aviation but had also been central to supporting government during emergencies such as the Second World War and the Partition airlift. When it was realised that the Royal Indian Air Force's planes would be inadequate for the task at hand, the decision was taken to have the DGCA commandeer planes from the civil airline companies such as Dalmia Jain, Air Services of India and Deccan Airways.³¹ An emergency broadcast was made on All India Radio by Sardar Vallabhai Patel requiring civilian aircraft from airline companies to report at aerodromes in New Delhi. Some 25 aeroplanes, mainly DC 3 Dakota transport aircraft, which had been purchased by Indian airline companies in the aftermath of World War II from the United States Army Air Force,

²⁹ V.P. Menon, (1985), p 276.

³⁰ B. Kumar, (2007), p 41.

³¹ A. Reddy, (2001) p 158.

responded to the call. Many of them were actually in the midst of ferrying partition refugees to and from Delhi.³²

The Srinagar airlift coincided with 'Operation India', the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) led operation aimed at evacuating Indian government officials and non-Muslims stranded in Pakistan, discussed in chapter three. Alastair Lamb has suggested that 'the presence of a large number of civil aircraft as part of a project to fly Muslim refugees from India to Pakistan' provided 'an admirable cover' for Indian military plans to intervene in Kashmir.³³ This was however not the case. The possibility that BOAC aircraft might be used in the Srinagar airlift caused concerns in both London and Karachi that BOAC aircraft might be used by the Government of India to airlift its troops to Srinagar.³⁴ Air Commodore H.G. Brackley who was heading the relief effort was instructed by the Commonwealth Relations Office not to permit BOAC aircraft to be used in the Kashmir operations. Consequently, an Indian request on 31 October 1947 for the use of BOAC aircraft in airlifting Indian troops was denied.³⁵ While HMG could easily limit BOAC involvement in the conflict it was much more difficult to prevent British personnel flying aircraft for Indian airline companies from taking part in the Srinagar airlift. A number of foreign pilots had been recruited to fly for Indian companies and many of these were now flying as part of the Kashmir operations. These included 30 British, 1 Canadian, 5 Australians, 3 Ceylonese, 1 Burmese, 3 Americans and 2 Poles most of whom worked for Indian National Airways. According to the Commonwealth Relations Office at least half the air crews flying Indian

³² B. Kumar, (2007), p 44.

³³ A. Lamb. *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy 1846-1990*, (Hertingsfordsbury, 1991), p 145.

³⁴ TNA, DO 142/482, Kashmir: Aircraft and Air Crews.

³⁵ Ibid., UK representative New Delhi to CRO, 31 October 1947.

troops into Kashmir were British European subjects from Australia and the United Kingdom. The Australian High Commission in India had advised Australian pilots not to take part in Kashmir operations and the British Commonwealth Relations Office considered following suit, though it was clear that there were no legal tools whereby foreign and particularly British personnel could be restrained from flying in Kashmir if they wished to.³⁶ By mid-November 1947 however HMG decided not to request the Indian government to advise British personnel from taking part in the Kashmir operations. This was partly because of the legal difficulties of doing so and also because the most dangerous phase of the Srinagar operations appeared to have passed.³⁷ The British government's quandaries over the employment of British pilots in Kashmir is indicative of the difficulties of separating military and civil aviation. It is also demonstrative of the broader internationalisation of the conflict which, as we have seen already involved a number of tribesmen from Afghanistan.

British commanders of the Indian armed forces and Lord Mountbatten opposed the airlift to Srinagar since this was fraught with military risks. Indian planes would have to fly over the Zaskar mountain range, whose lowest point was 9300 feet, to a city that might well have fallen into enemy hands, bearing a full load to land on a short airstrip that pilots had never before seen.³⁸ Moreover, Srinagar airfield was a fair weather field with little in the way of signals and refuelling facilities for aeroplanes.³⁹ Their objections however were overridden by the Indian cabinet considering the urgency of the situation. A land column would be forced to travel via the Banihal pass and simply could not be expected to arrive in time to defend

³⁶ In at least one case a British pilot expressed his willingness to undertake operations in Kashmir provided there were no legal consequences in the United Kingdom. Ibid., UKHC India to CRO, 4 November 1947.

³⁷ Ibid., CRO to UKHC India, 15 November 1947

³⁸ L.P. Sen, (1969), p 45.

³⁹ CAC, GBR/0014/ELMT 3-1, 'Kashmir, Winter 1947'.

Srinagar. Consequently, troops of the first Sikh battalion who were policing Gurgaon in the immediate aftermath of the partition riots were ordered to rapidly embark the impromptu air fleet assembled for them in the early hours of the morning of 27 October.⁴⁰ Their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ranjit Rai was famously ordered to circle the airfield to make sure that it had not fallen to the tribesmen before disembarking his troops.⁴¹

A total of twenty two aircraft were able to make the landing on Srinagar airfield on 26 October 1947.⁴² Over the next weeks the tempo of flights bearing Indian troops to Srinagar would remain steady. The AAC met every day to decide on the number of sorties that could be delivered utilising between twenty five and thirty civil aircraft to transport troops and supplies from New Delhi's Willingdon airport to Srinagar. Aeroplanes dedicated purely to the airlift made two trips daily from Delhi to the Srinagar airfield. Planes would have to quickly taxi on Srinagar's increasingly dusty airfield in order to make the rapid turnaround required to make the ten hours flying in daylight.⁴³ Others would continue flying their designated routes in the mornings and do one flight to Kashmir in the afternoon. In the three weeks after the airlift began Indian planes flew 750 flights, carried thirteen million pounds of load and flew about 600,000 miles in journeys to Kashmir.⁴⁴ Somewhat ironically the Indian Union owed its large reserve of planes to Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, who as seen in a previous chapter, had as member of communications in the 1946 interim government India granted licenses to a large number of airline companies. Though in the long term this led to

⁴⁰ S.N. Prasad, (2005), p 28.

⁴¹ NAM, 7901-87-6-1, 'Army Headquarters India Operational Instruction No 3', 26 Oct 1947.

⁴² *Idem.*,

⁴³ CAC, GBR/0014/ELMT 3-1, 'Kashmir, Winter 1947'.

⁴⁴ *Hindustan Times*, December 19, 1947-Loc cit B. Kumar, (2007), p 67.

the bankruptcy of many of the commercial airlines, in 1947 it provided India with a sizable pool of aircraft for operations in Kashmir.

An unexpected outcome of the airlift was the evacuation of a large number of holidaymakers who wished to flee the imminent capture of Srinagar by the tribals. Lieutenant General L.P. Sen recalled the way in which large numbers of tourists simply abandoned their vehicles at the airfield when they were informed that the army would not take care of them. Troops eventually had to be used to clear vehicles clogging the route to the airfield numbering close to a hundred.⁴⁵ Nearly four hundred British citizens, mainly retirees and families of British government officials based in India, resided in Srinagar. Their evacuation from what would soon become a war zone was a key concern for the British government. The Royal Air Force asked for and received permission to evacuate them using RAF transport squadrons that Mountbatten had fought to maintain in India against RAF Headquarters protests for just such a contingency.⁴⁶ This added an extra layer of complications an extremely complicated logistical operation as the precious daylight time for landing planes in Srinagar had to be shared with the RAF.

Though transport aircraft dominated the Srinagar airlift they were also accompanied by combat aircraft. The RIAF found itself in a disorganised state at the commencement of the Srinagar operations. There were severe shortages of spares, transportation and ammunition and as the commander of the RIAF Air Marshal Thomas Elmhirst noted, ‘equipment staffs

⁴⁵ L.P. Sen, (1969), p 61.

⁴⁶ BL, IOR Neg 15538-67, Dickson to Ismay, 20 Oct 1947. Negotiations to this end were still on when the Kashmir war broke out. The RAF had firmly indicated it considered the maintenance of two transport squadrons in India for the evacuation of British personnel an extravagance despite the fact that it would permit Mountbatten to maintain his own communications squadron in case the situation in India deteriorated, necessitating his evacuation.

hardly knew what was available and where it was'.⁴⁷ Srinagar air strip also posed a problem with its air strip as it was too short for the RIAF's frontline plane, the Tempest. Nevertheless the RIAF improvised rapidly, equipping its Harvard trainer aircraft with guns and the difficult flight to Jammu was piloted by flying instructors. Later they would be fitted with makeshift bombing racks. Soon Spitfires used for training at the Ambala Elementary Flying Training School were rearmed with guns and sent to Srinagar to provide fire support for the Indian troops defending the air strip much to the horror of the civilian pilots for whom it made an already dangerous flight more dangerous.⁴⁸

A number of problems with the Srinagar airfield had to be overcome by the RIAF. This included the lack of communications, repair and refueling facilities. An RIAF headquarters was flown into Kashmir airfield including a jeep to serve as a 'communications car' to enable better co-ordination between New Delhi and Srinagar. Pilots conducted turn around repairs on their own before the arrival of ground crews. The lack of refueling facilities at Srinagar was offset by the draining of excess fuel from transport aircraft until a Dakota was refitted solely to carry fuel to the airfield.⁴⁹

With the help of the RIAF, the Indian army managed to hold onto Srinagar and its all-important airfield despite bitter fighting at nearby Badgam on 3 November. RIAF Spitfires and Harvards were based at the airfield and sent into action against the invaders. Tempests based at Ambala helped destroy columns of raiders moving about by trucks in the open during

⁴⁷ CAC, GBR/0014/ELMT 3-1, 'Kashmir, Winter 1947'.

⁴⁸ *Idem.*,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, B. Kumar, (2007), p 57. This unorthodox practice was the cause of much fury, when airline companies presented their bills to the finance department as the latter protested that forms measuring fuel transfer had not been filled.

daylight hours.⁵⁰ By 6 November, India had 3500 troops in Srinagar.⁵¹ The long awaited column of armoured cars from Punjab had also arrived over the perilous road from Pathankot. Harvard reconnaissance aircraft and other Indian scouts detected a buildup of thousands of raiders at Shalateng. Indian forces were ordered to attack the raiders from three sides with full air support on 7 November. In their concentrated numbers they offered perfect targets for the RIAF. The battle was over in 20 minutes. The raiders were routed, leaving 500 dead on the field for only three Indian casualties.⁵² Indian forces drove them all the way to Uri in the next three days effectively securing the Kashmir valley.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah was furious when he heard about the Srinagar airlift and immediately ordered the Pakistani army to go into action against the Indians in Kashmir. His army commander, General Messervy, was unwilling to do this since it would effectively mean war with India and called his supreme commander, Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck to Karachi to talk Jinnah out of military action. Auchinleck forced Jinnah to withdraw his orders by threatening a 'stand down' of all British officers serving in the Pakistani military which, given its post-partition disorganisation it could scarcely afford.⁵³ This by no means meant that Pakistan accepted Kashmir's accession to India and the Pakistan government stepped up its support for the raiders. The Kashmir war had begun in earnest.

Indian aviation had played a central role in initiating the conflict in Kashmir. While war between India and Pakistan was not unexpected over Junagadh, the speed with which aircraft

⁵⁰ CAC, GBR/0014/ELMT 3-1, 'Kashmir, Winter 1947'.

⁵¹ S.N. Prasad, (2005), p 40.

⁵² M.N. Gulati, (2000), p 243.

⁵³ The 'stand down' order would lead to a withdrawal of British forces from the armed forces of dominions that went to war with each other and was aimed at preventing British soldiers from being pitted against each other.

could facilitate both diplomacy and war in Kashmir was critical to beginning the Kashmir conflict. Indeed the speed and success of the airlift was so great that it convinced Pakistani observers and later historians that India had planned it well in advance.⁵⁴ The roots of India's ability to project air power in such a spectacular and sustained way must be traced to the Second World War. Not only was the RIAF's sole transport squadron, No. 12, raised as part of the wartime expansion of the force but the sale of aircraft to airline companies in its aftermath provided India with a large strategic reserve.⁵⁵ As noted above the size of this reserve was a product of the politics of partition. The airlift stands out as one of the myriad instances of the blurring of civil and military aviation during the decade. Aircraft are an excellent example of what would be later called dual use technology and the ways in which India made use of its scarce aviation resources is illustrative of the ways in which poorer states throughout the world would seek to exploit this dual use capability in what have, somewhat ethnocentrically, come to be called 'regional conflicts'.

II. The Siege of Punch

As Indian and Pakistan backed *Azad* (freedom) forces clashed in Kashmir negotiations between the Indian and Pakistani governments commenced.⁵⁶ On 1 November 1947 Lord Mountbatten, in his capacity as Governor General of India, met with his Pakistani counterpart M.A. Jinnah. Jinnah was offered a U.N conducted plebiscite to be preceded by the withdrawal of *Azad* and then Indian forces. Jinnah's dismissal of the offer is ironic in hindsight since all

⁵⁴ Bharat Kumar has convincingly refuted the allegations of Alastair Lamb that the airlift was pre-planned. B. Kumar, (2007), p 208. Also see: A. Lamb, (1997), p 145.

⁵⁵ TNA, AIR 27/180, No 12 Squadron Operations Record Book.

⁵⁶ The Government of Pakistan used the term *Azad Kashmir* for those zones that had broken free from Dogra control. Consequently, the umbrella term *Azad* forces was used to address the diverse forces ranged against the Dogras and later the Indians. See for instance: NMML, *Pakistan Times*, 22 October 1947.

subsequent negotiations to this day have broken down on the issue of plebiscite and the withdrawal of Indian troops from Kashmir.⁵⁷ Besides the obvious need to prevent a subcontinent wide conflagration Mountbatten was moved by one other major consideration.

British planners had hoped to integrate India and Pakistan into a Commonwealth that they envisioned as a military alliance aimed primarily aimed at the Soviet Union. The British chiefs of staff penned a paper titled 'British Defence Requirements in India' according to which India would provide Britain with bases in the Indian Ocean and manpower, while Pakistan would provide it with forward strategic air bases. Both dominions were to have the closest defence co-operation whose basis lay in the Joint Defence Council.⁵⁸ At least one bureaucrat involved in planning compared the proposed Indo-Pak military arrangements to that of New Zealand and Australia.⁵⁹

The proposed Commonwealth defence alliance was a casualty of the war in Kashmir. Mountbatten presented a paper on joint defence arrangements against external aggression to the Indian and Pakistani governments at the Joint Defence Council meeting held on 22 December 1947. India and Pakistan were unanimous in stating that foreign policy convergence had to precede defensive alliances. Mountbatten failed to convince the Joint Defence Council to invite the British chiefs of staff before his departure from the subcontinent despite attempting as late as January 1948 to secure some form of tripartite

⁵⁷ Nehru may have changed his mind on conducting a plebiscite as early as November 1947. Talks between India and Pakistan over a plebiscite in Kashmir ever since have stumbled on the question of withdrawing Indian troops. A.G. Noorani, (2014), p 40.

⁵⁸ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Defence of India and Pakistan Part I (b).

⁵⁹ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Defence of India and Pakistan Part I (a); It is also worth noting that given his staunchly internationalist position Nehru, would most likely have steered clear of military alliances. See- B. Zachariah, (2004).

military agreement.⁶⁰ Cold War paranoia underpinned much British thinking during the Kashmir war often at the cost of ignoring the depth of the ideological conflict between Pakistan and India.⁶¹

That ideological contest was nowhere more clearly borne out than around the siege of Punch. In a telegram to the Commonwealth Relations Office, British High Commissioner to India, J.S.H. Shattock noted that 'To Indians the Punch siege was somewhat parallel to the siege of Tobruk or Kut.'⁶² The Indian leadership was not initially certain that military efforts should be concentrated around Punch, located in the mountainous region where the rebellion against Dogra rule had first begun.⁶³ Proposals were even mooted for the early evacuation of State forces and the non-Muslim population of Punch town and the eponymous district.⁶⁴ However Indian military reverses in November 1947 fundamentally changed the tenor of the GoI's position on Punch.

The fall of nearby Kotli and severe attacks against the town of Uri, which served as the gateway to the Kashmir valley, nearly pushed the Indian military in Kashmir to desperation in December 1947.⁶⁵ The Indian leadership actively considered an offensive into the Punjab to relieve pressure on its forces in Kashmir, a move that would certainly have heralded full scale war with all its attendant problems noted earlier.⁶⁶ Though Uri would be held and the situation would be stabilised the Azad offensives of December had two key effects. First it

⁶⁰ BL, Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542, Defence of India and Pakistan Part I (b).

⁶¹ This is a point first raised by C. Dasgupta. His view however vests excessive agency in British hands at the cost of ignoring Indian decision making. C. Dasgupta, (2002), p 13.

⁶² TNA, DO 133/82, Shattock to CRO, 19 October 1948.

⁶³ S. Raghavan, (2010), p 114.

⁶⁴ Ibid p 117.

⁶⁵ S.N. Prasad, (2005), p 87.

⁶⁶ C. Dasgupta, (2002), p 97.

led India to place its case ahead of the UN largely in the hopes of placing pressure short of war on Pakistan. Second it led to the decision to hold Punch town.

Holding Punch for the Indians was critical on a number of important lines. Non-Muslim refugees had fled to Punch to flee from rebels who were targeting them.⁶⁷ Punch was one of the granary districts of Kashmir state.⁶⁸ The most important reason for holding Punch however was, as Srinath Raghavan has argued, that Nehru was well aware of ‘the link between military operations and diplomacy’.⁶⁹ Control of Punch would convince Pakistan and the world that India was serious about its military commitment in Kashmir precisely because the region was difficult to hold.

Punch town had been under siege before Indian troops landed in Kashmir. Its Kashmir state force garrison had been reinforced by an Indian battalion led by Lt. Col. Pritam Singh on 21 November 1947, though a larger accompanying force had been prevented from relieving the town by a combination of enemy action and sheer bad luck.⁷⁰ Some 3000 troops had to defend a civilian population of 40,000 non-Muslims. They were cut off from all relief and in a particularly vulnerable position as the lines of communication of the Punch garrison with friendly forces faced the enemy. Only the air link now connected Punch with the outside world.

Lt Col. Singh realised that the town could not be supplied by air drops and the decision was made to put the able bodied population of Punch to work, constructing a landing ground that

⁶⁷ A. Whitehead, (2007), 116.

⁶⁸ TNA, DO 133/96, Military Situation (hereafter Milsit) 28 September to 4 October.

⁶⁹ S. Raghavan, (2010), p 120.

⁷⁰ S.N. Prasad, (2005), p 58. A bridge meant to carry over the relief column of vehicles was burnt by friendly state forces who mistook it for a raider column.

could support transport aircraft by extending the J & K militia parade ground. Construction was done in full view of besieging forces and with only RIAF aircraft fire support for cover.⁷¹ The Punch air strip was completed in little over six days and was carefully tested with lighter planes to see if it was capable of accepting fully loaded transport aircraft. A trial Harvard plane was followed by an Oxford aircraft test before fully loaded Dakota aeroplanes landed bearing critical supplies from December 12 onwards.⁷² Dakotas from No 12 squadron RIAF provided flew in petrol, medicines, ammunition, flour, rice, sugar, matches, fruit, whisky, cigarettes and even champagne.⁷³ As they had in Srinagar civil aircraft also played their part flying in despite the extreme danger of Punch's very short airfield.⁷⁴ The air fleet began bringing in a regular stream of supplies while evacuating those refugees, particularly women and children, whose labour was not considered necessary for the garrison. Over the course of six days 4,27,000 pounds of supplies and a battery of mountain guns were flown into Punch.⁷⁵

Azad forces constantly shelled and sniped at Punch. Full scale attacks were not launched at least partly because of the difficulty in concentrating troops in the face of constant RIAF tactical reconnaissance though the town's fortifications also discouraged offensives.⁷⁶ The siege of Punch on the ground was thus an action in which the garrison constantly streamed out in an effort to capture strategically critical points in keeping with the belief that it was facing irregular forces.⁷⁷ The besiegers meanwhile fought often to defend positions that they

⁷¹ B. Kumar, (2007), p 178.

⁷² CAC, GBR/0014/ELMT 3-1, 'Kashmir, Winter 1947'.

⁷³ MoD (I), 601/14292/H, Air Drops.

⁷⁴ MoD (I), 601/14418/H, AO 70, 6 January 1947.

⁷⁵ R. Chhina, (2006), p 271.

⁷⁶ TNA, DO 133/95, Milsit 12 to 18 February 1948.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Milsit 24 February to 1 March 1948.

held while avoiding concentrations that might be easily spotted from the air. Indeed by March 1948 the situation had sufficiently been alleviated by evacuations of civilians and the flying in of supplies that the Punch garrison moved to the fields out of the town to cover civilians from Punch as they harvested grain fields.⁷⁸

In order to bombard Indian pickets outside the town and disrupt the landing of planes at Punch airfield the raiders moved up 3.7 inch guns against the town later that month. Indian forces would later learn that the Azad forces were in fact backed by the 3rd Mountain Battery of the Pakistan army.⁷⁹ For the time being however the consequences of the bombardment were grave as the RIAF Dakotas tasked with supplying Punch from Jammu were forced to suspend landings and to resort to the far less effective method of air dropping in order to supply Punch. As the British military adviser in Pakistan noted, 'Food is said to be running short in the town which is packed with refugees, the morale of the troops is low and without more substantial assistance than the Indians can provide by parachute the town is expected to fall in a month at the outside.'⁸⁰

It was in this context that General Roy Bucher, commander-in-chief of the Indian army approached his Pakistani counterpart General Douglas Gracey to negotiate possible safe passage for refugees from Punch and a limiting of military action.⁸¹ The negotiations are representative of the influence of British commanders in de-escalating the Kashmir conflict. They are also significant to a degree not previously realised in the context of the RIAF resupply of Punch. According to the agreement the RIAF would limit its bombing of hostiles

⁷⁸ Ibid., Milsit, 2 March to 9 March 1948.

⁷⁹ Ibid., Milsit, 22 to 28 April 1948.

⁸⁰ TNA, DO 134/1, A.H. Reed to H.S. Stephenson, 25 March 1948.

⁸¹ C. Dasgupta's account of these talks which leans heavily on a simplistic nationalist reading of events has been critiqued. See; C. Dasgupta,(2002), p 141; S. Raghavan, (2010), p 115.

around Punch while the Azad forces would stop their increasingly effective artillery bombardment of the town. Bucher pursued two interconnected objectives in the negotiations that were begun on 19 March 1948, two days after the 3.7 inch guns were inducted to bombard Punch. Bucher believed that the Indian political leadership was intent on holding Punch to protect its large non-Muslim population. Therefore he sought to ensure that civilians were withdrawn from Punch so he could convince the Indian government to eventually withdraw its forces from Punch. Bucher assumed mistakenly that the Indians were committed to holding Punch primarily to defend its non-Muslim civilian population and once civilians were evacuated the 'commitment of the Indian Army would be less'.⁸² He was also at least partially concerned about the adverse supply situation caused by the arrival of the Pakistani artillery.⁸³ Bucher eventually ended the talks with Gracey, claiming that Azad forces were not capable of implementing a scaling down of action due to their poor communications. This along with several other factors, not least of which were the emergent political differences on Kashmir between Bucher and Gracey who had both significantly internalised the convictions of the governments they served, led to the withdrawal of the offer to slow down operations in Punch. It is also very likely that the RIAF's delivery of artillery to Punch, took the pressure off Bucher to negotiate de-escalation.

RIAF aircraft famously flew in two 25 pounder guns along with ammunition and artillery crews to counter the 3.7 inch guns that the Azad forces were bombarding Punch with on 21 March 1948.⁸⁴ This led eventually stabilised the situation in Punch. By the end of April the town could boast a battery of four 25 pounder guns as the Azad commitment to attacking it

⁸² BL, L/WS/1/1141, Shone to CRO, 28 March 1948

⁸³ *Idem.*,

⁸⁴ For a detailed account of the delivery of 25 pounder guns to Punch see: B. Kumar, (2007), p 189.

seemed to decrease, partly because Punchi rebels needed to return to their fields in order to harvest their crops. In the meanwhile over twenty thousand refugees of the original refugee population of forty thousand were evacuated by air.⁸⁵ Indeed the situation for India improved so greatly that the reinforced garrison of Punch was able to fan out and capture positions around the town even briefly linking up with friendly troops from Rajauri.⁸⁶

India had committed to holding Punch in December 1947 to ensure its prestige in Kashmir. Holding Punch would not only convince rebellious Kashmiris and Pakistan but also Hyderabad of India's commitment in the broader context of negotiations. India's position before the United Nations would be more secure if it claimed sovereignty over all Kashmir in keeping with its broader case that all of Kashmir state was 'provisionally' Indian territory. It did so primarily through the work of the RIAF which both provided the Punch garrison with air support and supplied it.

As Azad forces increasingly showed signs of disintegrating from the force of the imminent Indian spring offensive of 1948 Pakistan inducted its regular forces into combat considerably upping the stakes of the Kashmir war.⁸⁷ Following the failure of the Indian spring offensive and the arrival in the subcontinent of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) Indian military activity in Kashmir wound down considerably. Pakistan made use of the opportunity to infiltrate troops into Ladakh and to encircle Punch. For Pakistan the capture of Punch was important not only for prestige reasons. One common argument was that over 12,000 personnel in the Pakistani army were from Punch and the integrity of the

⁸⁵ TNA, DO 133/95, Milsit, 22 to 28 April.

⁸⁶ S.N. Prasad, (2005), p 246.

⁸⁷ S. Nawaz, (2008), p 67.

Pakistani army depended on forestalling further Indian moves in Punch.⁸⁸ Perhaps more importantly the full scope of the refugee crisis created as Muslims fled from the Indian army was making itself apparent to the government of Pakistan. Karachi's concerns on this count are apparent from the fact that the Pakistan army's ceasefire plan, hoped to gain Indian permission to use roads as far as Uri as well as the Jhangar crossroads in order to get supplies to homeless Punchi refugees who were wandering between Punch district and the Jhelum river.⁸⁹

Confronted with the imperative of capturing Punch, Pakistan deployed a large force to surround the town. By late September nine battalions of Pakistani and Azad troops had surrounded Punch in a semi-circle.⁹⁰ A 25 pounder gun was transported with great difficulty from Kohala in Pakistan to Punch being towed by hand for 35 miles before being broken down into man loads and then being carried by 400 men for 16 miles.⁹¹ With its ability to rapidly change position along the road on which it was based it equaled the heaviest guns in Punch and was able to put the airfield out of action effectively dooming Punch unless a link up by land was effected. Indian planes continued to air drop supplies around Punch but these supplies would not be adequate, particularly with the onset of winter. Even Pakistani army officers who insisted that the bombardment of the Punch airstrip did not constitute a major provocation, since they argued that Punch likely had stocked up provisions for months, conceded that 'the (Indian) Union troops must have been handicapped greatly by their inability to evacuate casualties.'⁹²

⁸⁸ TNA, DO 134/3, A.H. Reed to H.S. Stephenson, 16 May 1947.

⁸⁹ TNA, DO 134/4, A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 2 August 1948.

⁹⁰ TNA, DO 133/96, Milsit 28 September to 4 October.

⁹¹ TNA, DO 134/4, J.F. Walker to UKHC Pakistan, 23 September 1948.

⁹² TNA, DO 134/5, A.H. Reed to UKHC, 7 Dec 1948.

The cutting off of Punch is illustrative of the limitations of air supply against a determined enemy. India was able to sustain Punch for a year thanks to the heavy and often ingenious commitment of its air force but this could not be maintained continuously. Consequently, the Indian army was forced to launch a major ground offensive to relieve the Punch garrison in the winter of 1948.⁹³ While in the long term the decision to hold Punch proved politic, the link up alarmed the Pakistani military which was convinced that India was seeking to conquer all of Kashmir, pushing forward an unsustainable mass of refugees into Pakistan. As a British observer at Pakistan Army Headquarters noted following the Indian link up on 20 November 1948, 'The general opinion here is that the Union Government is dedicating all its energies to achieving a *fait accompli* in Kashmir as soon as possible...For their part the Pakistan Government is equally determined this shall not come to pass.'⁹⁴ Pakistan was in the midst of deploying nearly its entire army in Kashmir with the intention of launching an offensive against India's line of communications in late November 1948 and the Punch link up seemed to offer them reason to do so.

Indian aviation had enabled the holding of Punch but it had done so at the cost of escalating the artillery duel there with Pakistan, a duel that could not in the long term be won given the determination and superior logistics of the enemy. To be fair it is worth noting that the initial decision to hold Punch was made under the assumption that regular Indian forces would be combating irregular forces rather than the Pakistan army.⁹⁵ Ultimately however the continued Indian presence in Punch came to be seen as escalatory by Pakistan. The Indian ground offensive to link up Punch, launched after the failure of the RIAF to keep the town supplied,

⁹³ A. Subramaniam, *India's Wars*, (Noida, 2016), p 153

⁹⁴ TNA, DO 134/5, A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 23 November 1948.

⁹⁵ S.N. Prasad, (2005), p 73.

was seen very differently in New Delhi and Karachi. What to Nehru appeared to be ‘defensive measures...assuring supplies to Punch’ could appear to be ‘impending offensives’ to Liaquat Ali Khan.⁹⁶ By December 1948 full scale war looked as likely as it had been in December 1947. As the next section will reveal the RIAF mechanisms to manage escalation were under serious pressure by the end of the war.

III. Bombing, Air-to-air combat and managing escalation

The acceptance by both India and Pakistan of the need to limit the war meant that explicit and often highly detailed arrangements were worked out between the armies of the two countries. As seen earlier, even before the Pakistani army was officially inducted into combat, the commanders-in-chief of both armies were working on ways to prevent escalation. Managing escalation between the Indian and Pakistani forces usually amounted to localising combat and conveying clear signals about intentions. The case of the air forces of the two dominions however was more complex.

The Royal Pakistan Air Force (RPAF) was remarkably small and was still going through the process of reorganization following partition. George Cunningham, governor of the North West Frontier province was ‘struck by the smartness and good appearance of its officers’ at a parade but noted that ‘it is a little disturbing that this was the whole of the Air Force of Pakistan.’⁹⁷ Its participation in the early phase of the war was a secret though there is some evidence that Harvards and Spitfires of the RPAF undertook reconnaissance for the Azad

⁹⁶ TNA, DO 133/82, Nehru to Menon, 19 November 1948; TNA, DO 134/5, Liaquat Ali to Clement Atlee, 8 December 1948.

⁹⁷ BL, MSS Eur D 670/6, Diary entry, 14th Jan 1948.

forces.⁹⁸ This initial secrecy around its initial deployment and the small size of the RPAF meant that there was little need to evolve a framework around managing its escalatory potential.

The RIAF in contrast was central to India's war in Kashmir. Consequently, the Indian political leadership restricted its actions to prevent escalation. As was the case with the army, despite claiming sovereignty over the entirety of the territories of the state of Kashmir, the Indian government limited the areas in which the RIAF could attack the enemy. Pilots were ordered not to bomb the Lachman Pattan and Kohala bridges due to their proximity with Pakistan and not to attack the Mangla irrigation headworks. Any violation of these restrictions or any attacks on Pakistan territory by gun, bomb and rocket would result in immediate court martial.⁹⁹ Indeed bombing restrictions were heavy enough to draw complaints from high ranking army commanders who felt severely constrained. Lt. General Cariappa called for the bombing of the Lachman Pattan bridge arguing that if the RIAF did not bomb the bridge the buildup of enemy forces would be so great as to threaten Indian territorial gains and hence endanger the very political goals for which aerial bombardment was being held back.¹⁰⁰ He was swiftly rebuffed by the Indian military's British commanders who were especially keen to avoid escalation. Air Marshal Thomas Elmhirst, who as someone more experienced with bombing, claimed that over half of all bombs dropped on the bridge would fall in Pakistan territory.¹⁰¹ General Roy Bucher meanwhile warned of the

⁹⁸ S.S. Hussain, (1982), p 33.

⁹⁹ MoD (I), 601/14247/H, Directive to AOC No 1 (op) Group for conduct of air operations in Kashmir, 26 June 1948.

¹⁰⁰ NAM, 7901-87-6-1, K.M. Cariappa to Chief of General Staff, 19 June 1948.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., T.W. Elmhirst to R. Bucher, 23 June 1947.

‘incalculable political repercussions’ of such an action ending any possibility it would be undertaken.¹⁰²

Despite this the RIAF was accused of indiscriminate and occasionally provocative bombing, not least by its own commander. Air Marshal Thomas Elmhirst, commander-in-chief of the RIAF, wrote to his deputy that he was alarmed at the ‘apparently indiscriminate’ attacks by Tempest aircraft on houses. This did not fulfill the military objective of supporting the advance and ‘would cause locals not to vote for the accession to India.’¹⁰³ Air Vice Marshal Subroto Mukherjee, to whom the letter was addressed, was instructed to consider the matter and to pass orders he thought were necessary to control indiscriminate bombing. Consequently, restrictions on bombing were further increased by a fresh directive for pilots in Kashmir. Attacks on buildings and civilians were to be avoided as the ‘Air Force is fighting within the territory of India.’¹⁰⁴

The RIAF also received complaints from the East Punjab Red Cross for bombing its hospitals and shooting up its vehicles. One Miss Macqueen niece of the West Punjab governor who worked for the East Punjab Red Cross accused the RIAF of bombing the Bagh hospital once and the Kotli hospital twice despite her complaints.¹⁰⁵ Elmhirst consequently launched investigations that revealed that Kotli hospital had indeed been bombed though he defended the bombings by claiming that it was inadvisable to place hospitals in forward areas without markings visible from the air. Since ‘under no circumstances would RIAF pilots deliberately attack’ a Red Cross building, Elmhirst claimed that ‘the lady in question must be in quite an

¹⁰² Ibid., R. Bucher to H.M. Patel, 24 June 1948.

¹⁰³ MoD (I), 601/14247/H. Elmhirst to Mukherjee, 21 June 1948.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Directive to AOC No 1 (op) Group for conduct of air operations in Kashmir, 26 June 1948.

¹⁰⁵ MoD (I) 601/14420/H, Telegram from Miss MacQueen, Red Cross Chairman, West Punjab, 9 October 1948.

imbalanced state of mind'.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless restrictions were made ever tighter and Pakistani radio intercepts in November 1948 showed that RIAF planes were reporting back to headquarters on whether towns under reconnaissance had any visible Red Crosses on them.¹⁰⁷ Attacks on Red Cross hospitals opened India to international pressure as they could bring with them the scrutiny of the International Committee of the Red Cross. They also gave Pakistan valuable propaganda material. Pakistani newspapers were running stories on the Indian bombing of hospitals as early as November 1947.¹⁰⁸ The RIAF's sensitivity to allegations of bombing Red Cross buildings is indicative of the ways in which air action was being adapted to ensure that both international and Kashmiri opinion did not turn against India. It was also informed to a degree by the leadership of Air Marshal Elmhirst who appears to have been personally shocked by the actions of the force.

More alarming for the Indian government however were those instances when Pakistani territory was bombed by RIAF planes. Bombing Pakistani territory was dangerous for a number of reasons. Attacks on Pakistan might lead to a full scale escalation of the war which the Indian leadership was keen to avoid. The RIAF attacked Pakistan on multiple occasions. Some, such as the attack on Kohala bridge, occurred before strict orders were enforced. Others such as the attacks on Garhi Habibullah and Murree were caused inadvertently.¹⁰⁹ The bombing of Murree is revealing of the difficulty of preventing RIAF bombings of Pakistan territory despite heavy restrictions. It is also revealing of the mechanisms in place for managing escalation between Pakistan and India over the bombing of Pakistan territory.

¹⁰⁶ MoD (I) 601/14420/H, Elmhirst to H.M Patel, 25 October 1948.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, DO 134/5 A.H. Reed to UKH C Pak, 21 November 1948.

¹⁰⁸ NMML, *Pakistan Times*, 5 November 1947.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, DO 134/3, Grafftey Smith to Carter, 7 June 1948.

As seen earlier the RIAF had managed to severely constrain enemy forces by attacking motor convoys during daylight hours. This meant that most Pakistani convoys then travelled by night when RIAF strike aircraft could not fly. Lacking aircraft designed for night bombing the RIAF improvised by loading its Dakota transport aircraft with twelve 250 pound bombs which were then rolled out of the plane, which could then fly at night and impede Pakistani convoys. One such ‘Dakota bomber’ meant to carry out a bombardment of Muzzafarabad bridge on the night of 19 August 1948, overflowed its target. Mistaking the lights of the Pakistani hill station town of Murree for their target the IAF pilot T.N. Ghadiok dropped two bombs before realizing their mistake. T.N. Ghadiok, who would rise to be an Air Marshal, recognized the town from its Great Mall road since he had gone to college in Murree.¹¹⁰

The Pakistan army was quick to condemn the action. General Gracey, its commander, was ‘wild’ with Air Marshal Elmhirst as his wife was ‘summering’ in Murree when the bombs fell.¹¹¹ Pakistani authorities also went on to claim inaccurately that the bombing had been accompanied by a machine-gunning of the town, though this was later proven to be untrue.¹¹² India’s response to the complaint was conciliatory. The claim was investigated and when found to be true apologies were made to Gracey by Elmhirst. Pakistan Army Headquarters accepted the apology though anti-aircraft batteries were dispatched along with their British staff to Northern Punjab as a precaution against further air raids.¹¹³ Pakistani military authorities were willing to make allowances for attacks that were clearly inadvertent, caused no casualties and were not aimed at targets of military importance, even if these occurred in

¹¹⁰ B. Kumar, (2007), p 175.

¹¹¹ CAC, GBR/0014/ELMT, 5/5 A, 22 August 1948.

¹¹² TNA, DO 134/4, Anonymous to Symons, 23 August 1948.

¹¹³ Ibid. A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 24 August 1948.

Pakistan itself. In contrast when the RIAF bombed the Northern town of Gilgit, Pakistan not only claimed that a hospital had been hit but also threatened to execute Indian prisoners of war being held there.¹¹⁴ India was quick to cease bombing Gilgit town and Nehru ordered that no towns located in Pakistani territory should be bombed by the RIAF.¹¹⁵ Clear signaling by both governments of the thresholds of escalation communicated primarily through the British military commanders of the Indian and Pakistani armies went some way in ensuring that the RIAF would be used in limited ways.

The Government of India sought to prevent bombings of Pakistani territory for a number of reasons. Bombing Pakistani territory would almost certainly provoke Pakistan into escalating the conflict into a large scale war that would be ruinous for both countries. Indiscriminate bombing would also paint India as a callous invader in a political setting where the legitimacy of its intervention was under question. This would severely weaken India's standing among the Kashmiri populace and also potentially invite international opprobrium, especially from the United Kingdom and the United States with its attendant consequences. Finally there was the not inconsequential concern that directly attacking Pakistani territory would alienate British commanders of the Indian armed forces leading potentially to their resignations at a time when their experience was critically necessary both for the conduct of military operations and for the organisation of independent India's armed forces.

A key consequence of India's unwillingness to bomb Pakistan was the almost painstaking observance of Pakistani territorial sovereignty by the Royal Indian Air Force. Its pilots as seen above were strictly forbidden from attacking or even flying close to Pakistani territory.

¹¹⁴ MoD (I) 601/14422/H, Gracey to Bucher, Telegram 10007, undated.

¹¹⁵ TNA, DO 134/4, UKHC India to CRO, 6 September 1948.

This was in gross contrast to contemporary Indian actions in Hyderabad where RIAF aircraft not only routinely violated Hyderabad air space but were also ordered to attack aircraft smuggling arms into the state if they sighted them on the ground. Indian restraint with Pakistan and aggression in Hyderabad is emblematic of independent India's emerging notions of sovereignty. Indian recognition of Pakistani territory was consistent with its wider notions of sovereignty that located it in a global order based on international legal sovereignty.¹¹⁶ Despite disagreements over Kashmir, the Government of India recognised Pakistani sovereignty, in large part because there were concrete international repercussions to violating it, whereas such disincentives were absent in the Hyderabad case. This is less revealing in certain ways of Indian notions of sovereignty than it is of the international system that emerged from the Second World War. That world was one constituted by a set of nation-states that were simultaneously distinct and modular.¹¹⁷ Overt violations of territorial sovereignty in this system were treated as a threat to global stability, particularly in the context of the Cold War, whereas violence aimed at consolidating the domestic sovereignty of the nation-state was not. These seemingly abstract notions had concrete military consequences in Kashmir where RIAF aircraft were prevented from risking escalation through attacks on Pakistani territory.

Another source of anxiety related to the use of air power in the region was the possibility that Indian aircraft might intercept Pakistani aircraft beginning a cycle of escalation that would end in full scale war between the two countries. The eventual clash of the RIAF and the RPAF in Kashmir altered the mechanisms evolved to keep the conflict limited, but not by

¹¹⁶ For a discussion of international legal sovereignty see: S. Krasner, (1999).

¹¹⁷ A growing body of work has critiqued the inevitability of the emergence of the nation state as the sole means of organising sovereignty. See for instance: F. Devji, (2013), p 71.

very much. It is unclear when exactly the RPAF was inducted into Kashmir though Dakotas of the RPAF may have begun supply dropping missions as early as December 1947. These missions were carried out in radio silence to avoid detection by the Indians and were flown over some of the most mountainous terrain of the world.¹¹⁸ By October 1948 with the open participation of the Pakistan army in Kashmir, the RPAF took on ever increasing supply duties. RIAF planes sought to suppress this and made attacks on airfields behind Pakistani lines in places such as Bunji, Gilgit and Chilas which were then heavily patrolled from the air to prevent repair.¹¹⁹

It was on one such patrol that an RIAF Tempest spotted an RPAF Dakota dropping supplies on 4 November 1948. The RIAF had only been authorised by the Defence Committee of the Indian cabinet to intercept any planes flying over Kashmir territory. On spotting an RPAF plane the Indian pilot was to signal it to land at a nearby airfield failing which he was to open fire across the planes bow. If even this did not work the plane was to be shot down. When they spotted the RPAF plane the Indian pilots followed their orders.¹²⁰ Unwilling to surrender the Pakistani pilot Mukhtar Ahmad Dogar flew low into the Chilas valley. He managed to evade the Indians who were chasing him despite losing two crew members to Tempest firing and was subsequently awarded the Sitara-e-Jurat for his actions.¹²¹

C. Dasgupta has shown that this precipitated a flurry of diplomatic correspondence as British officials in the Commonwealth Relations Office tried to defuse what they and the Pakistan cabinet saw as an act of escalation.¹²² He argues that British High Commission officials and

¹¹⁸ S.S. Hussain, (1982), p 30.

¹¹⁹ MoD (I), 601/14302/H, No. 206, 3 November 1948.

¹²⁰ MoD (I), 601/14302/H, No. 207, 4 November 1948.

¹²¹ S.S. Hussain, (1982), p 35.

¹²² C. Dasgupta, (2002), p 175.

commanders, working in conjunction, prevented escalation and robbed India of a chance to seriously disrupt Pakistani supplies by attacking Dakotas. In making this argument he shares the belief of contemporary British officials that RIAF attacks on Pakistani Dakota transport aircraft would naturally escalate the conflict into a full scale war. If Pakistan protected its transports with fighters, this thesis assumes, India would ultimately be forced to attack Pakistani airbases triggering an inter-dominion war. The British government would then have to issue a stand down order to its officers serving in the armed forces of one or both of the dominions. This assumption ignores a point put forward in the very files Dasgupta quotes. A note most likely written by Sir P. Patrick of the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) says:

Even if the RPAF and RIAF did become engaged in desultory fighting (for it would, I think be no more) I do not see why this should be any more reason for the sounding of the Stand-down than the indisputable fact that the Indian and Pakistani armies are at this moment fighting each other.¹²³

A similar argument was echoed in a letter by the High Commissioner to India, Terence Shone, to the Air Marshal Elmhirst of the RIAF dated 16 November 1948. Elmhirst had spoken to Shone informing him that he was wracked by guilt at the possibility of fighting breaking out between the RIAF and RPAF. He might find himself in the position of advising the Indian government to attack RPAF bases in Pakistan thus being forced to wage war against his fellow-RAF officers.¹²⁴ The Air Marshal mourned the fact that the His-Majesty's-Government had not issued the stand down order as soon as Pakistani regular troops were

¹²³ BL, L/WS/1/1144, BGS 8 Nov 1948.

¹²⁴ The RPAF had a large contingent of British officers and technicians and it is likely Elmhirst feared that Indian bombings of Pakistani bases might harm them.

found to be fighting India. Finally he had hinted heavily that he would put in his resignation if he found himself in the position of fighting the RPAF.¹²⁵

Shone replied that thus far Elmhirst had not put in his resignation despite the long-standing public knowledge that Pakistani regular forces commanded from the rear by British officers were operating in Kashmir. Shone felt that ‘the fact that you wear a blue hat and the soldiers wear khakhi hats is a matter of mere detail.’ So long as any air operations took place ‘in the confines of Kashmir’ the conditions under which Elmhirst operated would not ‘have changed one iota.’¹²⁶

Shone wrote to Elmhirst that, ‘If you did give such advice it does not necessarily follow that the Indian Government would accept it, because the political implications of such an action, not only locally but throughout the world, would be very grave indeed.’ If however such a recommendation was given and accepted ‘it seems to me an entirely different situation would be created.’ Shone also said that an identical situation would emerge if India decided to launch a land attack on Pakistan.¹²⁷

Thus it appears that both contemporaries and historians overestimated the escalatory potential of air-to-air combat in the Kashmir war. A clash between the RIAF and the RPAF would not lead with any certainty to the bombing of air bases inside Pakistan or for that matter to an order to stand down from Her Majesty’s Government. While it is true that in keeping with the broader policy of not engaging in provocative actions the Indian government ceased operations aimed at downing Pakistani transports it is likely that even if there had

¹²⁵ CAC, GBR/0014/ ELMT 3-1, Shone to Elmhirst 16 November 1948

¹²⁶ *Idem.*,

¹²⁷ *Idem.*,

been dogfighting between the RPAF and RIAF, it would not have led to full scale war as long as the Indian government was committed to keeping the war localised. It is worth noting here that British commanders in India had by late 1948 made it clear that they were neither willing nor able to prosecute an advance on the Pakistani border in Kashmir, let alone a full scale war against Pakistan in the Punjab.¹²⁸ For its part the Indian leadership understood that there was no hope for a military solution in Kashmir and did not intend to expand the conflict into a full scale war.¹²⁹ What would turn out to be the only clash of Indian and Pakistani aircraft in the war simply did not merit an escalatory response.

The Indian political and military leadership had created a number of mechanisms aimed at restraining air power from providing its adversary with propaganda as well as preventing the escalation of the conflict. Air power was used sparingly, India's military intent was clearly signaled by its primarily British general staff and an attempt was made to prevent the repetition of any action that Pakistan held out as overtly provocative. Though it was believed by both contemporaries and historians to be a grave escalation air to air combat merely underlined the fact that as long as it was localised, the fighting in Kashmir would not lead to full scale war. By the end of 1948 however this situation began to change as Pakistan deployed the bulk of its army in an offensive posture in Kashmir.

¹²⁸ NAM, 7901-87-6-1, R. Bucher to H.M. Patel, 23 November 1948.

¹²⁹ BL, L/WS/1/1144, UKHC India to CRO, 24 November 1948.



Image V: An RIAF Dakota lands at Leh airfield in autumn 1948. Note the harsh mountainous terrain in the background. The eventual failure of air resupply would necessitate Indian link-up offensives that dangerously escalated the conflict.

IV. Inadvertent escalation: The Palak Bombings

By December 1948 Pakistan considered its military situation to be desperate. Indian troops had linked up with the besieged towns of Punch and Leh. Like Punch, Leh was a strategically critical town, which served as an important junction and as the capital of the Ladakh region. Also like Punch, it had been besieged by rebels, the Gilgit scouts, and had relied on the air link to survive a siege that lasted from May to November 1948. Just as in Punch the air link had remained tenuous and Indian troops had been forced to take the offensive to relieve the town before it ran out of supplies.¹³⁰ Combined with the Punch link up, the Indian march on Leh and the capture of the strategically vital towns of Dras and Kargil to its North pushed Pakistani forces back considerably. In some sectors, Pakistani defensive positions were not more than 20 miles away from the East Punjab border.¹³¹

The Pakistani leadership was alarmed by these developments and denuded its defences on the border with West Punjab to reinforce its troops in Kashmir from late November 1948.¹³² The Indian advances were the cause of alarm for two reasons. Firstly the Indian army had advanced into striking distance of the canals that watered much of the Punjab. The capture of the Jhelum and Chenab headworks would give India control over four fifths of the water necessary to feed the Punjab. Pakistani policy makers were convinced that their capture would mean the effective end of Pakistan's independence.¹³³ Perhaps more immediately troubling for Pakistan was the possibility that further Indian advances would cause a refugee influx that the country simply could not cope with. As the High Commissioner for Pakistan

¹³⁰ TNA, DO 133/96, Symon to CRO, 6 November 1948.

¹³¹ TNA, DO 134/5, A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 23 November 1948.

¹³² BL, L/WS/1/1144, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, No 1322, 18 November 1948.

¹³³ Ibid., UKHC Pakistan to CRO, No. 1322, 18 November 1948.

noted, ‘they believe that an influx of no more than another one or two hundred thousand refugees would crack the provincial economy and mean the end of Pakistan.’¹³⁴ Many fled from what they were certain were Indian atrocities. Refugees flooding into Pakistan and Azad areas spoke of villages being burnt, Azad supporters being shot and a number of people being blinded.¹³⁵ When confronted with accusations that his forces were committing atrocities General Bucher accepted that refugees had been fleeing but contended that they had ‘been filled with unjustifiable terror of India’.¹³⁶ India was widely seen as a defender of the anti-Muslim Dogra state by the predominantly Muslim populace of Punch and Mirpur. Though it is certain that atrocity stories were exaggerated there is some evidence that atrocities were indeed committed. General Bucher sacked at least one army commander for failing to prevent atrocities against the local populace.¹³⁷ It is also not unlikely that fear of RIAF attacks drove refugees to flee towards Pakistan controlled territory. The IAF continued to launch heavy attacks on houses in regions held by the enemy despite the heavy restrictions placed on such actions discussed earlier. The British military observer in Pakistan received reports that ‘there was scarcely a cottage standing between DOMEL and CHAKOTHI (sic)’ though he reckoned it was possible to argue that the houses might well have been used as shelter by Pakistani forces.¹³⁸

The calculus of the war in Kashmir shifted in fundamental ways from the end of November onwards. Pakistan no longer saw Kashmir as a theatre in which it was waging a limited war with India. Instead due to the threat to its water supplies and the influx of refugees Pakistan’s

¹³⁴ Ibid., UKHC Pakistan to CRO, No 1392, 18 November 1948.

¹³⁵ TNA, DO 14/512 A.H. Reed to Stephenson, 18 April 1948.

¹³⁶ MoD (I), 601/14422/H, Bucher to Gracey, October 1948.

¹³⁷ TNA, DO 133/96, T. Shone to CRO, 9 July 1948.

¹³⁸ TNA, DO 134/4, A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 2 August 1948.

leaders felt that it was possible for 'India to destroy Pakistan by action in Kashmir alone'.¹³⁹ Indian forces were extremely vulnerable to an attack by the Pakistani army and RPAF in Kashmir due to their exposed communications lines and their reliance on air supply. It is likely that a Pakistani offensive in Kashmir with the full weight of its army and air force would have been catastrophic for Indian forces.¹⁴⁰ The Indian leadership would then likely be forced to counterattack in Punjab where Pakistan's reduced defences would make East Punjab vulnerable to invasion unleashing the worst effects of full scale war that neither country could contemplate.¹⁴¹ A Pakistani offensive was slated for 7 December 1948 and subsequently postponed to the 11th of December.¹⁴²

On 13th December 1948 eleven RIAF Tempests in two waves dropped 1000 and 500 pound bombs on enemy supply dumps near Palak in Mirpur district. They strafed three trucks spotted in the area and ended the raid with incendiary bombs. The next day two Tempests dropped incendiary bombs. Further, raids were called off when Bofors anti-aircraft guns were encountered in the area. In order to prove that it was attacking legitimate military targets and to show that the nearby village was not attacked the RIAF was careful to photograph the aftermath of the Palak bombings. The attack was among the largest and most well planned launched by the RIAF during the war.¹⁴³

In Pakistan, the Palak bombings caused some alarm. General Gracey ordered Pakistani artillery to bombard the Beri Pattan bridge and adjoining supply dump to retaliate against the air raid. A 24 gun field regiment and an 8 gun medium battery fired at the Indian depot at

¹³⁹ BL, L/WS/1/1144, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, No. 1395, 18 November 1948.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, UKHC India to CRO, 5 November 1948.

¹⁴¹ TNA DO 134/5, H.S. Stephenson to Grafftey Smith, 26 November 1948.

¹⁴² S. Raghavan, (2010), p 144.

¹⁴³ MoD (I), 601/14314/H, No 135, Air OPSUM, December 1948.

Beri Pattan from the morning of 15th December to the evening of the 18th of December. RIAF planes that attempted to attack the gun batteries were driven away by sustained anti-aircraft fire. The bombardment devastated the Indian supply dump at Beri-Pattan, scored a direct hit on the critical bridge situated there, destroyed a 25 vehicle Indian convoy and led some Indian troops to flee from their positions in panic. In light of Pakistan's decision not to launch an offensive this artillery bombardment was not as heavy as it would have been a few days previously when it would also have been followed with Pakistani armour and infantry.¹⁴⁴ The artillery bombardment came as a shock to the General Bucher who called up General Gracey to ask why Pakistani gunners 'had put 25,000 rounds into his supply dump'. When he was informed that this was retaliation for the Palak bombing he confessed that he was unaware of the bombing, which it later emerged had been carried out on the orders of Air Marshal Thomas Elmhirst.¹⁴⁵ Ironically as seen earlier Elmhirst had been concerned, to the point of threatening resignation, about the possibility of plunging the subcontinent into war through air action.

General Gracey claimed that the RIAF bombing of Palak had been a violation of an earlier agreement between himself and Gracey whereby Indian forces would make take no major actions following the linkup with Punch and Leh.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the Pakistan government pointed to a more recent agreement drawn up between Air Vice Marshal Mukherjee of the RIAF and Air Commodore Janjua of the RPAF that India would reduce the number of Tempest squadrons based in Kashmir and in the aftermath of the Gilgit bombings that no towns would be attacked. India had in this view violated the agreement meaning that

¹⁴⁴ BL, L/WS/1/1145, A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 21 December 1948.

¹⁴⁵ *Idem.*,

¹⁴⁶ BL, L/WS/1/1144, UKHC India to CRO, 23 December 1948.

Pakistani military forces were no longer obligated to limit themselves to defensive operations. The telegram sent by Gracey to Bucher when the bombardment eventually ceased was revealing, ‘All is now quiet on the Western front. *Nemo impune me lacessit* (No one cuts me with impunity).’¹⁴⁷

The Palak bombings and subsequent repercussions were occasioned by a number of factors. Agreements drawn up between Indian and Pakistani military authorities continued to be coloured by their political views on the conflict meaning that, despite themselves, the British chiefs of the Indian military had increasingly internalised the convictions of the countries they served. Earlier during negotiations over de-escalation of Punch, General Bucher had maintained the Indian government’s position that the Indian army was operating in its own territory against raiders while Gracey had insisted on inducting Pakistani troops into the district in keeping with Pakistan’s broad position that it had at least as much right to maintain forces in Kashmir as India.¹⁴⁸ Thus Gracey’s reading of the agreement to limit hostile operations included large scale air operations while Bucher had clearly not taken these into consideration.¹⁴⁹ The Indian agreement not to bomb towns was read by the RIAF as meaning that it would not attack populated towns and the photographic evidence gathered by it during the Palak raid clearly indicated that it had not indeed done so. Another reason for the way in which the Palak bombings clearly escalated the conflict was the sheer complexity of the military structures involved. Though Bucher had agreed to restrain Indian military actions in the aftermath of the Punch linkup, he could hardly be expected to prevent all military actions at a time when the Indian and Pakistani armies were in close proximity. His clear surprise on

¹⁴⁷ BL, L/WS/1/1145, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 19 December 1948.

¹⁴⁸ C. Dasgupta, (2002), p 141.

¹⁴⁹ BL, L/WS/1/1145, UKHC India to CRO, 22 December 1948.

being informed of the Palak bombings by the Pakistan army reveals that he had not considered the possibility that air attacks would be escalatory.¹⁵⁰ Indeed the RIAF was clearly not aware that its operations were likely to have escalatory effects.

The Palak raid may have been a large raid but it was similar to other air interdiction operations that the RIAF had carried out in the Kashmir theatre. RIAF commanders continued to believe that operations carried out in Kashmir would not lead to escalatory action by Pakistan as long as they continued to remain within a framework that the RIAF had evolved over the course of the war by adapting its actions to the signals sent to it by the Pakistani military. The RIAF had entered the war with a long list of restrictions which had over time expanded in response to Pakistani objections and its own understanding of what actions were provocative. The bombing of what RIAF commanders knew to be an enemy supply dump located within Kashmir territory away from major population centres did not appear to be a provocative action that would invite escalation. Given the changed tenor of Pakistani military policy in Kashmir however it led to an inadvertent escalation.

The response from New Delhi to the shelling of Beri Pattan was furious. As the British High commissioner there noted, ‘... there are very strong and bitter feelings in all responsible circles as a result of the recent action at Beripattan (sic), which has roused feelings of indignation to a degree which I would not have thought possible in apparently reasonable people.’¹⁵¹ Jawaharlal Nehru was enraged and renewed calls he had earlier made for British officers in Pakistan to be given a stand-down order since they were no doubt involved in the planning of the bombardment.¹⁵² The British government would not acquiesce to this for a

¹⁵⁰ TNA, DO 134/5, A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 21 December 1948.

¹⁵¹ BL, L/WS/1/1145, UKHC India to CRO, 22 December 1948.

¹⁵² Ibid., UKHC India to CRO, 22 December 1948.

battery of reasons. These included concerns that a British stand down order aimed at Pakistan would potentially throw the country into chaos opening the door to communism and also endanger the lives of British citizens present in Pakistan.¹⁵³ Nehru also again implied that the conflict would be escalated by threatening to take whatever steps were necessary to check the 'offensive' against the Indian army on its own territory.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless India did not militarily respond to the Beri Pattan shelling. Indeed Bucher assured Gracey that there would be no repeat of the Palak bombing, after speaking with Elmhirst. There were several reasons for this apparent de-escalation. Nehru knew that a military victory was no longer possible in Kashmir.¹⁵⁵ India controlled most of Kashmir and had little to gain from the capture of predominantly Muslim regions where the populace considered it to be a hostile power. Though Nehru had long given up on the prospect of a plebiscite he was willing to accept a ceasefire followed by negotiations on plebiscite as an alternative to full scale war.¹⁵⁶ It is not unlikely that the Beri Pattan action convinced him that the prospect of a stand down, which would have given India a significant advantage, was distant, prompting him to settle for what effectively amounted to a partition of Kashmir.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Ibid., CRO to UKHC Pakistan & UKHC India, 20 December 1948,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Nehru loc cit, CRO to UKHC India & UKHC Pakistan, 20 December 1948.

¹⁵⁵ TNA, DO 133/82, UKHC India to CRO, 19 November 1948.

¹⁵⁶ S. Raghavan, (2010), p 145.

¹⁵⁷ This is not to ignore other military developments that the Prime Minister was concerned about such as the shelling of Sadabad and the Pakistani army's construction of roads towards Akhnur. See: NAM, 7901-87-6-1, Nehru to Bucher, 23 December 1948; There are some indications that the Indian government's decision in favour of a ceasefire was taken suddenly. General Bucher sent General Gracey a telegram on the 30 December 1948 that began, 'In view of political developments my government thinks continuation of moves and counter moves due to misunderstanding accompanied by fire support seems senseless and wasteful in human life besides only tending to embitter feelings.' The Pakistani government accepted the proposal and what later telegrams between the two armies referred to as an 'informal ceasefire' came into existence the next day on 31 December 1948 ending the war in Kashmir. See: NAM, 7901-87-6-1, Bucher papers.

V. Conclusion

Though the Kashmir conflict and its aerial dimension has been the subject of some writing there have been few attempts to contextualise aviation in the broader politics that came to define it, let alone historicise the conflict in the overarching story of the Indian state's engagement with aviation. Drawing on a number of previously untapped sources I locate aviation in the politics of the Kashmir conflict. Utilising three important junctures in the war—the Srinagar airlift, the siege of Punch and the Palak bombings, I show that by shaping the war, aviation was also critical in shaping both the self-image and notions of sovereignty of the warring dominions of India and Pakistan. Despite being a limited conflict, the Kashmir war would prove formative in defining relations between the two states re-centering military attention within South Asia and ensuring that the two dominions viewed each other as adversaries. What was essentially a territorial conflict came to be seen increasingly in ideological terms by both states, a trend that continues into the present. The military clash between India and Pakistan was the logical culmination of fundamental disagreements flowing from the lack of clear cut mechanisms to resolve disputes arising from partition negotiations. The outbreak of military conflict between the two dominions however had a sobering effect on both governments about the costs of a full scale conflict and reinforced the need to manage escalation in light of the impossibility of total victory for either side. The very decision to limit the conflict is indicative of India's acceptance of Pakistani sovereignty at a time when the Government of India actively sought to end the independence of princely states including Junagadh, Hyderabad and Kashmir itself. I also point to the ways in which the conflict undermined British hopes that independent India and Pakistan would serve as Britain's military allies in the Commonwealth.

Indian aviation played a central role in the Kashmir war. It initiated, sustained and escalated the conflict. Aviation in general, and the RIAF in particular, enabled India to expedite diplomatic and military actions in response to the invasion of the state by Pakistan backed forces. The aeroplane enabled India to quickly rush its representatives to the state to secure its accession. It was then able to airlift a military force to intervene in Kashmir with a speed that took its adversaries by surprise. Central to India's airlift was its large reserve of civil and military transport aircraft, built up as a result of the Second World War and its aftermath. The airlift was militarily risky and logistically complex but was carried out successfully, in no small part due to emergency improvisation. It secured the most populous region of the princely state of Kashmir and firmly established India in a position to contest a Pakistani conquest of Kashmir. Without aircraft Indian representatives would never have been able to secure the states' accession rapidly enough to justify Indian intervention. Indian military forces motoring up the steep Banihal pass would not have been able to secure the state's capital, Srinagar, before the raiders. This would have fundamentally changed the map of South Asia, forcing the Government of India to face the stark alternatives of either accepting a Pakistani fait accompli or escalating the conflict by attacking Pakistan across the Punjab border. The rapid mobilisation of Indian aircraft was thus indicative of the governments' determination and ability to hold Kashmir.

Indian aviation enabled India to sustain the Kashmir conflict though its ability to do so declined as the conflict escalated. Aviation enabled India to offset its severe logistical difficulties against Pakistan. It was crucial in securing key political objectives such as holding the besieged town of Punch for India. The RIAF was able to keep the town supplied and to arm the garrison to meet evolving threats, serving as its sole conduit to friendly forces.

However the ability of the RIAF to sustain towns such as Punch was limited in the face of increasing escalation. When confronted with regular enemy forces, the ability of aircraft to keep Punch supplied significantly diminished, necessitating a link up by ground forces. The ground offensive, occasioned by the failure of the air supply of Punch, set off a chain reaction that dangerously escalated tensions between India and Pakistan.

Over the course of the war the RIAF evolved a framework for managing escalation based on localising the conflict, subordinating military effectiveness to political restraint. This was based largely on the Indian army's strategy for avoiding escalation which included avoiding attacks on Pakistan itself and clearly signaling India's military intentions to its enemy. However air power came with its own complexities which needed to be resolved in order to prevent escalation and underpin the legitimacy of Indian military actions in Kashmir, because of the entanglement of political, military and diplomatic objectives. The RIAF thus began the war with a number of military restrictions. The list of restrictions, especially those pertaining to bombing, only grew longer as the war progressed since RIAF policy was adapted to meet criticism from within and without.

The war was characterised by the absence of air-to-air combat as a consequence of the weakness of the Royal Pakistan Air Force. When air to air action did eventually occur, it set off deep concerns about the possibility of escalation. I have argued that these concerns, held by contemporaries and later historians alike, were misplaced as air to air combat even if it had occurred would have been localised in Kashmir, since the political reasoning preventing the outbreak of full scale war continued to hold. As recognised at the time, the Indian leadership had strong reasons not to order attacks on Pakistani air bases. Dogfighting therefore would, like land warfare, have most likely been limited.

The RIAF did however inadvertently escalate the conflict through its bombing of supply dumps at Palak in December 1948. By this point Indian moves in Kashmir had sufficiently alarmed the Pakistani government to commit all its forces for a military offensive in Kashmir. The Government of Pakistan now reasoned that given India's proximity to Pakistan's frontiers, the war in Kashmir itself, had ceased to be limited. Though the Palak attack took place after Pakistan had called off its decision to launch a major offensive in Kashmir, it nonetheless significantly escalated the conflict as Pakistan launched the largest artillery attack of the war in retaliation against India's lines of supply at Beri Pattan. Tensions between Pakistan and India rose significantly at what was the most dangerous time of the war. Confronted with British unwillingness to call for a stand down order Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru found himself facing a decision on whether to go to war with Pakistan or conclude a ceasefire. He chose the latter ending the war.

The Kashmir war is illustrative of the political potential of air power. Indian airlifts to Kashmir took place in a decade that had been characterised by politically vital airlift operations. India had been the base for the United States Army Air Force 'Hump' airlift that had been critical to supplying the Nationalist government of China during the Second World War.¹⁵⁸ The Kashmir operations coincided with the 1948 Berlin airlift which saw Anglo-American aircraft circumvent the Soviet Blockade of the city from the air.¹⁵⁹ While not as large as either the 'Hump' or the Berlin airlift, the political consequences of the mobilisation of Indian aviation, both civil and military, in Kashmir have been no less enduring. The Indian

¹⁵⁸ J.D. Plating, *The Hump*, (College Station, 2011), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3037902>, -accessed 18/4/17.

¹⁵⁹ R.A. Slayton, *Master of the Air*, (Tuscaloosa, 2010), <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=547673>, -accessed 18/4/17.

government drew critical lessons on air power, its political importance and its role in escalation from the Kashmir war. It would apply these with some success to the next great confrontation with Pakistan- the Bengal crisis of 1950.

Of Princes and Planes: Aviation in the Indian States

The 'Indian' or 'Native' states covered two-fifths of the British Raj on the subcontinent. Consisting of some 600 odd states of varying sizes, the Indian states were indirectly ruled by the paramount power, the colonial Government of India.¹ Spread over half a million square miles, the Indian states were home to some ninety million subjects of the British Empire.² Also known as the princely states after the collection of monarchs who headed their governments, the Indian states pledged allegiance to the Government of India in return for a measure of autonomy in internal affairs.³ Indirect rule had the benefit of entrenching colonial power with the support of a native elite, securing revenues cheaply, and served in important ways to underpin the ideological justification for colonialism. Moreover, the ambiguous relationship between the Government of India and the princely states meant that the former could freely interfere in the affairs of the princely states even when such intervention was often technically illegal. Despite this the governments of the princely states had greater freedom to frame policy than their counterparts in the provinces of British India. This meant that they were able to make innovative interventions in a number of important fields such as aviation.

The princely states played a critical role in the establishment of the Indian aviation sector. They encouraged aviation both within and outside of their territories, contributing extensively to the setting up of aerodromes, flying clubs and airlines. An Indian prince,

¹ The total number of Indian states remains contested since historians do not agree on the precise definition of what constitutes a princely state. I. Copland, (1997), p 1.

² Idem.,

³ This could refer to a widely different set of political arrangements that usually involved the bearing of financial and military obligations towards the colonial state on the part of the Indian states.

Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, had the distinction of becoming the first Indian, and perhaps the first Asian, to own aircraft when in 1910 he sent Patiala state's chief engineer to Europe to purchase two Farman biplanes and a Bleriot monoplane.⁴ Over the next four decades India's semi-autonomous princely states would play a major role in the establishment of the Indian aviation sector. Hyderabad and Nawanagar would establish their own airline companies.⁵ Bhopal, Jodhpur, Travancore, Patiala and Cochin would come to feature some of India's most sophisticated aerodromes. A 'confederation of Indian chiefs' offered to fund a programme of glider training to make Indians more 'air minded'.⁶ Mysore State would set up India's first aircraft factory, Hindustan Aircraft (Private) Limited, for the manufacture of planes during the Second World War. Some of India's smallest states, with no aircraft of their own, insisted on donating money for the purchase of aeroplanes for the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Sirmur state, for instance paid 50,000 Rupees towards the purchase of a Vickers Valentia while Khairpur paid 1,40,000 Rupees for a Hawker Hurricane. Indeed the princely contribution to aviation is so extensive as to be challenging to summarise. This chapter therefore raises and seeks to answer three questions about the princely engagement with aviation in India. Why did the Indian states pour substantial resources into the development of aviation? What were the political implications of the aeroplane for India's monarchical order? How did aviation inform the broader engagement between princely India and the colonial and post-colonial Indian state?

It will be argued that the princely investment in aviation was part of a broader struggle to maintain and exert sovereignty by the monarchical order in the face of increasing pressure

⁴ *Flight*, 17 December 1910.

⁵ PC (AR), James B. Muff file.

⁶ CS, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, (New Delhi, 1940), p 208.

from the colonial state on the one hand and Indian nationalists on the other. Significantly the challenge to the legitimacy of princely rule was framed by both the Government of India (GoI) and Indian nationalists in terms of a lack of modernity. In the eyes of both the colonial state and nationalists the princely states did not, and indeed could not, possess modernity and therefore had little authority to govern. As Manu Bhagwan has pointed out ‘colonial modernity’ was built, at least partly, in opposition to the idea of an unchanging princely India. In this view the princely states stood for tradition and stagnation whereas British India stood for modernity and progress.⁷ This tendency, which had long been a defining characteristic of the colonial state only, deepened as the GoI increasingly embraced developmentalist ideas of improvement, to counter an increasingly confrontational mass nationalist movement.⁸ Even when Indian states attempted to modernise, this process was seen by the colonial power as being a failed imitation of western methods. Racialised notions that underpinned ideas of the modernity of British India meant that though Indians might adopt Western methods this adoption was doomed to imperfection due to racial difference. Indian states, in other words, were seen as being incapable of modernisation at a time when modernity was held to be the basis of British rule. The tendency to delegitimise strategies of modernisation in the Indian states by the colonial government had serious consequences in the form of constant and often illegal interference in the affairs of the Indian states. As will be seen the GoI, in its role as the ‘paramount power’, would make use of an ambiguously defined paramountcy to intervene in the affairs of the princely states. In these circumstances the need to modernise and to

⁷ M. Bhagwan, (2003), p 4.

⁸ See for instance: D. Bannerjee, *Colonialism in Action*, (Hyderabad, 1999). For contemporary colonial discourses on improvement see: F.L. Brayne, *Village uplift in India*, (New Delhi, 1931), F.L. Brayne, *Socrates in an Indian Village*, (Bombay, 1943).

modernise credibly would push several of the larger princely states to embrace aviation technology.

If the colonial state made claims that princely states lacked legitimacy because they stood outside modernity and were only capable of imperfectly mimicking ‘colonial modernity’, nationalists argued that the princely rule was illegitimate because it was unrepresentative. According to nationalists princely governments were both simultaneously undemocratic and incapable of modernising. Indeed the inability to modernise sprang from the anachronistic form of government that monarchy represented. This is not to argue that nationalists always or even consistently opposed princely rule. Several nationalists looked to the Indian states for inspiration for their dream of an independent India and some monarchs such as the Gaekwad of Baroda maintained close links with the nationalist movement.⁹ Moreover, for a series of complex reasons India’s leading nationalist party, the Indian Nationalist Congress, eschewed active political interventions into the affairs of princely states until 1938.¹⁰ Nevertheless elements of the party could display a marked antipathy towards princely governments. Jawaharlal Nehru famously began his 1929 Congress presidential speech by saying;

I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican and am no believer in the order of kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy.¹¹

⁹ F. Gaekwad, *Sayaji Rao of Baroda*, (Bombay, 1989) p 183; For a survey of the relationship between the princes and Indian nationalists see: B. Ramusack, (2004), p 216.

¹⁰ B. Chandra, *India’s Struggle for Independence*, (New Delhi, 1989), p 359.

¹¹ G.A. Natesan, *Congress Presidential Addresses 1911-1934*, (Madras, 1934), p 894.

The speech is remarkable more for its dismissal of the princely order than for its socialist emphasis. The 'old feudal aristocracy' is contrasted with 'modern kings of industry' as though the monarchical order which existed at the time was an anachronism. Congress pressure on the princes steadily increased in the years following 1938 as links were forged between the party and a number of organisations within the princely states seeking greater representation. The Indian states were therefore faced with the nationalist accusation of lacking modernity because they were undemocratic.

The Indian states confronted two distinct challenges to their sovereignty framed in modernist terms. The colonial state maintained that it was the sole agent of modern developmentalism in the subcontinent since Indian states were incapable of possessing true modernity. Indian nationalists on the other hand took an increasingly strident tone, allying with princely state subjects to claim that the Indian states were not modern because they were unrepresentative. The challenge to modernity thus translated to a challenge to the legitimacy of the princes to rule.

The princely response in several of the larger states was to pursue a sophisticated programme of modernisation. This had two main thrusts aimed at meeting the twin challenges of an exclusive colonial modernity and a nationalist vision of modernity premised on representation. Indian states would not aspire merely to mimic Western modernity but also to craft their own 'native modernity' that could successfully confront 'colonial modernity' despite labouring under colonial constraints.¹² To be sure native modernity was not solely reliant on technology. An Indian state could make claims to modernity by adopting more

¹² M. Bhagwan, (2003), p 8.

‘modern’ social policies such as the Mysore government’s decision to ban the religio-sexual services of the *Devadasi* (servants of god) order.¹³ However technology in general and high technology in particular loomed large in visions of native modernity, as they did in most visions of modernity at the time.

In order to counter nationalist criticism about the unrepresentative nature of their rule the Indian states made use of a variety of strategies. The most common of these was to increase, or provide the perception of increasing, popular representation. Indeed in the years between the end of the Second World War and independence the Indian states made enormous strides in developing representative institutions.¹⁴ Nevertheless other strategies could be adopted instead of or in addition to the provision of representation. Some of India’s larger states sought to offer an alternative vision of modernity where representation would be replaced by governance as the basis of state legitimacy.¹⁵ Once again high technology served as an important means of realising such a modernity.

In these circumstances the aeroplane, arguably the pre-eminent symbol of modernity offered larger Indian states a means to leverage their wealth and autonomy to produce ‘native modernity’. Aviation served to strengthen princely claims of legitimacy on two levels. First the strategic potentialities of the aeroplane could be tapped, as I shall demonstrate, in order to legitimate princely rule. The mobility of the aeroplane and the technical impact it had on princely governments served to undergird princely power in a number of ways. Just as

¹³ J. Nair, (2011), p 218.

¹⁴ I. Copland, (1997), p 212.

¹⁵ J. Nair, (2011), p 16.

importantly, aviation could serve a number of ideological ends by reconstituting the image of the princely state as a site of modernity.

The princely engagement with aviation was broadly characterised by an attempt to utilise technology to constitute a ‘native modernity’ that could then be used to entrench the sovereignty of the Indian states. However the manner in which states operationalised this could vary depending on a number of factors including the size of the state involved, its goals and its location. This chapter will analyse the role of aviation in three princely states; Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore. While all three states share some commonalities such as large size, wealth and an advanced administrative apparatus they are also adequately diverse to represent the very different ways in which aviation was approached by the Indian states. Jodhpur constituted a new paradigm that combined traditional notions of martiality with the modernity of the aeroplane in the person of its Maharaja. Mysore sought to use the aeroplane to begin a broader process of industrialisation during the Second World War that catered to its developmentalist view of modernity. Hyderabad meanwhile sought to entrench its sovereign status through the establishment of an airline. When this failed it resorted to utilising aeroplanes to circumvent a blockade of the state by independent India.

The princely engagement with aviation would have important consequences for the process of state formation in twentieth century South Asia. It would affect not only the legitimating ideologies of the Indian states but also their self-image. Moreover, aviation played an important role in the events surrounding the dismantling of the princely order or as it was euphemistically termed, the ‘integration of the princely states’.¹⁶ The long term consequences

¹⁶ V.P. Menon, (1985), p. 483.

of the princely engagement with aviation would continue to be felt long after the demise of the monarchical order in 1949 as the new post-colonial state came into possession of, among other things, the aircraft, aerodromes and institutions previously patronised by the princes. Before undertaking an analysis of aviation in the princely states under discussion however it is important to ground the study in its wider political context.

I. The Indian States: A background

The British East India Company (EIC) established the system of indirect rule over large swathes of India from 1759 to 1856. The process of transforming Indian kingdoms into subordinates of the EIC was long and complex, relying as often on constant renegotiation between the EIC and the kings as it did on treaties and other agreements.¹⁷ As a reward for their loyalty during the 1857 rebellion the princes were assured by Queen Victoria that ‘all Treaties and engagements made with them by or under the Authority of the Honourable East India Company are by Us accepted and will be scrupulously maintained.’¹⁸ The proclamation had the effect of stabilising indirect rule. The political map of India from 1858 would remain largely unchanged for the duration of colonial rule.¹⁹ Despite the Queen’s proclamation however, Government of India interference in princely affairs continued.²⁰

With the outbreak of the First World War the stance of the GoI regarding the princes softened. The Indian states contributed large amounts of personnel, funds and materiel to the war effort.

¹⁷ B. Ramusack (2004), p 59.

¹⁸ *Proclamation of the Queen in Council to the Princes, Chiefs and People of India*, (Published by the Governor-General at Allahabad, November 1st 1858).

<http://www.csas.ed.ac.uk/mutiny/confpapers/Queen'sProclamation.pdf>.-accessed 29/6/16

¹⁹ Barbara Ramusack has shown how in practice territorial transfers continued to occur. B. Ramusack, (2004), p 106.

²⁰ For a discussion of British interference in Indian states see: J. McLeod, *Sovereignty, Power, Control*, (Brill, 1999), p 183.

The rulers of Bikaner, Patiala, Cooch Behar, Rutlam and Jodhpur even served directly in the war.²¹ Consequently, the GoI looked upon princely demands with favour and permitted the setting up of a representative institution for the princes of India in the war's aftermath; the Chamber of Princes (CoP). The CoP was aimed at representing princely interests to the GoI and was focused around two key objectives. It sought to develop a united and coherent princely front to pressure the GoI to redress grievances, especially surrounding the lack of definition of 'paramountcy', which enabled GoI interference into the Indian states.²²

At the Round Table Conference on 12th November 1930 held in London to discuss India's political future, the representative of the princes Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru proposed an All-India Federation. According to the proposal British India and the princely states would join a federation which would be legislated for by a bicameral house. This legislature would feature elected Indian representatives as well as the representatives chosen by the governments of the princely states. The idea of federation was appealing to the princes since it would lead to a formal recognition of their powers by the British and in the long term bring about an end of the dreaded paramountcy as Indian states affairs would be handled by a central government.²³

In the long term however federation would turn out to be a failure as a number of factors would militate against its implementation. These included the disunity of the CoP, the decision by larger states such as Hyderabad and Mysore to stay away from the scheme, and

²¹ S. Das, "Responses to the War (India)", [http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/pdf/1914-1918-Online-responses to the war india-2014-10-08.pdf](http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/pdf/1914-1918-Online-responses%20to%20the%20war%20india-2014-10-08.pdf), accessed 28 June 2016.

²² B. Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire*, (Columbus, 1978), p 23.

²³ I. Copland, (1997), p 80.

the fear of smaller states that they would not be represented in a federal legislature.²⁴ Ultimately too few Indian states would join the federation ensuring that the scheme was a failure. When the GoI finally dropped plans for federation in 1939, due to the outbreak of the Second World War, opinion in government circles held that the princes had failed to implement a plan that they had been at the forefront of proposing.²⁵

The princes came to the aid of the British Empire in the Second World War in much the same way as they had during the Great War. Their contributions to the war, at a time when the Indian National Congress rebelled against the GoI, did much to regain the princes some of the favour they had lost due to the failure of federation. The wartime chancellors of the CoP from 1938, Digvijaysinhji of Nawanagar and Nawab Hamidullah, of Bhopal worked hard to reinvigorate the organisation and to press the princely cause in Britain and India. A sophisticated strategy involving political agreements with India's leading parties and an attempt to push states to provide greater representation to their subjects in decision making and the amalgamation of several of the smaller states into rationalised administrative units was evolved.²⁶ By 1946 the princely order appeared to be prepared for constitutional negotiations that would follow the war. Despite this however the CoP continued to suffer from a number of weaknesses. The speed of reform while unprecedented was still very slow in many of the Indian states and it was also severely weakened by the failure to strike an alliance with the Muslim League. Though Hamidullah hoped to strike a collective bargain that would maintain at least some of the autonomy of the princely states in an independent

²⁴ J. McLeod, (1999), p 124.

²⁵ I. Copland, (1997), p 191.

²⁶ Ibid., p 210.

India he was to ultimately fail.²⁷ The vast majority of princes therefore acceded to India in 1947, only to be pensioned off in 1949.

The princely order that had been constituted, if not created, by the British from 1759 onwards came to an end two hundred years later in 1949. The princes collapsed in part because they had failed previously to gain a secure position in the constitutional apparatus emerging in twentieth century India. They were also in great measure thwarted from defending their interests by a failure to act, outside of the first Round Table Conference, with unity. The speed of decolonisation also clearly caught them off guard ensuring the end of their order. Further, as I will argue Cold War calculations meant that British planners wanted strong centralised states in South Asia.

The overwhelming academic consensus is that the princes were able to exercise an avowedly precarious and restricted sovereignty.²⁸ It is largely in the details of the circumstances of individual states then that there is variance in academic analyses. Specificity mattered in the ways in which states exercised their sovereignty. It is these specificities, this chapter will argue, that shaped the princely encounter with aviation in Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad.

II. Jodhpur: Aviation as modern martial tradition

Jodhpur State was located in India's north-western region of Rajputana. The Rathore dynasty that ruled over the state traced its lineage back to the eighth century A.D., though the kingdom of Marwar or Jodhpur came into its own in the fifteenth century.²⁹ Pressed by the Marathas and the Pindaris and riven by a series of violent dynastic conflicts, Jodhpur concluded a treaty

²⁷ Ibid., p 233.

²⁸ See: R. Jeffrey (ed), (1978); I. Copland, (1982); B. Ramusack, (1978); B. Ramusack, (2004).

²⁹ R. Hooja, *A History of Rajasthan*, (New Delhi, 2006), p 373.

with the East India Company in 1818 that inaugurated British indirect rule over the state. British rule had a stabilising effect on what had been a highly conflicted region despite the EIC's tendency to intervene in state affairs. Consequently, Jodhpur's rulers were swift to come to the aid of the British during the 1857 rebellion and were rewarded for their services with the grant of a *sanad* (deed) recognising their right to rule by the Viceroy Lord Canning in 1861.³⁰ Government of India interventions however continued unabated in Jodhpur state internal affairs. The GoI appointed the state's Prime Minister or *Dewan*, restricted the ruler's powers and imposed a minority administration on the state from 1895 to 1898.³¹ Despite or perhaps because of this, the period of indirect rule led to significant legal, social and economic reforms. Land, excise and customs were reformed, slavery and *Sati* (widow immolation) were outlawed, new systems of famine relief were introduced and railways were constructed extensively.³² Jodhpur also played its part in the suppression of anti-British dissent in the state and contributed military forces for the British Empire's global needs. Jodhpur state forces served on India's Northwest Frontier province, in China during the Boxer rebellion of 1900, and in the Great War.³³

Maharaja Umaid Singh ascended to the throne of Jodhpur state in 1919, a century after indirect rule had been established. The state that the fifteen year old king would have to eventually administer encompassed an area the size of modern day Hungary and a population

³⁰ This recognised the right of the Rathore dynasty to adopt children in order to continue the dynastic line. N.M. Upadhyay, *The Administration of Jodhpur State*, (Jodhpur, 1973), p 57.

³¹ Maharaja Takht Singh for instance was punished for leaving the Ajmer Durbar of 1870 in anger for having been seated below the kings of Udaipur and Jaipur which he considered to be inferior. The act incensed the Viceroy Lord Mayo and led to his eventual abdication. Ibid., p 63

³² S. S. Kheechee, *Economic Reforms of Maharaja Umaid Singh's Reign*, (Jodhpur, 2004), p 29.

³³ N.M. Upadhyay, (1973), p 64.

of some 212,000 people in 1921.³⁴ It was also passing through a period of great turbulence.³⁵ As a consequence of the reforms passed by his predecessors under British guidance, and the more recent shocks of the Great War, the boundaries separating Jodhpur from British India had turned increasingly porous. This led increasingly to the entry into the state of political ideas from British India. As early as 1921, a no-rent agitation, launched in co-ordination with the nationalist Non-Cooperation movement, had to be put down by Jodhpur state forces. A series of organisations such as the *Marwar Seva Sangha* (Marwar Service Union) and the *Marwar Hitakarani Sabha* (Marwar Welfare Gathering) sprang up through the decade demanding greater civil rights for the people of Jodhpur. Interestingly these organisations did not directly attack the Maharaja but claimed to be protesting misgovernment by subordinate officials. They nevertheless alarmed the state administration, which understood that the movements were ultimately subversive of both colonial and monarchical authority. Repressive legislation was introduced and political leaders such as Jai Narain Vyas, Banwar Lal Shraff and Madan Mohan Sarda were jailed.³⁶ The 1930s were even more disturbed and several new organisations demanding civil rights and the extension of representative government emerged in the state including the Marwar State People's Conference, the *Praja Mandal* (Subjects Board) and the *Marwar Lok Parishad* (Marwar People's Council).³⁷ These organisations were often repressed by the government but it was increasingly clear that the state would have to continue to contend with movements that at the very least subverted the Maharaja's sovereignty.

³⁴ S. S. Kheeche, (2004) pp 25-26.

³⁵ Umaid Singh took on formal powers in 1923 as he was deemed too young to rule. His uncle Sir Pratap Singh was appointed to rule in his stead as regent. D.Singh, *The House of Marwar*, (New Delhi, 1994), p 151.

³⁶ N.M. Upadhyay, (1973), p 204.

³⁷ D.Singh, (1994), p 173.

In these taxing circumstances Umaid Singh adopted a complex strategy to bolster his regime's legitimacy. A vast programme of administrative reforms was inaugurated and the land revenue, excise, customs, agriculture and legal departments were rationalised in order to increase their efficiency.³⁸ The value of architecture as a means of representing power and promoting welfare was not lost on the Maharaja who constructed such iconic buildings as the Jubilee Court, Ajeet Bhawan and Umaid Bhawan palace. He also constructed a number of 'modern' facilities in Jodhpur city itself such as the Windham hospital, Umaid Female hospital, Sardar Museum, Sumair Public Library, Willingdon stadium, Willingdon Garden and a mental hospital. Perhaps more significantly, for a land that routinely suffered droughts and famines, the Maharaja oversaw the construction of several waterworks including the Umaid Sagar dam, Jawai Bandh, Sumer Samandh Jodhpur water supply dam and Takhat Sagar Dam.³⁹ This replicated and in certain ways exceeded the GoI's claims to 'colonial modernity' through programs of 'improvement' and 'development'.

The Maharaja of Jodhpur was perhaps the first Indian monarch to grasp the idea that the aura of modernity surrounding aircraft could be used to legitimise his rule. During the first decade of his reign he oversaw the transformation of the aeroplane from a luxury object to an instrument of state policy. This is not to argue that the modern appeal of aircraft had escaped other rulers such as the Maharaja of Patiala, who as seen previously, was the first Indian to purchase aeroplanes in 1910. Nevertheless the advances in aviation technology between 1910 and 1931, the year Jodhpur aerodrome was built were extensive making it possible for aviation to become a matter of state policy. Umaid Singh arguably poured more resources

³⁸ S. S. Kheche, (2004), p 29.

³⁹ Ibid., p x.

into aviation, during the 1920s than any of his counterparts in the princely order. The Maharaja established a Flying Department in his state, the first of its kind, to oversee the construction of aerodromes in 1924. One of India's most sophisticated aerodromes was constructed at Jodhpur, between 1924 and 1931, at a cost of Rupees 1, 36,830 while a satellite aerodrome was constructed at Utterlai for Rupees 9,610. By 1938 the Department had completed the construction of twenty three aerodromes throughout the state.⁴⁰

Jodhpur state's heavy investment in aviation is possibly explained by the nature of the state's revenues. Railways generated between twenty and thirty percent of the state's revenues in the years of Umaid Singh's rule.⁴¹ Jodhpur State Railway served to traverse hostile terrain in a state bordering the Thar Desert and leveraged the states then central location in British India for the generation of customs and excise taxes. Like aviation it was recognised as a major state interest and expanded by the Maharaja's government. To be sure there is little doubt that the Maharaja's enthusiasm for aviation was genuine. Maharaja Umaid Singh was himself a graduate of the Royal Air Force academy at Cranwell and one of the first Indians to qualify for a flying license. As 'Flight Magazine' claimed, he was 'intensely keen on aviation'.⁴² Nevertheless the decision to invest heavily in aviation was explained by a number of other motivations. Jodhpur state's terrain and administrative structure made investments in transportation attractive. It could draw on a sophisticated railway system for the necessary skilled personnel required to service aircraft and aerodromes. Besides serving to buttress the state's claims to modernity, earning it revenues and, as we shall see, granting the state a degree of prominence, aviation also allowed the Maharaja to pay quick visits to those parts

⁴⁰ Ibid., p 128.

⁴¹ Ibid., p 93.

⁴² *Flight*, 16 November 1933.

of his state that required attention. Thus for instance the Maharaja flew to the city of Ladnu to open a hospital on 4 March 1938 and revisited it by air later in the year on 14 November 1938 in order to inspect famine relief work.⁴³

Jodhpur state further moved to promote flight as a state prerogative with the establishment of princely India's first flying club in 1931. The club made use of the aerodrome established near the Maharaja's Chittar palace in Jodhpur city. Umaid Singh had been closely associated with the New Delhi Flying club, from where he had earned his license and hoped to encourage flying in his own state. For this he hired Geoffrey Godwin, a South African aviator who had served in the RAF and expanded Jodhpur aerodrome to include a longer runway for larger planes, night landing gear and a control tower costing around Rupees 1, 28,000 combined.⁴⁴ A moat and a barbed wire fence surrounded the aerodrome to keep wild boars away and a roof viewing area surrounded by canvas was set up so that royal ladies in *purdah* (seclusion) could view the planes without being seen.⁴⁵

Jodhpur aerodrome benefitted from the critical location that Jodhpur city occupied on the trans-India imperial air route. What this meant was that planes flying on the Trans-India route from Karachi to Calcutta would have to fly via Jodhpur. The state thus became an important transit point for planes from a number of international airlines such as KLM, Imperial Airways and Air France flying the 'Imperial air route' from London to Sydney, a journey at the time of several weeks.⁴⁶ Given the fact that planes at the time needed to stop over during nights for maintenance, a red stone hotel 'with appropriate carving winged

⁴³ S. S. Kheeché, (2004), p 19.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p 128.

⁴⁵ P. Vacher, (2008), p 15.

⁴⁶ AEW Salt *Imperial Air Routes*, (London, 1930), p 32.

horses' was constructed close to the airfield for passengers to rest in.⁴⁷ This had the effect not only of earning Jodhpur aerodrome a transit fee but also of placing Jodhpur city in the constellation of critical cities in India and the world. Thus Jodhpur a medium sized state capital was able to place itself on an international map that included not only prominent Indian cities such as Karachi and Calcutta but also Sydney, Cairo and London. Due to its advanced facilities and critical location Jodhpur emerged not only as a critical stop for international airlines but also one for what was arguably the first Indian operated air route; the Delhi Flying club's mail delivery route from Karachi to Jodhpur to Delhi.⁴⁸

As Jodhpur emerged as the leader in aviation among the Indian states it became involved in the question of formulating aviation laws for princely India. This was a complicated matter as aviation law in India had to operate on three different levels. Firstly, the British Empire and His Majesty's Government were signatories of the 1919 Paris convention relating to the regulation of air navigation and the 1929 Warsaw convention for international carriage by air respectively. This meant that India would be required to accept certain international aviation laws regarding aircraft safety and air sovereignty in order to bring them in line with international norms.⁴⁹ Secondly, British India had a number of aviation laws including the 1911 Indian Aircraft Act and the Carriage by Air Act of 1934 which had no binding power over the Indian states.⁵⁰ Thirdly, South Asia had hundreds of semi-autonomous princely states which could pass whatever laws on aviation they wished.

⁴⁷ *Flight*, 16 November 1933.

⁴⁸ *Flight*, 8 December 1932.

⁴⁹ E. Sochor. *The Politics of International Aviation*, (Basingstoke, 1991), p 2.

⁵⁰ NMML, *Indian Aircraft Manual*, (New Delhi, 1934).

The GoI could pass laws to bring aviation regulations in British India in line with international standards but lacked the power to pass said laws in the princely states. As the Indian states began to become increasingly involved in aviation from the late 1920s, the responsibility for bringing their aviation laws fell on the GoI which faced legal hurdles in legislating aviation laws for the princes. This in certain ways reflects the anomalous nature of the relations between British India and the princely states which had no parallels in international law. Matters were further complicated by impending federation. As noted above, from 1930 onwards the princes and the GoI hoped to form an All-India Federation. The prospect of federation however meant that laws passed by the princely states might well have to be rescinded or rewritten once it was achieved necessitating extended negotiation. The GoI consequently felt that it would be best for the princes not to pass additional laws, including those pertaining to aviation, until a federation was established.

The Jodhpur government, represented among others by Geoffrey Godwin, was consulted by the Director of Civil Aviation and the Secretary for the Department of Industries and Labour, to evolve certain general principles regarding aviation in 1931.⁵¹ In doing so the government effectively recognised Jodhpur as the leader in aviation among the Indian states at the time. The regulations discussed included the decision to register aircraft and provide them with certificates of airworthiness, to require pilots to have flying licenses, to use common sign language for aircraft and to jointly investigate air accidents on Jodhpur territory. Significantly the state was permitted to declare certain areas as prohibited zones for flying though it was urged not to use this power excessively.⁵² With the sole exception of the Jodhpur Carriage

⁵¹ NAI, F&P-Reforms Branch-72 (21)-R/1931, General Principles for Flying in Jodhpur.

⁵² *Idem.*,

by Air Act of 1935, the state would not pass any aviation related legislation. The act sought to bring Jodhpur's laws into line with the Warsaw Convention of 1929 since Jodhpur was a major international hub and as such had to conform to international standards.⁵³ Jodhpur played a central role in evolving aviation regulations for the princely states, a role that becomes even more critical when it is understood that federation never occurred and as such the rules relating to aviation that were crafted in consultation with Jodhpur effectively remained the rules of all of the Indian states with major investments in aviation until the outbreak of the Second World War.⁵⁴ It was only in 1939, after war had broken out and federation was effectively shelved, that the GoI made some moves towards encouraging the states to legislate on aviation matters under the Defence of India Act.⁵⁵

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Jodhpur's aerodrome became critical for the transfer of air supplies and reinforcements from the West to the Burma front. The Royal Air Force (RAF) took over Jodhpur aerodrome in 1942 and designated it as an RAF station. The United States Army Air Corps also set up base at Jodhpur for flights to pass to pass on to the 'Hump' operations aimed at supplying Nationalist China. This in turn meant that Jodhpur would also host the crews and planes of the Chinese Air Force.⁵⁶ Jodhpur state forces were deployed to protect the station and these were rapidly increased with the outbreak of the Quit India movement later that year. Rooms in the state hotel next to the aerodrome were reserved for air crews ferrying aeroplanes to the Burma front.⁵⁷ This involved among other things the

⁵³ KSA, Industries and Commerce file 20, Legislation of Aircraft rules in Jodhpur.

⁵⁴ Jodhpur itself reversed its early pro-Federation position when it became clear that the state would suffer significant financial losses as a result of Federation. I. Copland, (1997), p 103.

⁵⁵ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 26, Secretary to the resident to Chief Secretary of Mysore state, 22 June 1940.

⁵⁶ TNA, AIR 28/406, Operations Record Book (ORB) Royal Air Force Station Jodhpur, 28 August 1942.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 11 August 1942.

flying in of planes from Europe and the United States which were then fitted at 317 Maintenance Unit based out of RAF station before being dispatched to Burma. This could involve the fitting of up to 50 planes at a time at the station.⁵⁸

Even as Jodhpur aerodrome was pressed into service with the RAF, Jodhpur flying club was given over to the training of Indian pilots. Jodhpur flying club was initially designated as Jodhpur Air Training Centre and later as No. 2 Elementary Flying School (EFTS), Indian Air Force (IAF) for the training of cadets recruited from India.⁵⁹ Several IAF pilots who would serve in Burma in the following years received their training at Jodhpur's Flying training school, which was second in size only to the one at Hyderabad.⁶⁰ Like several others, the Elementary Flying Training School would be affected by high rates of trainee wastage as rapid wartime expansion of the IAF had an adverse impact on the quality of recruits. By 1943 the school was suspending the training of those cadets considered to be unfit for flying early in order to concentrate on those who displayed an aptitude for the task.⁶¹

Jodhpur state also made a number of other contributions to the war in the air. The Maharaja's personal plane, a Lockheed Electra, was donated to the GoI for the use of Lord Wavell, then commander of the Allied or ABDA (American-British-Dutch-Australian) forces.⁶² It also donated funds towards the purchase of a Halifax bomber for the Royal Air Force and 400,000 Rupees towards the Viceroy's War Purposes fund for the purchase of four fighter planes for the Indian Air Force.⁶³

⁵⁸ Ibid, Establishment of RAF personnel.

⁵⁹ P. Vacher, (2008), p 100.

⁶⁰ TNA, AIR 29/616, ORB No 2 EFTS, April 1943.

⁶¹ Ibid, November 1943.

⁶² P. Vacher, (2008), p 107.

⁶³ I. Copland, (1997), p 185; N. Upadhyay, (1973), p 197

Maharaja Umaid Singh himself volunteered for active service at the front in the Royal Air Force, in which he had had been granted the honorary rank of Air Commodore since 1939.⁶⁴ He was bitterly disappointed when the GoI refused to permit this for political reasons especially since his elder brother and royal predecessor, Sumer Singh had served in combat during the Great War.⁶⁵ Though the Maharaja was prevented from serving on the front he was appointed to serve on the staff of Air Marshal Sir Richard Peirse along with Nawab Hamidullah Khan of Bhopal.⁶⁶ The two Air Commodores were expected to serve as liaisons between the Indian personnel of the Air Forces in India and Air Headquarters (India). Both Umaid Singh and Hamidullah Khan toured the country extensively to check on the welfare of Indian airmen and communicated their grievances to the government.⁶⁷ Indeed Umaid Singh's commitment to the welfare of the men of the IAF and RAF was such that he went on to donate 100,000 Rupees, a quarter of which was drawn from his own privy purse, for the welfare of the IAF men.⁶⁸ Umaid Singh also played an important role in publicising the IAF in India by addressing audiences at War Services exhibitions.⁶⁹ He also regularly inspected the passing out parades of the Indian Air Force cadets at the Jodhpur EFTS.⁷⁰ The Maharaja's lavish parties and entertainments for RAF and IAF men stationed at Jodhpur with such prominent guests as the Duke of Gloucester served to raise the morale of men battling the heat, overcrowding, and malaria to keep the war effort going.⁷¹ As a reward for his services

⁶⁴ TNA AIR 2/4912, India: Regulations regarding the grant of honorary commissions in the RAF.

⁶⁵ Sumer Singh was 17 when he led the Jodhpur Lancers into battle in Flanders. D.Singh, (1994), p 148.

⁶⁶ R. Chhina, (2006), p 77.

⁶⁷ MoD (I), ORB No 1, 10 November 1944.

⁶⁸ P. Vacher, (2008), p 118; N. Upadhyay, (1973), p 197.

⁶⁹ TNA AIR 29/481, 1 IAF exhibition unit formed at New Delhi (India) in March 1942, 1 March 1942.

⁷⁰ See for instance; TNA, AIR 29/616, ORB No 2 Elementary Flying Training School, April 1943, December 1942.

⁷¹ TNA, AIR 28/406, ORB Royal Air Force Station Jodhpur.

during the war, Umaid Singh was granted the honorary rank of Air Vice Marshall of the Royal Air Force, the first Indian to receive that rank.⁷²

After the war Umaid Singh backed the Cabinet mission plan, which would have granted his state a degree of autonomy in an independent India.⁷³ However the negotiations were to prove to be futile with the announcement of the Mountbatten plan on 3 June 1947 according to which British India was to be divided between India and Pakistan. The Maharaja died six days later of a ruptured appendix and was succeeded by his son Hanwant Singh.⁷⁴ Maharaja Hanwant Singh would eventually accede to the Indian Union. However before he did so he famously discussed the possibility of joining Pakistan with Mohammed Ali Jinnah.⁷⁵ Though the negotiations have since been considered either as the naïve acts of an inexperienced prince or explained away as a wily negotiation tactic that strengthened the hands of Jodhpur in its negotiations with India, there might well have been sound reasons for them.⁷⁶ Jodhpur's demands for access to the port of Karachi, control of the Jodhpur-Hyderabad (Sindh) railway line, grain for famine relief and freedom to import arms reflect the historical concerns of the state. The demand for access to control over the Jodhpur-Sindh railway line is especially relevant in the context of a state revenue structure that depended on excise revenues. It shows a clear preoccupation, and one not exclusive to Jodhpur, with the possibility of the state being encircled by an independent and possibly hostile India. Significantly demands for over flight did not feature among Jodhpur state's priorities though this may have stemmed from the

⁷² TNA AIR 2/4912, India: Regulations regarding the grant of honorary commissions in the RAF.

⁷³ D.Singh, (1994), p 177.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p 179.

⁷⁵ The meeting was to have far reaching consequences because of its implications for the Kashmir dispute. If Jinnah could court Jodhpur despite its Hindu majority then the Indian government could claim the right to interfere in Kashmir, a state with a large Muslim population. A.G. Noorani, (2014), p 7.

⁷⁶ For a view of the former see: V.P. Menon, *Integration of the Indian States*, (Hyderabad, 1985)p 117. For the latter view see: D.Singh, (1994), p 182.

states indisputable position as a hub of international air traffic. Indeed the state's strong aviation position might very well have been one of the factors that convinced the Maharaja that it could come to an agreement with Pakistan, ensuring a degree of internal autonomy. Whatever the case, Hanwant Singh was eventually persuaded by Viceroy Lord Mountbatten and Secretary the Indian states ministry V.P. Menon to accede to India.⁷⁷ Hanwant Singh would go on to become the first of India's successful democratic princes, trouncing the Congress Party in elections held in 1952. He would however not live to see the victory as his Beechcraft Bonanza aeroplane crashed while he was travelling through his state to check election results, killing him and his wife, the film actress Zubeida Begum.⁷⁸ Though Jodhpur state was merged with the Indian Union in May 1949, several of its legacies in the field of aviation remain. Jodhpur aerodrome remains an international civil airport and Jodhpur air force station is an important air base.

Maharaja Umaid Singh of Jodhpur represents a new model of 'martial valour' that was taking root in parts of princely India. In common with other Indian princes he sought to garner legitimacy as an enlightened monarch intent on bringing his state into the twentieth century. Like other Indian states Jodhpur, sought to deploy aviation technology to make claims to a 'native modernity' that would buttress its sovereignty against the criticism from the GoI and Indian nationalists. Jodhpur offers a distinct model, however in its particular approach to aviation. The state combined its historical Rajput military tradition with the modernist appeal of aircraft to be embodied in the person of the Maharaja as military pilot. This approach to

⁷⁷ Maharaja Hanwant Singh, an amateur inventor and magician, had built a gun that could be disguised as a pen. When he finally agreed to accede he is famously alleged to have threatened V.P. Menon with death in case his subjects were betrayed. For a sensationalist account of the event see: L. Collins and D. Lapierre, (1975), p 242.

⁷⁸ R. Hooja, (2006), p 1143.

aviation was a consequence of the distinct conditions prevailing in the state. Jodhpur was a desert state that drew much of its revenue from the railways and whose rulers had traditionally legitimated themselves through martial prowess. Closely associating aviation with the person of the Maharaja therefore served to paint him as a valorous leader who was keen to modernise his state. Aviation also served to leverage the central location of the state not only in India but also on the globe at a time when the technology's range was limited. Umaid Singh's early investment in aviation it would appear was a success. The critical importance of Jodhpur aerodrome and the Maharaja's exceptional wartime record served, at least partially, to legitimate the monarchy in the eyes of the GoI, if the grant of the exceptional rank of Air Vice Marshall to Umaid Singh is taken as an indicator.⁷⁹ That the Rathore dynasty's legitimacy was intact with its subjects is indicated by Hanwant Singh's electoral success years after the Jodhpur state merged with India. It is important here not to overstate the importance of aviation. Several other actions such as the provision of irrigation facilities and famine relief probably helped entrench dynastic legitimacy, yet there is no doubt that the aeroplane lent a degree of prominence to the Rathores of Jodhpur that they would likely not otherwise have enjoyed. Other states would choose different strategies to utilise aviation to uphold their sovereignty with very different results.

⁷⁹ This did not however ensure British support for an independent Jodhpur though, as I will argue, that was a consequence of Cold War pressures and a larger policy of not supporting princely independence. Maharaja Hanwant Singh both before and after accession actively considered fighting the Indian Union for independence.

D.Singh, (1994), p 181.

III. Mysore: Aviation as Development

Though the Wodeyar Dynasty that came to rule Mysore could trace its genesis to the fourteenth century, modern Mysore state was very much a British creation.⁸⁰ Following the defeat of its great enemy Tipu Sultan, the East India Company annexed Mysore. In order to deny the territorial claims of their former allies Hyderabad and the Marathas, the British decided to hand over a portion of the conquered territory to the Wodeyars. The Wodeyars would then act as their surrogates, enabling the EIC to rule Mysore indirectly. This led to the formation of Mysore state, India's second largest princely state in terms of population and third largest in terms of territory.⁸¹ Wodeyar Mysore signed a subsidiary treaty with the EIC in 1799. In 1831, the EIC took over the state on claims of misgovernment.⁸² Mysore remained under direct colonial rule for fifty years until 1881 when it was returned to Maharaja Chamarajendra Wodeyar. As a consequence of its origins as a British client state and the long period of direct colonial rule Mysore state developed an exceptionally powerful bureaucracy. Though Wodeyar rulers were hardly powerless, much of the responsibility for running the state fell on the state's Prime Minister or Dewan.⁸³ This affected what may broadly be termed as the state's ideological underpinnings and would have significant consequences for the manner in which aviation was engaged with.

A powerful strain of indigenous developmentalism was the dominant agenda for a line of Mysore dewans stretching back into the late 19th century. Mysore's bureaucracy thus

⁸⁰ For a complete history of the Wodeyar Dynasty that stresses the continuities of Mysore kingdom and Mysore state see: V. Sampath, (2008).

⁸¹ M. Gowda, (1997), p 2.

⁸² M. Bhagwan, (2003), p 38.

⁸³ J. Nair, (2011), p 13.

espoused an ideology of development that identified the economy as the primary site for state intervention. This drew both from the prevailing colonialist economic discourse, as well as the nationalist critique of this emphasising India's inability to progress economically under colonial rule. As Chandan Gowda has shown Mysorean developmentalism drew on a number of often contradictory economic ideas drawn from social evolutionism, neomercantilism, utilitarianism and even orientalism.⁸⁴ The state also drew on non-western ideas to legitimate itself. Indian ideas about the nature of kingship revolving around *Dharma* (right behavior) were often fused with developmentalist ideology.⁸⁵ Indeed the relative lack of ritual legitimacy of the Mysore Maharaja in comparison to smaller northern Rajput states was keenly felt by the Wodeyars leading to the adoption of certain Rajput customs such as resort to a mythological lineage.⁸⁶ These ideas however were subordinated to developmentalist policy, reflecting in certain ways the subordination of a ritualised monarchy to the state's bureaucratic machinery. This had the effect of ensuring that modernity in Mysore was heavily, though not exclusively, conflated with industrial development.

If a developmentalist ideology informed the agenda of the Mysore bureaucracy this was not solely a response to an overweening colonial power. Mysore, along with Baroda, was considered to be a 'model' Indian state, partly due to the fact that it had granted a degree of popular representation not seen elsewhere among the princely states. The state convened the first representative institution in princely India, the Mysore Representative Assembly in 1881 and the first legislature, the Mysore Legislative Council in 1907.⁸⁷ As the twentieth century

⁸⁴ C. Gowda, "Empire and Developmentalism in Colonial India", George Steinmetz (ed), *Sociology and Empire*, (London, 2013).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p 355.

⁸⁶ J. Nair, (2011), p 12.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p 17.

progressed however powerful forces emerged to challenge the legitimacy of the princely government to rule. A non-Brahmin movement challenging the dominance of the Brahmins in the state bureaucracy began in 1917. This was followed by the establishment of the Mysore Congress in 1920. By 1937 the two movements had united to demand greater representation from the government. Ironically the states 'modern' focus on education enabled the Congress to recruit volunteers from the students of the state's schools and colleges for their agitations. Unlike in Jodhpur however the Mysore government was broadly supportive of the Congress and the dewan of Mysore Mirza Ismail was highly successful in defusing the crisis by claiming that the Mysore government could not grant greater representation while the state was under indirect colonial rule.⁸⁸ Nonetheless political tensions with nationalists persisted. Confronted with a popular political movement, the Mysore administration, as Janaki Nair has argued, sought to legitimate the state through governance rather than representation.⁸⁹ Mysore state officials would explicitly assert that development was the sole font of legitimacy for the state and that they rather than elected representatives were best placed to deliver it.

Since development and modernity were synonymous to a large extent with industrialisation the Mysore government would exert great efforts to industrialise. The state thus became the site of several of India's leading industries including steel, cement, fertilizers, coffee curing and paper.⁹⁰ Opportunities for expanding the states industrialisation plans were however ultimately limited by the conditions of colonialism. This was to change with the outbreak of the Second World War and the entry into Mysore of Walchand Hirachand.

⁸⁸ J. Manor, (1977), p 110.

⁸⁹ J. Nair, (2011), p 16.

⁹⁰ G. Piramal, *Business Legends*, (New Delhi, 1998), p 254.

Walchand Hirachand was an Indian industrialist and the founder of the Walchand group which had interests in construction, engineering and sugar. Walchand had nationalist leanings and wished to be the first Indian to manufacture aircraft, ships and automobiles. This had led him to establish the famous Scindia Steam Navigation Company, the first Indian ship building firm, in 1919.⁹¹ Walchand had discussed the setting up of an automobile factory with Mirza Ismail's predecessor as Dewan of Mysore, Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, as early as 1934. The plan to set up an automobile factory with the aid of the Congress government of Bombay, in partnership with an American automobile firm, had however failed due to a lack of support from the colonial government following the resignation of the Congress ministry in Bombay in 1939.⁹²

In October 1939 Walchand Hirachand met American businessman William Pawley on an aeroplane from San Francisco to Bombay, an event that would lead directly to the establishment of India's first aircraft company.⁹³ Pawley represented the Intercontinental Aircraft Corporation, an American firm that had been involved in the assembly of aircraft for Nationalist China. He would play a critical role in the founding of the famed American Volunteer group, more popularly known as the flying tigers, which fought for Nationalist China against the Japanese. Pawley headed the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO) based out of Hankow in China. When Hankow was overrun by Japanese forces, with whom China had been at war since 1937, he moved the factory to Loiwing on the Sino-Burmese border.⁹⁴ This arrangement too would be short lived and Japanese advances forced Pawley to consider moving his factory out of China in 1940 on the eve of his meeting with

⁹¹ For an overview of Walchand Hirachand see: M. Hardeck, *India's Industrialists*, (Washington, 1985).

⁹² S. Raghavan, (2016), p 93.

⁹³ G. Piramal, (1998), p 242.

⁹⁴ A. Carozza, *William Pawley*, (Washington, 2012), p 29.

Walchand. On hearing of Pawley's predicament Walchand offered to help Pawley set up an aircraft factory in India.⁹⁵ Walchand quickly approached the GoI with plans to set up an aircraft factory, offering to provide military aircraft made at the factory for the war effort.

The GoI response to Walchand's proposal however was unpromising. As seen in a previous chapter the GoI had no inclination to make even modest increases in the size of the Indian Air Force in 1939. It was thus unresponsive to Indian entreaties to provide for an air defence and as such did not answer Walchand's proposal.⁹⁶ However the GoI quickly reversed its stance in 1940 in the face of what it considered to be the distinct possibility of a Soviet attack on India while the RAF was engaged in Europe. Walchand was summoned to Simla and given a 10 million dollar contract and permission by the GoI to set up an aircraft factory.⁹⁷ Even after this several hurdles remained. Lord Beaverbrook the Minister for Aircraft production in Britain insisted that Britain had greater need of machinery and parts required for the factory, meaning that Walchand could not import necessary parts. Further, it was difficult to raise capital for the venture at short notice. Walchand wrote to the governments of Baroda, Gwalior, Mysore and Bhavnagar for help.⁹⁸

While the others rejected Walchand's approach, Mysore responded enthusiastically in the affirmative. Dewan Mirza Ismail offered Walchand very generous terms. The factory which would come to be called the Hindustan Aircraft (Private) Limited factory or HAL was to be set up in Bangalore on government land. Private land would be acquired for it if this too was necessary. Electricity and water would be provided at subsidised costs. Machinery and plant

⁹⁵ *Life*, 22 March 1943.

⁹⁶ CS, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, (New Delhi, 1940), p 216.

⁹⁷ BL, IOR/L/WS/1/496, Note dated 26 December 1940.

⁹⁸ G. Piramal, (1998), p 246.

required for the factory would not be charged customs or octroi when it entered the state from British India. State police would guard the factory at no additional cost. HAL would have a monopoly on aeroplane production in the state and would be given contracts by the state if it decided to ever train pilots or construct planes. The road to Bangalore was widened and tarred to allow heavy vehicles to move to the factory. Materials needed for factory construction were provided at a low cost and necessary steel structures were fabricated for the company at the state's Bhadravati steel works.⁹⁹ Perhaps most importantly the company was not required to pay any taxes on profits on the 10 million dollar contract it had received from the GoI for the construction of aeroplanes.¹⁰⁰ The speed and vigour with which Mysore acted to erect the factory is indicative of the deep investment its administration had in the scheme. The paperwork for the company was rushed through and it was allowed to begin work within a week of being registered. The Belandur tank was acquired for the company to land seaplanes on before negotiations on compensation could be completed.¹⁰¹ A 'Special Land Acquisition' officer was recruited to take measures to quickly acquire the 700 acres that the factory needed. This included rapidly reacquiring land that the state had earlier given to sixty lower caste *Voddar* families, for instance, who were only paid five Rupees per family to relocate their huts.¹⁰² In addition to all of this the state on its own initiative set up a chair of aeronautic and automobile engineering at the Institute of Science, Mysore at a cost of 100,000 Rupees with a recurring grant of fifty thousand Rupees.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 205, The Hindustan Aircraft Limited.

¹⁰⁰ KSA, Industries and Commerce (I & C) file 25, Facilities to the Hindustan Aircraft Factory Limited.

¹⁰¹ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 205, The Hindustan Aircraft Limited.

¹⁰² KSA, I & C file 130, Deputy Commissioner Bangalore District to Chief Secretary, Government of Mysore, 1 February 1941.

¹⁰³ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 205, The Hindustan Aircraft Limited.

Clearly the establishment of the HAL factory was central to the Mysore bureaucracy's developmentalist vision. The factory opened in 1941 with a capital of 75 lakhs to be divided equally between Walchand's company Messrs Walchand Tulsidas Khatau Limited, the GoI and the Mysore state government.¹⁰⁴ The company was thus founded by a nationalistic businessman, a colonial government and an Indian state. It had a contract worth 10 million dollars for the production of aircraft on American license. Air Marshal Sir John Higgins became its resident director representing the GoI and the other two partners sent their representatives to the board of directors. HAL produced its first plane a PC-5 trainer in August 1941 and its second a Curtiss P-36 in July 1942.¹⁰⁵ The factory did not function perfectly however as it fell behind schedule on the manufacture of Curtiss Hawks and Vultees due to the difficulty of securing spare parts from America and because ships due to bring required parts from Europe, such as engines, were sunk on their journey to India.¹⁰⁶

The outbreak of the war with Japan led the GoI to propose a nationalisation of the company at the beginning of 1942. This was partially because the American Lend-lease scheme was not allowed to be used in profit making enterprises and partly because of fears that the factory could be bombed by Japanese aircraft.¹⁰⁷ The GoI also argued that it was better placed to run the factory on its own for a number of other reasons. Wartime production would require research and development that only it could provide. Moreover, the levels of secrecy required had now increased due to the entry of Japan into the war.¹⁰⁸ Then there was the claim that

¹⁰⁴ KSA, I & C file 10, Agreement entered into between the Government of India, the Hindustan Aircraft Ltd and Messrs Walchand Tulsidas Khatau Ltd.

¹⁰⁵ *Flight*, 27 August 1954.

¹⁰⁶ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 205, Walchand to Madhav Rao, 6 February 1942.

¹⁰⁷ S. Raghavan, (2016), p 94; For the measures taken to protect HAL from air raids see: KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 22, Order under rule 51c of the Defence of India rules to be served on the Hindustan aircraft factory.

¹⁰⁸ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 205, The Hindustan Aircraft Limited.

the GoI would have to rapidly expand the factory in ways that might be found to be ‘superfluous after the war’ in order to meet military requirements and it would be unfair to saddle its partners with the costs of such an expansion.¹⁰⁹ Walchand was dismayed by what he, perhaps rightly, saw as the GoI’s decision to exclude him from an enterprise he had been instrumental in establishing. He was especially unhappy with what he saw as the lack of adequate compensation for the financial losses this would entail in profits and opportunity costs. Walchand claimed that his partners in Bombay were ‘as shocked as I was at the idea of having to get out of this Industry.’¹¹⁰ He asserted that the 12.5 lakhs he was being offered in lieu of profits was thoroughly inadequate. In addition to greater compensation for profits he demanded payment for his organisation’s role as Managing agents highlighting the many concessions he had managed to secure from the Mysore government.¹¹¹ Walchand consequently asked to be paid between 34 and 38 lakh Rupees by the GoI in return for his share.¹¹² Ultimately the GoI bought out Walchand Hirachand’s HAL shares for the cost of the original share capital plus 20 lakhs which included compensations of 12.5 lakhs for profits, 5 lakhs for managing agency fees and 2.5 lakhs for goodwill.¹¹³

Mysore state’s response to the GoI’s proposal to buy out its shares from HAL was markedly different. The state’s new dewan from 1941 onwards, Madhava Rao noted that;

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Dewan’s Minute, 2 February 1942.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Walchand to Secretary of Department of Supply, 3 February 1942.

¹¹¹ Idem.,

¹¹² Ibid., Walchand to Secretary of Department of Supply, 24 January 1942.

¹¹³ Ibid., McCann to Dewan, 24 March 1942; Gita Piramal has suggested that Walchand was relieved to leave HAL since he had under-capitalised the enterprise and India lacked the necessary ancillary industries required to manufacture aircraft. It is however extremely difficult to establish intentionality especially considering that Walchand Hirachand was widely acknowledged as one of the leading industrial propagandists of his times. G. Piramal, (1998) p 248.

We have to look at the matter not only as investors but as a government which has promoted this enterprise on account of its indirect benefits, such as, stimulation of ancillary industries and provision of technical training for local men. It is, necessary therefore, to make sure that we can re-assume and if possible, improve our share in the management of the undertaking.¹¹⁴

Instead of focusing on compensation therefore Mysore state's representatives tried to negotiate the continued involvement of the state in HAL even if this could only be accomplished after the war. Madhava Rao made a concerted rebuttal of the government's arguments for taking over HAL completely. The state was interested in research, it had a record of maintaining secrecy and it was not interested in profits accrued during the war.¹¹⁵ Mysore state would be willing to relinquish decision making powers for the course of the war in return for only 12.5 lakhs in compensation for lost profits and the restoration of Mysore states' rights in the factory two years after the war. As the Dewan noted, 'our interests in this matter are not identical with those of the Walchand group. The factory is within our jurisdiction and we can, in no circumstances, part with that jurisdiction.'¹¹⁶ After an extended negotiation over the details of the agreement the GoI accepted Mysore's offer. An agreement was signed between the Mysore government and the GoI on 5 August 1942, according to the terms of which Mysore would regain executive control of its share of HAL two years after the war. In the meanwhile the GoI would have a free hand to run HAL and the Mysore government would not gain any profits besides the 12.5 lakhs it received as compensation for wartime profits.

¹¹⁴ KSA, General and Revenue Secretariat file 205, Dewan's Minute, 2 February 1942.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., The Hindustan Aircraft Limited.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Dewan's Minute, 2 February 1942.

HAL was thus taken over by the GoI in 1942. In 1943 the firm was handed over to the United States Army for the assembly of aircraft being brought into India. The Americans hired 15,000 workers and began a three shift system. In August 1945 with the end of the war the factory was handed back to the GoI. It was then repurposed temporarily to manufacture railway locomotives and handed over to Mysore state in 1947 just before for the *Mysore Chalo* (Go to Mysore) agitation.¹¹⁷ The movement which was spearheaded by the Mysore Congress led to the end of Wodeyar rule as the state acceded to India on 24 October 1947.¹¹⁸ Like many of its counterparts, princely Mysore was swept away by the speed of independence and integration, though the state would only formally be liquidated with the formation of Karnataka in 1956.¹¹⁹ HAL would go on to become independent India's largest aircraft factory. As a subsequent chapter will show it played an important part in pioneering Indian manufactured aircraft such as the HT-2 and HT 10. More importantly it would serve to repair B-24 Liberator bombers left behind by the United States Army Air Force thus strengthening the Indian Air Force.

The question that remains however is how far the Mysore state bureaucracy was able to realise its developmentalist vision through HAL? As noted above Mysore officials were motivated to aid the HAL project since they hoped that it would serve to aid in the goal of industrialisation of the state. HAL would serve to train Mysore subjects in technical skills and provide the forward linkages necessary for the state to engage in advanced industrialisation. Thus following the establishment of HAL in 1940, dewan Mirza Ismail turned to a project his predecessor M. Visvesvaraya had drawn up previously in conjunction

¹¹⁷ *Flight*, 27 August 1954.

¹¹⁸ J. Manor, (1977), p 159.

¹¹⁹ J. Nair, (2011), p 245.

with Walchand Hirachand; the premier automobile factory.¹²⁰ As noted above Walchand hoped to produce India's first automobiles. That plan however had run into trouble with the Bombay government. Therefore Walchand in conjunction with Ismail decided to establish an automobile factory in Mysore state. The planned car factory however was effectively blocked by the GoI, which refused to release the requisite dollar credits and placed pressure on the Maharaja to withdraw support from the scheme.¹²¹ It claimed not to be able to spare foreign exchange to import necessary machinery from the United States, where Walchand had been successful at securing a deal with car manufacturer Chrysler. However Walchand and Ismail were convinced that the real reason behind this action was the unwillingness of the GoI to allow Indian manufactured automobiles to compete with British made vehicles despite the exigencies of the war. Despite launching a bitter propaganda campaign that saw him clash with GoI Commerce member, and later member of the British war cabinet, Ramasamy Mudaliar, Walchand was eventually forced to shelve plans for the automobile factory.¹²² Walchand would ultimately realise his goal of building an automobile factory in 1947, rolling out the first car made in India's aptly named Premier Auto factory.¹²³ He would do so however under the aegis of the government of independent India headed by the Congress party, which embraced industrialisation and development in what would come to be called the Nehruvian consensus.¹²⁴

Mirza Ismail was disillusioned enough by the failure of the automobile plan for it to contribute to his eventual resignation. To be sure, Ismail's resignation from the post of

¹²⁰ B.D. Sardesai, *Walchand Hirachand Diamond Jubilee Commemoration Volume*, (Bombay, 1942), p 199.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p 208.

¹²² NMML Walchand Papers, Subject File, *Bombay Chronicle*, 14 Sept 1941.

¹²³ G. Piramal, (1998), p 261.

¹²⁴ See: B. Zachariah, (2004).

Dewan in 1941 was a consequence of his increasingly frayed relations with the new Maharaja of Mysore Chamarajendra Wodeyar, who keenly felt the dominance of the Dewan in a state with a particularly powerful bureaucracy.¹²⁵ Nevertheless the failure of the high prestige automobile plant certainly contributed to Ismail's resignation by highlighting the limits of the developmentalist vision under colonialism. Though the GoI was willing to permit the establishment of an aircraft factory in order to make up for serious military weakness in 1940 it was unwilling to permit Mysore state to set up an automobile factory. The colonial state was unwilling to permit industrialisation even in 'model' princely states, both since this would pose a threat to metropolitan interests as well as because this went too far in legitimising Mysore's native modernity. Significantly the colonial state, the Mysore bureaucracy and even the nationalist movement shared similar understandings of modernity as development. As noted above Mysore officialdom's notions of modernity drew heavily from colonial narratives of legitimacy. One consequence of this was that the colonial state recognised attempts to realise a native modernity through developmentalist policy as being ultimately subversive of its own legitimacy, even when this was carried out by its apparent allies.

The wartime industrialisation of Mysore is indicative both of the enduring nature of developmentalist discourse and its limits under colonial conditions. As Janaki Nair has shown, nationalist criticisms of the Mysore government were based solely in the realm of representation rather than economic policy.¹²⁶ The construction of HAL is indicative of a number of other trends in the decade under discussion. HAL was very much a product of the

¹²⁵ J. Manor, (1977), p 134.

¹²⁶ J. Nair, (2011), p 15.

internationalisation of South Asia occasioned by the Second World War. It relied on American expertise, by way of China, for the establishment of an aircraft factory in Southern India. It also reveals the broader trend of the increasing association of the princely order with Indian capital. Though Mysore's primary goal in establishing HAL was not to make financial gains, the anticipated profits were handsome. Indian states could and in several cases did leverage state power in wartime to reap profits. Even, as in Mysore, when this was not the case the power of the Indian states to successfully intervene in the economic realm was a source of unease for both the colonial government and its independent successors.¹²⁷ Finally Mysore's engagement with HAL is illustrative of the different strategies that princely states could potentially embrace in using aviation as a means to legitimate state sovereignty. Mysore's actions were shaped by its historical context. As a wealthy state with a powerful bureaucracy and a complex strategy to nativise modernity, Mysore idealised aeroplanes and automobiles, though with different motives for doing so than, for instance, Jodhpur. The state's elite displayed a distinctly democratising, though not democratic, vision aimed at uplifting its subjects economically, thus securing its authority to rule. In this it failed due to the traditional constraint it had faced since its formation; colonial rule.

IV. Hyderabad: Aviation as Independence

Hyderabad came into existence as an independent kingdom when the Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I, the Mughal governor of the Deccan defeated the forces of the emperor in 1724. British involvement in Hyderabad affairs would begin in 1759 as British forces intervened in the succession struggles that affected the state to prevent the growth of French influence there.

¹²⁷ I. Copland, (1997), p 185.

Hyderabad's independence would end with the signing of a series of subsidiary alliance treaties with the British East India Company in 1798 and 1800. This would be followed in 1853 with the signature of a treaty that forced Hyderabad to pay for a British military contingent, ostensibly for Hyderabad's own defence by ceding several districts including the economically critical district of Berar. Though many of these were returned as a 'reward' for Hyderabad's support for the British during the rebellion of 1857, Berar would remain in British hands. The demand for the return of Berar was led by the state's famed dewan Salar Jung, and the claim implicit in this, that Hyderabad was a sovereign state whose relations with the paramount power were defined by its treaties rather than its subordination would inform state policy in the long term.¹²⁸ Hyderabad politicians from Salar Jung to Nizam Asaf Jah VII would argue, unsuccessfully but persistently, that Hyderabad had concluded its treaties with the British on equal terms as a sovereign state.¹²⁹ Hyderabad exceptionalism was also fuelled from the nineteenth century onwards by a keen awareness of the state's premier place at the head of the monarchical order established by the British in India.¹³⁰ The state was India's second largest in territorial terms and largest in terms of population with some 23 million subjects, at the time of independence, most of whom were Hindu.¹³¹ Hyderabad was also India's wealthiest princely state thanks to its size, location and the administrative genius of its gifted administrators from Salar Jung to Akbar Hydari.¹³²

¹²⁸ M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University), 1995, p 54.

¹²⁹ The terms of the treaties signed with Hyderabad were indeed more equal, if not entirely so, than those that the British would subsequently sign with other Indian states as its position on the Indian subcontinent became more secure. E.L. Beverly, (2015), p 69.

¹³⁰ Hyderabad however consistently refused to join the Chamber of Princes as the Nizam refused to equate Hyderabad's relations with the GoI to that of other princes. I. Copland, (1997), p 68.

¹³¹ L. Benichou, (2000), p 13.

¹³² For the career of Hyderabad's most prominent Dewan see: V.K. Bawa, (1996).

Hyderabad's internal politics also served to distinguish the state from others in the princely order. Hyderabad did not have an analogue to the Congress or Praja Parishads that came increasingly to characterise other states. Instead it had a powerful nativist or *Mulki* (literally country) movement that was both anti-British and xenophobic towards non-Hyderabad subjects.¹³³ Significantly *Mulki* sentiment was not necessarily communal and meant in the long term that there were strong pressures on the government from below to uphold Hyderabadism. Hyderabad was thus characterised by an elite that saw the state as sovereign and at least part of the populace that regarded it as distinct.

In 1874 the state would become the site of one of India's first railway lines leading eventually to the establishment of the Nizam's State Guaranteed Railway (NSR).¹³⁴ The company would grow in size to become one of India's largest railway firms. It would also diversify operations into Road Transportation, an operation that included the curiously named Nizam's State Railway buses. More significantly, in 1938 it would become the first and only railway in a princely state to open an aviation department.¹³⁵ The Nizam's State Railways Air Department was created by an NSR takeover of the state's flying club, the Hyderabad Aero Club which had in turn been established in 1933.¹³⁶ The club and later the air department were placed under the supervision of two of the state's leading aviators; Pingle Reddy and Babbar Mirza. Reddy had been educated in mechanical engineering at the University of Leeds before completing an apprenticeship at Krupp industries in Germany in

¹³³ K. Leonard, *Hyderabad and the Hyderabadis*, (New Delhi, 2014), p 47.

¹³⁴ Ownership of the railway repeatedly changed hands going from the Great Indian Peninsular Railway to the Nizam's Guaranteed Railway in 1885. It was then transferred in 1930 to the Nizam's State Railway. V.K. Bawa, 'Salar Jung and the Nizam's State Railway 1860-1883', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2,307, pp 307-340.

¹³⁵ APSA, 1942 Hyderabad Directory, H.E.H. Nizam's State Railway, p 200.

¹³⁶ APSA, H.E.H. The Nizam's State Railway Annual report of the General Manager Financial year 1938-1939.

1934 and an air instruction course in the United Kingdom in 1936. On his return to India he became chief pilot instructor at the Hyderabad Aero club and was subsequently made a flight instructor for the Indian Air Force at Hyderabad.¹³⁷ Babbar Mirza was the son of a local Hyderabad notable. After receiving flying training in England in 1930, Babbar returned to India to open the Hyderabad Aero Club on 5 August 1933.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ A. Reddy, (2001), p 34.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p 39



Image VI: P.M. Reddy's Aviator's license. Reddy along with Babbar Mirza played a leading role in establishing aviation in the Nizam's dominions.

The Hyderabad government intended to use the NSR air department to start a service between Madras and Bangalore via Hyderabad before presumably expanding it. To this end the Aero-club's personnel and machines were taken over and five aerodromes in the state were prepared.¹³⁹ However the service, which had begun in 1938, had to be discontinued with the outbreak of the Second World War. The contributions of Hyderabad State to that war have been discussed at length in a previous chapter. Here it is adequate to note the three major contributions made by the state in brief. Hyderabad contributed over 100,000 Pounds towards the establishment of three 'Hyderabad' squadrons of the Royal Air Force.¹⁴⁰ The advanced aerodrome at Begumpet was handed over to the Indian Air Force to serve as No 1 Elementary Flying Training School.¹⁴¹ A number of Hyderabad personnel, including Pingle Reddy, volunteered to serve the war effort.¹⁴²

The Hyderabad government's contributions to the war effort were aimed at strengthening its position in negotiations with the GoI on constitutional agreements after the war. In its view the departure of the British from India would bring to an end the system of paramountcy to which it had submitted through a system of treaties. This and its clear viability as an independent state in economic terms would mean that it would become independent with the passage of colonialism. In these circumstances Hyderabad needed to prepare for discussions on independence and on the retrocession of Berar which had been unfairly taken from it in 1853. Hyderabad politicians were not blind to the obstacles this course would face. Thus as early as 1942 Hyderabad's chief engineer Ali Yawar Jung handed over a memorandum to His Majesty's Government outlining Hyderabad's concerns. Most of these revolved around

¹³⁹ *Flight*, 20 October 1938.

¹⁴⁰ *Flight*, 23 November 1939.

¹⁴¹ TNA, AIR 2/616, Operations Record Book No 1 Elementary Flying Training School (India).

¹⁴² *Deccan Chronicle*, '92 Mulkis for Indian Air Force', loc cit A. Reddy, (2001), p 94.

the possibility of the British handing power over to a central government that might also make claims to paramountcy. The most important point however, for the purposes of the present discussion, is Hyderabad's concern that if the British left without establishing constitutional safeguards for Hyderabad's independence then it would find itself defenceless and isolated. Vitally, it emphasised that Britain might have no strategic reasons for allying with such a state. Measures suggested to prevent this state of affairs from emerging included retrocession of lost territories, a new treaty with Britain that would effectively recognise Hyderabad parity and an increase in Hyderabad's military potential.¹⁴³

Nothing came of Hyderabad's negotiations with the GoI as well as its talks with representatives of the British government, such as Sir Stafford Cripps. As Michael Witmer has shown this did not however indicate that an independent Hyderabad was impossible at the end of the war. Hyderabad's position was reasonably strong in 1945. Its military contributions to the war, not least in the air, had been significant.¹⁴⁴ Its rival at the national level, the Congress Party had in contrast lain dormant for the duration of the war with the arrest of its leadership in 1942. Hyderabad also continued to receive mixed signals about independence from British representatives.¹⁴⁵ The notion that it would soon be independent once the British left and the treaties they had signed lapsed informed Hyderabad's aviation policy as well. Whereas Hyderabad had made a relatively limited attempt to form an air service before the war, towards the end of the war it made significant leaps towards establishing its own airline. It partook of the post-war boom in aviation by purchasing five

¹⁴³ M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University, 1995), p 84.

¹⁴⁴ Hyderabad state forces had fought in the war. The Nizam had also paid for an Australian battleship, aptly named HMAS Hyderabad.

¹⁴⁵ M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University, 1995), p 86.

Douglas DC-3 Dakota aircraft from the United States Army and Navy Foreign Liquidation Commission in early 1946.¹⁴⁶

Deccan Airways was established on 21 September 1945. It was the largest, though not the only, airline established by an Indian state.¹⁴⁷ Deccan Airways fleet would expand to feature 19 aircraft including DC-3 Dakotas, de Havilland DH 89 Dominies and Beechcraft C-45 Expeditors. Deccan Airways launched a Madras to Delhi service and a Madras to Bangalore in cooperation with Indian National Airways four times a week via Hyderabad.¹⁴⁸ Though most of its personnel were drawn from Hyderabad and British India, the airline also drew personnel from abroad. At least four Polish pilots, R. Bobinski, K. Kuzubski, Garsetski and S.Z. Zygnerski flew for Deccan, reflecting the both the displacement caused by the war and the enormous financial reach of the Nizam's government.¹⁴⁹ The airline itself was headed by a retired RAF Air Commodore named Harold Arthur Fenton. It also had the distinction of hiring India's first female commercial pilot Prem Mathur. She was however not permitted to fly planes as 'commander' and would subsequently quit Deccan Airways.¹⁵⁰ Deccan Airways would play a critical role in the crises of 1947. As seen in the previous chapter it was perhaps the last Indian airline to stop ferrying refugees to and from Pakistan during the partition violence. It also ferried Indian troops during the Kashmir conflict later that year.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ *ToI*, 2 January 1946.

¹⁴⁷ Jamair was established in 1946 in part by the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar in partnership with American pilots who had served in the China National Aviation Corporation PC (AR), James B. Muff file.

¹⁴⁸ *ToI*, 3 July 1946.

¹⁴⁹ The Polish pilots would remain with Deccan Airways until it was nationalised in 1953. A. Reddy, (2001), p 124, 158.

¹⁵⁰ Mathur had been rejected by eight airlines before being hired by Deccan. When she asked P.M. Reddy for command of her plane she was told, 'If they know the pilot is a woman they will run away.' Mathur would later serve as industrialist G.D. Birla's pilot. *The Hindu*, 17 March 2008.

¹⁵¹ A. Reddy, (2001), p 152.

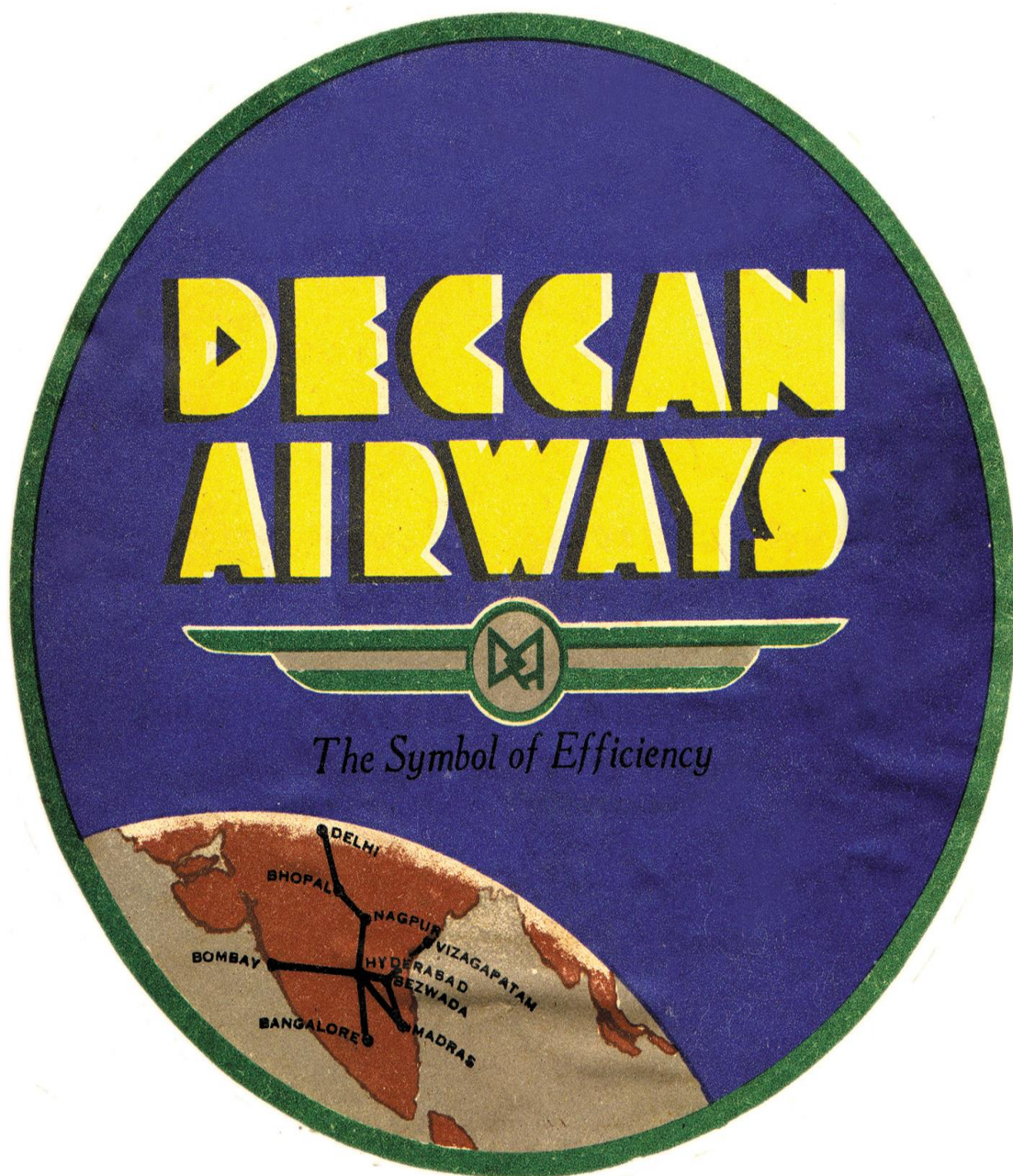


Image VII: A Deccan Airways advertisement, c1948. Note the extent to which the airline's air routes had extended within three years of its establishment.



Image VIII: (L to R) Captain Saldana, Air Hostess Maureen O'Dowd and Captain Johri c1946. Deccan Airways extensively hired foreign personnel including British air hostesses and Polish pilots.

The establishment of Deccan Airways was aimed at announcing Hyderabad's sovereignty. Though strategic considerations aimed at preventing Hyderabad's isolation no doubt played a part in the establishment of the airline it is also clear that the state understood the ideological implications of having its own airline. The decision to rapidly establish the airline by buying aircraft and hiring personnel in the immediate aftermath of the war was clearly aimed at projecting a distinct Hyderabadi identity. In establishing Deccan Airways, Hyderabad sought to construct its own variant of native modernity with two simultaneous objectives. On the one hand the airline was clearly aimed at setting Hyderabad apart from any 'national' government that Britain might hand power to at the centre. On the other hand the airline also proclaimed Hyderabad's long cherished stance of parity with Britain, with which it had long maintained it was connected solely through treaties.¹⁵² The founding of Deccan Airways was only one of a battery of actions taken to ensure that with the passing of colonial rule Hyderabad would resume its sovereignty.

Hyderabad relied on its closest ally in the GoI, political advisor to the Crown representative Conrad Corfield, to have restrictions on it eased in 1947. Hyderabad representatives travelled to the United Kingdom, France and the United States to commence diplomatic relations and raise support for its independence.¹⁵³ The state hired Walter Monckton, the lawyer who had previously advised King Edward VII, to prepare its legal case for independence.¹⁵⁴ Keenly aware of being surrounded by British India, Mirza Ismail, who served briefly as the dewan of Hyderabad, began negotiations to buy the port of Goa from the Portuguese. The Portuguese government responded that it was unwilling under any circumstances to part with

¹⁵² On Hyderabad's insistence on parity see: E.L. Beverly, (2015), p 69.

¹⁵³ I. Copland, (1997), p 251.

¹⁵⁴ See: BCA, Dep Monckton Trustees 25-52.

Goa, a claim that it would stand by for another 15 years, but would be willing to offer Marmagao port for Hyderabad's use.¹⁵⁵ The ultimate failure of these talks however would force Hyderabad to make use of more desperate measures to import the arms necessary to protect its sovereignty. More immediately Hyderabad sought to leverage its enormous wealth as well as its existing aviation infrastructure by creating a Hyderabad Air Force.

In the first half of June 1947, Hyderabad's representative in London Mir Nawaz Jung approached retired RAF Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Courtney to inquire whether the latter would be interested in being employed by the Hyderabad government for the setting up of an air force for the state.¹⁵⁶ The initial plan was to form a Hyderabad air force consisting of a transport and a reconnaissance squadron. Since Hyderabad would not have the personnel to man such an air force it would recruit British personnel to begin with. The Hyderabad government would 'naturally wish that their Air Force should be organised on a British basis'.¹⁵⁷ If help was not forthcoming from Britain as represented in this case by Air Chief Marshal Courtney then Hyderabad would not rule out the possibility of approaching the United States for support in the project.¹⁵⁸ The proposal is remarkable in many ways for its underlying assumptions. Foremost among these is that Britain was likely to aid an independent Hyderabad militarily. The proposal would also appear to exhibit a lack of urgency since it focused on those arms of the air force that are least likely to be used in combat, though this could also be understood in more pragmatic terms. A focus on transport

¹⁵⁵ M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University), 1995, p 144.

¹⁵⁶ There was some disagreement about Jung's official position since he claimed to be the Agent General for Hyderabad in the United Kingdom while HMG only considered him to be a trade commissioner in keeping with the broader policy towards Hyderabad's sovereignty. TNA, AIR 8/1437, Hyderabad Provision of Air Forces: Report by the Joint Planning Staff, 15 July 1947.

¹⁵⁷ TNA, AIR 8/1437, Note by Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Courtney, 21 June 1947.

¹⁵⁸ *Idem.*,

and reconnaissance might enable Hyderabad to make use of infrastructure and personnel it already possessed for civil purposes. The offer also acknowledged the passage of global power from Britain to the United States by invoking the possibility that Hyderabad would do business with the United States if Britain failed to oblige it.

Sir Christopher Courtney, who had previously served on the British Air Council, was intrigued by the offer but wished to consult the British government before he answered Jung.¹⁵⁹ He therefore approached Sir David Monteath, Permanent Undersecretary of State at the India Office. Monteath advised Courtney not to take up the offer as Hyderabad was likely to demand the retrocession of Berar when India became independent. This would cause a tense situation between independent India and Hyderabad, in which the presence of retired British personnel would be seen by the 'Hindustan Government' as continued British interference in its affairs. Monteath subsequently confirmed this with his boss the Secretary of State.¹⁶⁰ Courtney however felt that 'there may very well be more than one view on the situation' and moved the matter to the Chief of Air Staff of the RAF, Arthur Tedder who in turn passed it on to the Joint Planning Staff.

In a note dated 15 July 1947, a month before Indian independence the Joint Planning Staff laid out reasons why Courtney should not take up Jung's offer. These bear quoting at length:¹⁶¹

7. From the Political point of view, therefore, it would be undesirable to take any action that would lead to the 'Balkanisation' of India or which might encourage the Indian States to feel that they can stand on their own. We understand that the United States Government is in agreement with this policy.

¹⁵⁹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30975>. Accessed 5 July 2016.

¹⁶⁰ TNA, AIR 8/1437, Note by Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Courtney, 21 June 1947.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Hyderabad Provision of Air Forces: Report by the Joint Planning Staff, 15 July 1947, p 2.

8. From the Military point of view our primary aim remains to get satisfaction for our long term strategic requirements from India and Pakistan. Military agreements with the Indian states are of little account in comparison with this and if in attempting to negotiate with them we make it harder to achieve our primary aim it would clearly be better to avoid any entanglements with the Indian states at this stage.

To be sure the document also expressed some ambiguity about the possibility of agreements with the Indian states in case conditions were ideal and independent India proved unable to provide for British strategic needs.¹⁶² However the note also shows that for HMG the process of decolonisation was part of a larger Cold War policy. As noted in a previous chapter British planners believed that India and Pakistan would serve as military allies in the Commonwealth, continuing to play their old role as British military clients even after independence.¹⁶³ This belief would turn out to be badly misplaced, especially once India and Pakistan went to war in Kashmir. However at the time it meant that the United Kingdom, and the United States did not regard Hyderabad as a viable ally, actualising the state's worst fears about the loss of sovereignty outlined in the 1942 memorandum.

India became independent in August 1947. In the months before and after this the newly constituted Ministry of States (MoS) led by Vallabhai Patel and V.P. Menon succeeded in securing the accession of the vast majority of princely states to India.¹⁶⁴ Several states however refused to accede to India including Junagadh which had received some encouragement to stay independent from the Nizam and Kashmir where, as seen in a previous chapter, non-accession brought India and Pakistan into conflict in October 1947.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Idem.,

¹⁶³ BL, Defence of India and Pakistan Part I (b), Mss Eur IOR Neg 15542.

¹⁶⁴ V.P. Menon, (1985), p 7; Pakistan's integration of the princely states adjoining it would take longer. See: Y. Bangash, *A Princely Affair*, (Karachi, 2015).

¹⁶⁵ For a discussion of the Indian invasion of Junagadh see: S. Raghavan, (2010), p 26.

Hyderabad in keeping with its stance that it was resuming its sovereignty also chose to be independent after concluding a standstill agreement with independent India. Negotiations between New Delhi and Hyderabad were carried out from December 1947 to June 1948, on the latter's constitutional status. A vast corpus of literature has covered the Indo-Hyderabad negotiations and their subsequent breakdown.¹⁶⁶ As such what follows is a brief précis. The Nizam contended that his state was resuming a legal sovereignty ensured by the lapse of treaties with Britain and that it had the wherewithal to emerge as a viable independent state. The Indian leadership on the other hand claimed that Hyderabad was an anachronistic despotism that had no place in the modern world. Indian leaders pointed to the Hyderabad government's close association with the *Majlis-e-Ittehadul-Muslimeen* (Council of the Union of Muslims) Party and its paramilitary wing the *Razakars* (Volunteers) to argue that Hyderabad was a communal state in which a Muslim despot terrorised the Hindu majority.¹⁶⁷ Michael Witmer has shown that despite being bitter, negotiations between India and Hyderabad in June 1948, came close to succeeding with a compromise that would have seen a plebiscite carried out in the state to decide on its future. He contends that these were not carried out largely due to India's fears that Muslims, their numbers swelled by refugees fleeing communal violence in South India, would form an alliance with the states lower castes to ensure that Hyderabad did not join India.¹⁶⁸ Whatever the case, two other factors acted to deeply complicate the Hyderabad imbroglio. India and Pakistan went to war in Kashmir in October 1947 and Hyderabad's apparent friendship with Pakistan, as seen in its grant of a

¹⁶⁶ See: V.P. Menon, (1985); A.G. Noorani, *The Destruction of Hyderabad*, (London, 2014); L. Benichou, (2000); V.K. Bawa, *The Last Nizam*, (New Delhi, 1992); M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University, 1995); S. Raghavan, (2010).

¹⁶⁷ *White Paper on Hyderabad*, (New Delhi, 1948).

¹⁶⁸ M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University, 1995), p 282.

200 million rupee loan to the latter, served to paint it as a threat in Indian eyes.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, Hyderabad itself was affected by a communist insurgency which the GoI feared would spread outside the state if it was not quickly stamped out.¹⁷⁰

In order to pressure Hyderabad into acceding to India, the GoI imposed a blockade on the state from January 1948.¹⁷¹ The blockade was apparently aimed at preventing the import of arms into the state though there is some evidence to show that it was aimed at starving the state into submission paralleling Pakistan's actions in Kashmir in September 1947. English travellers to the state, for instance were forbidden from carrying in parcels of potatoes and vegetables by the Madras government's customs department.¹⁷² The weight of the blockade naturally fell heavily on Deccan Airways. Its provisional license was cancelled in July 1948 and all flights to Hyderabad were barred 'to complete the isolation of the Nizam's State from the air, which has hitherto proven a vital medium of arms traffic into Hyderabad.'¹⁷³ The decision to do this followed the collapse of talks between India and Hyderabad in June 1948, though the charge of arms smuggling was never proved. As a communique from Deccan Airways on 5 July 1948 pointed out Deccan Airways had an impeccable record and in any case its Dakota planes were not suited for the long distance flights that would have been necessary to smuggle arms.¹⁷⁴ In the months preceding this Deccan Airways air crews had been harassed at by Indian authorities when landing at Indian aerodromes.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p 215.

¹⁷⁰ L. Benichou, (2000), p 209; For the argument that independent India engaged in anti-communist actions see: B. Zachariah, (2004). See also: P.M. McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia*, (Cambridge, 2013), p 32.

¹⁷¹ S. Purushotham, "Internal Violence: The 'Police Action' in Hyderabad", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 57, 2, 2015.

¹⁷² BCA, Dep Monckton Trustees 36, Col. J.M. Graham to General Roy Bucher, 26 July 1948.

¹⁷³ *ToI*, 3 July 1948.

¹⁷⁴ *ToI*, 5 July 1948.

¹⁷⁵ A. Reddy, (2001), pp 132, 156; *ToI*, 4 July 1948.

The decision to suspend air services to Hyderabad while clearly aimed at pressuring the state also points to the broader underlying ideological conflict between Hyderabad and India. Hyderabad claimed to be resuming the sovereign status it had possessed before its subordination to colonialism. Its decision to issue its own currency, float an airline, arm its forces, send envoys abroad and refuse to accede to India flowed from this conception of sovereignty. India vehemently denied Hyderabad's right to do so, signalling the radical new self-conception of sovereignty that it had crafted. Eric Beverly has called for an understanding of Hyderabad as a state possessing a fragmented sovereignty that permitted it to surrender some functions of state to colonialism while maintaining others. In this view Hyderabad could emerge as a sub-Imperial sovereign space in which the relationship of colonial power with its subjects could be mediated by groups whose sovereignty, however limited, it was willing to acknowledge.¹⁷⁶ The corollary of this then is that the nation-state that succeeded the colonial power sought to monopolise sovereignty and was intolerant of anyone that came between the Government and its 'citizens'. I term this practise of sovereignty by the nation-state 'deep sovereignty' for its obsession with the penetration of state power to the people without the mediation of any other sovereign entity, however limited its claims. In this sense the adoption of state sovereignty in India was a radical departure from earlier colonial sovereignty whose acceptance of sub-imperial systems was anathema to the new regime. Thus Hyderabad's claims to resume an old sovereignty were impossible for India to accept precisely because this in some ways validated the possibility that more than one sovereignty might dwell within a single state. Deep sovereignty prompted India's leadership, at a time of perceived existential crisis brought on by partition and the

¹⁷⁶ E.L. Beverly, (2015), pp 64-69.

spectre of war with Pakistan, to consider any display of sovereignty including Hyderabad's operation of an airline as a threat.

The collapse of negotiations and the blockade of Hyderabad prompted the state to seek other means to gain the arms necessary in the last resort to defend its continued existence. Hyderabad's legal advisor, Sir Walter Monckton, contacted an Australian aviator Sidney Cotton to begin running arms to the state. Cotton agreed to fly required weapons into Hyderabad through his company the Aeronautical and Industrial Research Corporation (AIRC) in return for 400,000 Pounds in May 1948.¹⁷⁷ Using a fleet of five Lancastrian aircraft, Cotton began to fly much needed equipment of various kinds to Hyderabad from June 1948 onwards. This included pistols, rifles, machine guns, mortars, various types of grenades and wireless sets.¹⁷⁸ Arms bought in Switzerland were flown via Karachi's Drigh road aerodrome, the birthplace of the Indian Air Force, to Bidar aerodrome, Hyderabad with the covert aid of the Government of Pakistan (GoP).¹⁷⁹ The operation had the support of Iskander Mirza, the Secretary of the Ministry of Defence. There is reason however to believe that relations between Hyderabad and at least parts of the Pakistan government were not always amicable.¹⁸⁰ Still Cotton was successful in flying in over 400 tons of equipment to Hyderabad over the course of 39 trips and even expanded his fleet by purchasing two Canadian Lancaster aircraft.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ BCA, Dep Monckton Trustees 36, Cotton to Monckton, May 1948.

¹⁷⁸ *Idem.*,

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Bucher to Graham, 16 July 1948.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, S(idney Cotton) to John (Graham), undated secret letter.

¹⁸¹ BCA, Dep Monckton Trustees 36; TNA, DO 142/481, UK High Commissioner (UKHC) to India to Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), 22 July 1948.

Needless to say the GoI was not pleased when it was found that AIRC planes had been flying to Hyderabad. It exerted both diplomatic and military efforts to stop the supply of arms by air to Hyderabad. Krishna Menon, India's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom made informal approaches to HMG in July 1948. These however met with only limited success. While HMG was aware of the AIRC flights it chose not to share much of the information it had as this might compromise its intelligence sources on the sub-continent.¹⁸² Further there were serious legal limits on what actions the United Kingdom could take to stop the flights. Evidence against Cotton was difficult to collate as long as his operations did not involve the United Kingdom. In terms of international aviation, the Chicago convention held that the carriage of weapons over a sovereign country was a crime but only prescribed a minor fine for the transgression. His Majesty's Government could not even legally hope to delay Cotton in the United Kingdom or impound his planes if they were landed in the country. Indeed Cotton's lawyers threatened to sue Air Marshal Elmhirst the commander of the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) for interfering with 'medical supplies' being flown by their client to Hyderabad.¹⁸³ Cotton would eventually be prosecuted for gun running in 1949. He would plead guilty and would pay a total of one thousand Pounds in fines.¹⁸⁴ While the Cotton trial is remarkable for its lenient sentencing it also revealing of the extent to which HMG was committed to aiding India against Hyderabad. The British government clearly considered the establishment of a centralised Indian state as being in its interests.

Attempts by the Indian Air Force to stop the gun running were a failure. On 18 June 1948 two unarmed Tempest fighter aircraft of No 2 Wing, were ordered to intercept any aircraft

¹⁸² TNA, PREM 8/1007, Krishna Menon's representations about the Flying of Arms into Hyderabad, 5 July 1948.

¹⁸³ TNA, DO 142/481, CRO to UKHC Pakistan, 17 July 1948.

¹⁸⁴ TNA, DO 1463/48, Evidence of specific instances of gun running in India.

flying to Bidar from Karachi while patrolling. Such aircraft were to then be ordered to land in Santa Cruz in Bombay to face legal action. Aircraft were to be forced down through radio contact and were disarmed in order to prevent any incidents.¹⁸⁵ Less than a week later the Indian Defence Minister Baldev Singh was ordering fully armed planes to take ‘offensive action’ against AIRC aircraft. This alarmed RIAF Commander-in-Chief Thomas Elmhirst who noted that any such interception would for ‘radar reasons’ take place in the crowded area north of Bombay where a large number of American, British and Indian four engine aircraft, similar to the ones being operated by Cotton would be flying. Expressing his shock he wrote, ‘We are putting the responsibility of deciding a smuggler from other aircraft on to a young pilot of 22 or thereabouts of age.’¹⁸⁶ The order was subsequently rescinded but Indian leaders remained aggressive. Jawaharlal Nehru wondered how far radar could be used and whether smugglers could be brought down by offensive action. The RIAF was ordered to launch Operation Radar Gunman, a dedicated hunt for the Lancaster planes flying arms into Hyderabad. The RIAF’s No 3 Fighter Squadron backed by two radar stations formed for the purpose at Deolali and Pune was to attempt to intercept the smugglers. An attempt was made to co-ordinate with the Directorate for Civil Aviation to ensure that no British Overseas Airways Corporation planes, which included Lancasters, were shot down.¹⁸⁷ The situation escalated so far by July 1948 that the RIAF was not only ordered to shoot down any Hyderabad planes that refused to land but also to attack Lancasters if they were spotted in Hyderabad’s aerodromes.¹⁸⁸ Operation Radar Gunman failed for a number of reasons. Indian Tempests lacked the night flying capabilities possessed by the Lancasters which flew in late

¹⁸⁵ MoD (I), 601/14238/H, Interception of intruder aircraft-Hyderabad 1948.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Thomas Elmhirst to Baldev Singh, 24 June 1948

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., OP Radar Gunman.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., H.M. Patel to Thomas Elmhirst, 6 July 1948.

in the night and left before daybreak.¹⁸⁹ The IAF also lacked the equipment to trace the Lancaster's flight paths correctly. Finally co-ordination between Indian intelligence in Karachi and the IAF was far too slow to make an impact.¹⁹⁰

One of the key reasons that the GoI was keen to cut off supplies of arms to Hyderabad was because it had begun to make arrangements for Operation Polo, the invasion of Hyderabad. Comprehensive accounts of the operation from the perspective of the RIAF have been provided elsewhere.¹⁹¹ Once Indian forces began rolling across the border on 13th September 1948 the Polo Air Task Force which consisted of two Tempest squadrons and Transport squadron No 12 swung into action. Bidar aerodrome was bombed, Hyderabad troops were strafed and leaflets were dropped proclaiming the end of the Nizam's rule.¹⁹² The Hyderabad military collapsed within five days forcing the Nizam to surrender. This was not entirely unexpected. Not only were the Nizam's forces short on equipment, Cotton's interventions notwithstanding, but the Indian military had meticulously planned the operation for months.

Jawaharlal Nehru had begun to reposition forces on the Hyderabad border as early as May 1948.¹⁹³ The Indian Air Force had been flying reconnaissance sorties over Hyderabad at least from July 1948. This demonstrated India's dismissal of Hyderabad sovereignty, in comparison to Pakistan where, as seen in a previous chapter, Indian planes were explicitly ordered from violating territorial sovereignty.¹⁹⁴ In July India requested and received ten battalions of Gurkhas from the Maharaja of Nepal to increase the amount of troops available

¹⁸⁹ BCA, Dep Monckton Trustees 36.

¹⁹⁰ MoD (I), 601/14238/H, OP Radar Gunman.

¹⁹¹ See for instance: R. Chhina, (2006); S.N. Prasad, *Operation Polo*, (1972).

¹⁹² MoD (I), 601/1256/H, Summary of Operations Situation Reports-Hyderabad Operation.

¹⁹³ S. Raghavan, (2010), p 84.

¹⁹⁴ MoD (I), 601/14238/H, Secretary of External Affairs Hyderabad to Secretary to the Ministry of States India, 20 July 1948.

to it.¹⁹⁵ For India the Hyderabad invasion was a calculated risk that could potentially plunge it into war with Pakistan. RIAF planners led by Air Vice Marshal Subroto Mukherjee, prepared for a worst case scenario in which India would confront both Pakistan and Hyderabad even as its English officers were forced to step down by the British government. Consequently, Indian air defences were massed on the Punjab border while IAF units were divided between Kashmir and Hyderabad.¹⁹⁶ Pakistan did not respond militarily to the invasion of Hyderabad and so the greatest danger to the Indian intervention passed.¹⁹⁷

Operation Polo resulted in 632 casualties for the Hyderabad forces. It was followed by the massacre of between 25,000 and 40,000 Muslims by invading Indian forces in conjunction with the local Hindu populace.¹⁹⁸ It remains difficult to verify the numbers of those killed and the number quoted is a conservative estimate by the chairman of an Indian commission sent to the region. The violence is explained by a number of factors including among other things the communalised discourse surrounding Hyderabad and a deliberate policy aimed at ending Muslim dominance of the state irreversibly. Sunil Purushotham has pointed to the role of Indian irregulars in atrocities in the state to argue that the Indian state had lost control of the monopoly on violence central to sovereignty.¹⁹⁹ Consequently, it sought to appropriate the violence of increasingly militarised irregulars in service of the state. Two questions about the aeroplane's role in the Hyderabad invasion are worth raising. Did control of high

¹⁹⁵ The Maharaja had sought instructions from the British and when none were forthcoming had acquiesced to Indian wishes. PREM 8/1007, Kathmandu to Foreign Office, 3 July 1948.

¹⁹⁶ MoD (I), 601/14238/H, Air Defence Committee Paper No.2, 29 July 1948.

¹⁹⁷ The Pakistan government did not expect Hyderabad to mount an effective defence and moved quickly to tamp down on 'war fever' once news of the invasion was received. TNA, DO 134/4, A.H. Reed to S.J. Olver, 21 September 1948.

¹⁹⁸ See: 'Confidential Note attached to Sunderlal Committee Report', loc cit A.G. Noorani, (2014); Also see: S. Raghavan, (2010), p 98; S. Purushotham, "Internal Violence: The 'Police Action' in Hyderabad", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 57, 2, 2015.

¹⁹⁹ S. Purushotham, 'Destroying Hyderabad and Making the Nation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49, 22, 31 May 2014.

technology such as planes and tanks allow the state to claim to be the legitimating authority of violence? This becomes particularly pressing when we consider the blurring of lines between the military and ‘militias’, seen in the previous chapter, around partition. Second, to what extent was the deployment of irregular forces an improvised response to the paucity of high technology?

While these questions cannot be authoritatively answered without further research, tentative answers can be offered. The widespread adoption of military tactics by armed militias who took part in the partition violence led, as seen in a previous chapter, to the increasing reliance of the state on high technology to re-establish its monopoly on violence. Further, attempts were made, in Kashmir for instance, to integrate existing militias into state forces. In these circumstances state control of high technology was vital for providing the state with the legitimacy to decide which militias were a threat to order and which could be integrated to a degree with existing state apparatuses. As to the second question, the fact that the Indian military’s high technology was at the time deployed against the more serious threat of a full scale war against Pakistan in the Punjab might explain why the state seemed willing to make use of the services of government militias such as the Home Guards and their less official counterparts.

Ironically Deccan Airways would survive the collapse of the state it was meant to represent.²⁰⁰ Its planes were briefly used by the commander of the Indian military governor of Hyderabad General J.N. Chaudhuri.²⁰¹ P.M. Reddy became the airline’s general manager from 1948.²⁰² It would return to operating its old routes after the Indian invasion. With the

²⁰⁰ APSA, Niz/ ADM 20-1, Administrative report on Hyderabad State 1948-1950.

²⁰¹ A. Reddy, (2001), p 192.

²⁰² Ibid., p 121.

conquest of Hyderabad, the Government of India would take charge of the Nizam's shares in the company. Indeed the company would come so heavily under the direct control of the GoI, that at least one contemporary observer treated it as a partially nationalised enterprise.²⁰³ In 1953 Deccan was nationalised along with a number of other airlines to form the Indian Airlines Corporation.

V. Conclusion

The princely engagement with aviation presents an interesting view of the relationship between technology, modernity and sovereignty in a colonial context. Confronted with claims by the colonial state on the one hand, and nationalists on the other, that their rule was illegitimate because it was not modern, several Indian princes moved to embrace aviation technology to establish their modern credentials. Indian states sought to construct their own distinctive 'native modernity' that would serve to legitimate their regimes and entrench their sovereignties. This was to have critical consequences for aviation, some of which endure into the present.

Though the three states under discussion invested heavily in aviation their reasons for doing so could vary widely resulting in very different approaches to the aeroplane. Jodhpur state sought to combine the Rathore dynasty's military traditions with the modernity of the aeroplane in the person of its monarch. Much of Jodhpur state's interest in aviation was undeniably a consequence of the enthusiasm of its rulers for aviation. As one observer noted, 'There are probably more Jodhpur royals in the air than on the ground at any given point in

²⁰³ DO 35/ 4919, Confidential report, January 1953.

time.’²⁰⁴ However underlying structural reasons such as the state’s previous investment in railways and the need to project state power over difficult terrain also clearly played a part in the decision to pioneer Indian state involvement in aviation.

In Mysore state aviation policy was tinged with a developmentalist agenda. The state’s powerful bureaucracy hoped that the establishment of an aircraft factory would instigate a larger process of industrialisation in the state. This tied in with broader conception of governance as a means to forestall calls for popular representation. Mysore’s powerful bureaucracy was unsuccessful at expanding industrialisation in the wake of the founding of the Hindustan Aircraft Limited factory however, as it was constrained by the colonial state which recognised the subversive potential of Mysore’s project of industrialisation. By staking a claim on developmentalism, which was recognised both by the GoI and many of its nationalist opponents as the ultimate justification for the state, Mysore’s government threatened to undo the neat traditional/modern boundary that had been drawn between British India and the Indian states. The failure of Mysore’s attempt to industrialise in wartime is revealing not only of the limits of autonomous development under colonial conditions but also of both the increasing association of the princely states and Indian capitalists, as well as the opportunities offered by internationalisation during the Second World War.

Hyderabad state’s treatment of aviation was tied to its conception of itself as an equal of the British government which had temporarily abridged its sovereignty through legally binding treaties. When it became clear that colonialism was at an end, Hyderabad made a bid for independence on the understanding that Britain could not legally transfer its paramountcy to

²⁰⁴ ‘The Real Zubeida’,
<http://www.rediff.com/movies/2001/jan/17zub.htm>, -accessed on 7 July 2016.

any independent central government. The state therefore moved to acquire the paraphernalia of independence in the form of airlines and an air force. The possibility of Hyderabad's independence however was unacceptable to the government of independent India and to the British government, which hoped that India would serve as its military client. Consequently, India sought to coerce Hyderabad into acceding to it through the imposition of a blockade. When Hyderabad flew in much needed arms India responded with rapidly escalating military action. The eventual invasion of Hyderabad and the mass violence that followed it was a consequence of an ideological contest between Hyderabad and India that is revealing of the triumph of the nation-state as the sole legitimate form of statehood in the post-war international order. It is also proof of the radically new notions of sovereignty that came to underpin independent India. If Hyderabad made claims to resume an old sovereignty, then in denying its claims, the independent Indian state effectively rejected older notions of sovereignty held by its colonial predecessor. In doing so it sought to impose a deep sovereignty unmediated by entities such as the princely states. The move of Indian peoples from subjecthood to citizenship thus served to strengthen the legitimacy and therefore the power of the new state to an unprecedented degree.

The experiments of Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad with aviation varied widely. It is possible to argue that the princely states exhibited not one but several 'native modernities'. Though these modernities proved abortive thanks to the overwhelming victory of the nation state, this was in the circumstances of decolonisation, not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Other historians have already drawn attention to the contingent nature of decolonisation and the possibility that one or many princely states may well have achieved independence or autonomy if not for a complex series of circumstances that permitted the formation of the

nation-state.²⁰⁵ This chapter points to some of those possibilities through the princely engagement with aviation. Even after the ultimate absorption of the Indian states into the triumphal Indian state, princely aviation has enjoyed a post-colonial afterlife. HAL rechristened as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited remains India's premier aircraft factory, Deccan Airways was absorbed into Air India and several of the aerodromes built by princes remain in use. Aviation in present day India perhaps thus serves as an apt monument to a long passed monarchical order that privileged modernity.

²⁰⁵ I. Copland, (1997); M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University, 1995).

Towards Sovereign Skies: Aviation in Independent India 1948-53

The five years after India was granted formal independence mark a critical period of consolidation for both Indian aviation and the new state. Between 1948 and 1953 the Indian state took shape as a centralised republic with a commitment to unprecedented state power domestically and sovereign status abroad. This transformation of India from formally independent dominion to decolonised republic can be illustrated in the realm of aviation through an exploration of three major events that coloured the period; the establishment of external air services, the 1950 Bengal crisis and the nationalisation of civil aviation. Air India International (AII), India's flag carrier, made its debut in 1948, launching Indian civil aviation's long delayed entry on the world stage. The 1950 confrontation between India and Pakistan over the rights of minorities in the new South Asian states contributed to the continuing entrenchment of the Indian Air Force (IAF) as a national institution. In 1953 the nationalisation of civil aviation inaugurated a four decade-long period during which aviation effectively became a state monopoly. The half decade following independence was formative for aviation in independent India. A study of the period raises a number of important questions. What do the various views of aviation reveal about the nature of the independent Indian state? How did independent India 'territorialise the skies'? What was the vision for aviation expressed by independent India's government?

This chapter is divided into three broad segments studying the events that defined Indian aviation in the first five years after independence. Firstly, it analyses the entry of India onto the international aviation stage with a specific focus on the negotiations between India and other countries that enabled this. It argues that India sought, from the very beginning of its diplomatic life to establish itself as a sovereign state in a post-war global order. It sought

freedom of action, believing that the nation-state was the sole legitimate national formation. Secondly, it studies the 1950 Bengal crisis, which put India and Pakistan on the path to war to show that Indian state ideology came to be defined increasingly in opposition to Pakistan, thus belying the hope that the two countries could reconcile in the aftermath of the conflict in Kashmir. Thirdly, it traces the nationalisation of the Indian civil aviation sector to historical trends dating to the Second World War. It will show that nationalisation was part of a broader vision of unprecedented domestic state dominance that India's ruling elite saw as a necessary precondition to development and security. While each of these events will be studied in some detail, a key aim of this chapter is to explore the origins of these events, the logic that underpinned them and the ways in which they related to each other. This is in service to an overarching argument that I attempt to make on the complex nature of the independent Indian state. The new state sought to enact new notions of sovereignty on multiple levels. It sought internationally to ensure that India was recognised as a sovereign state that enjoyed formal equality with the other nation-states that came to characterise the post-war global order. At the regional level India sought to impose its dominance vis-à-vis Pakistan, even as it recognised Pakistani sovereignty. Enacting new notions of sovereignty abroad meant that domestically the Indian state made unprecedented claims to state power and sought greater control over the lives of its citizens, paradoxically, than the colonial state. Aviation reveals the different levels at which independent India exerted sovereignty, whether international, regional and domestic, and the relationship between them.

The aeroplane played a formative role in the first five years of Indian independence. It placed the Indian state on the same negotiating level as the foremost international powers, enabling India to impose a degree of hegemony on its recalcitrant neighbours and eventually came to

be seen as too important to be kept in private hands. Indian independence would in turn resolve a number of long standing issues that afflicted a decolonising aircraft sector and it is to one of the foremost of these that we now turn.

I. India and the world: The establishment of external air routes

The establishment of Air India International in June 1948, less than one year after India attained its independence was a remarkable feat. The famed industrialist and aviator Jehangir Rattanjee Daddabhoy (henceforth J.R.D.) Tata who headed Air India Limited, had made an application to the Ministry of Communications of the Government of India (GoI) for the establishment of an international airline that would fly Lockheed Constellation aircraft along a passenger route to London via Cairo and Geneva in September 1947. The GoI would hold forty nine percent of the companies' stock with an option to an additional two percent while the Tatas would hold twenty five percent and the remaining twenty six percent would be publicly subscribed. Significantly, the proposal required the GoI to subsidise any losses incurred by the company over its first five years and these could be recouped from upto fifty percent of future profits.¹ Despite the fact that New Delhi was at the time being convulsed by communal violence, the Government of India provided the company with permission to be set up within weeks. When decades later he was asked why permission for the founding of Air India International was rushed through, Jagjivan Ram, India's longest serving cabinet minister, would quip 'We did not know any better then!'²

¹ J.R.D. Tata, 'The story of Air Transport', p 11.

² R.M. Lala, (1992), p 113.

JRD Tata's offer to set up an external airline company was no doubt an attractive option for the GoI. The Tatas could bring their considerable experience running Air India Limited by taking on the role of managing agents for Air India International. They could also establish the airline more rapidly than the GoI could on its own since they had ordered three Constellation aircraft from Lockheed.³ There is also no doubt that the Government of India saw having an airline as being an essential marker of India's independence and modernity and that the GoI was keen to have a flag airline running as soon as possible. Certainly other claimants to sovereign power were vying to set up airlines. As seen in a previous chapter the Nizam of Hyderabad had set up a state airline as early as 1945. Mohammed Ali Jinnah had met with Mirza Ispahani before Pakistan became independent in order to discuss the prospect of setting up the new state's flag carrier.⁴ Additionally the GoI was preoccupied by a number of crises in the first year of its birth and likely simply did not have the resources to spare to set up an international airline.⁵

Yet the GoI's support for establishing an international airline was only possible in the context of a network of air routes transformed by the Second World War. While Indian independence certainly enabled and accelerated the founding of external services, the reconstitution of the pre-war international air route network was a necessary precondition that permitted the government of independent India to negotiate the setting up of its own international airline. JRD Tata had long hoped to establish an international airline that would fly west to London but it was only in the aftermath of the Second World War that AII could have been established as shall be seen.⁶ Indian independence while critical was not a pre-requisite for the setting up

³ *Flight*, 25 March 1948.

⁴ F. Ali and B.L. Dey, *Is Pakistan International Airlines Up to the Mark?*, (Bradford, 2011), p 13.

⁵ G. Parthasarathi ed., (1986), p 150

⁶ J.R.D. Tata, 'story of Air Transport', p 11

of external air routes. Understanding how India went from being merely a link on the Imperial air route from London to Brisbane to the site of an international air service of its own requires us to turn to the period before the Second World War.

Confronted by competition with better subsidised French and German airline companies flying more advanced aircraft, Britain's Imperial Airways turned increasingly towards the Empire to maintain competitiveness during the inter-war years. By effectively monopolising what would come to be called the Imperial air route from Britain to Australia on the one hand, and South Africa on the other, Imperial Airways could continue to remain profitable. Ensuring that Imperial Airways maintained its monopoly meant restricting competition from the airlines of the dominions. His Majesty's Government (HMG) insisted that the dominions not form external services of their own that might compete with Britain's international airline.⁷ As seen in a previous chapter, Indian companies which were in their infancy at the time, actually benefitted from the establishment of the Imperial air route since domestic carriers acting as feeders to Imperial Airways were able to avail subsidies in the form of the All-Up air mail scheme from 1938 onwards. By contrast the GoI came increasingly to see its role in the Imperial air route as unprofitable. The company that it helped set up with the assistance of Imperial Airways and Indian National Airways was named Indian Transcontinental Airways but was considered to have been a failure. This was partially because of the failure of the company to hire Indian air crews and partially because of what the GoI perceived as inequitable distribution of the All-Up Empire air mail scheme. The GoI

⁷ P. Ewer, 'A Gentlemen's Club', pp 75–92.

proposed to reorganise the Imperial air route to permit Indian Transcontinental Airways to independently operate the Karachi to Calcutta leg of the route when war broke out in 1939.⁸

The Second World War, however, brought an end to the system of Imperial air routes. As Britain focused its wartime aircraft production largely on combat aircraft, it became increasingly clear that the United States with its vast fleets of transport aircraft and its growing civilian fleet would dominate post-war civil aviation. Alarmed by the prospect of being marginalised by aggressive American airline companies in the war's aftermath, British planners cast about for a way to protect British dominance of civil aviation after the war. The idea of 'internationalisation' gained immense prominence during the war in the highest echelons of the British government and was highly influential in defining Imperial aviation policy. As a pamphlet written as propaganda for the GoI by Frederick Tymms explained, 'Under such a system international air services would be internationally owned and operated and no national or private service would operate outside its own country.'⁹ Waqar Zaidi has shown how internationalisation was in reality a highly ambiguous term with several, often contradictory, meanings. Nevertheless it came to enjoy widespread support across the political spectrum in the United Kingdom with prominent advocates including Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and Lord Beaverbrook and was the official policy of the British government until 1944.¹⁰ When it became clear that the United States, which advocated a laissez faire 'Open Skies' civil aviation policy after the war, would not accept internationalisation, HMG decided to drop many of the most idealistic components of its internationalisation policy while continuing to campaign for an international organisation

⁸ BL, IOR L/E/8/6561, 'Post War Planning-External Air Services' (New Delhi, 1945), p 3.

⁹ CUL, GBR/00115/RCMS 20/1/2/1/6, *India and Aviation*, September 1944.

¹⁰ S.W. Zaidi, 'Wings for peace' versus Airopia: Contested Visions of Post-War European Aviation in World War II Britain', in M. Schiefelbusch & H. Dienel (ed.), *Linking Networks*, (Farnham, 2014), pp 151-168.

that would be responsible for regulating air routes. Such an organisation would help Britain maintain its Imperial air routes and limit American expansion into the Commonwealth and colonies which Britain hoped would act as a single unit for purposes of aviation.¹¹ This stance was backed by the Indian delegation which was led by Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai at the Chicago conference on international civil aviation.¹²

While it enjoyed support from most of the Commonwealth and India, the United Kingdom was unsuccessful at the international negotiations that took place at the Chicago conference of November 1944, whose results have come to define the organisation of aviation to the present day.¹³ The United States stubbornly defended its 'Open Skies' policy. Meanwhile as Robert Bothwell and J.L. Granatstein have demonstrated a joint Commonwealth front failed as the Canadian delegation played off the United States and the United Kingdom against each other so as to secure control over its own lucrative air routes.¹⁴ The Chicago convention on international civil aviation, which resulted from the conference, left the question of fixing air routes to bilateral agreements between parties involved. In the new global order that the conference brought into existence sovereignty over air space would be vested in the national state, a fact that would be acknowledged by the United Kingdom itself when it signed the Bermuda agreement with the United States in 1946.¹⁵ The implications of this for India would be immense. While it did not concede total freedom of the air to American aircraft, the Chicago convention, was not a success for the United Kingdom. The defeat of even its limited

¹¹ D.R. Devreux, 'British planning for Post-war Civil Aviation 1942-45', *Twentieth Century British History*, 2, 1, 99, pp 26-46.

¹² E.A. Johnston, (1995), p 133.

¹³ The USSR pulled out of the conference the day before it began and Axis states were not invited leaving the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to dominate the conference.

¹⁴ R. Bothwell and J.L. Granatstein, 'Canada and wartime negotiations over civil aviation: the functional principle in operation', *The International History Review*, 2, 4, pp 585-681.

¹⁵ A. Sampson, *Empires of the Sky*, (London, 1984), p 72.

goal to form an international organisation to regulate air routes at the Chicago conference caused HMG to fall back on another means of maintaining its competitiveness, namely a Commonwealth airline.

An airline operated jointly by the Commonwealth states, including India, would help offset American advantages especially through preferential route distribution and permit the United Kingdom to retain something of its status as a world leader in aviation. In recognition of changes in the political situation HMG offered to transfer operation of different parts of the proposed Commonwealth airline to the dominions and India. It argued that the establishment of separate external services would merely serve to cause a competition between Commonwealth states and drive profits to non-Commonwealth airlines. At a Commonwealth conference held in Montreal in October 1944 however the dominions expressed their wish to establish their own international airlines independent of the United Kingdom.¹⁶ David Devreux has pointed to the decision by Australia, New Zealand and Canada to operate a Trans-Pacific Commonwealth airline jointly with the United Kingdom as proof that HMG wished to pursue a centralised aviation policy.¹⁷ While there is some truth to this, the fact that the dominions asserted their independence by refusing to help establish a round-the-world Commonwealth airline demonstrates that Britain simply could not impose a centralised policy even if it wished. This not only meant the end of the proposed Commonwealth airline but also of the United Kingdom-India-Australia air route that Imperial Airways and then British Overseas Air Corporation aircraft had flown. As each section of the route came to be

¹⁶ BL, IOR L/E/8/6561, 'Post War Planning-External Air Services' (New Delhi, 1945), p 4.

¹⁷ D.R. Devreux, 'British planning', pp 26-46.

operated by the national airline involved, India was given permission to set up its own international airline to take up the United Kingdom segment of the old Imperial air route.¹⁸

Consequently, Frederick Tymms, the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) of the Government of India drew up initial plans for the establishment of two international airlines to be based out of India. These would cater to four sets of routes:

- a) Karachi to the United Kingdom
- b) Karachi to the Middle East
- c) Karachi to East Africa
- d) Calcutta to China

The most important route proposed was the India to United Kingdom route both for purposes of trade and also as a means of ensuring that both Britain and India could negotiate air routes without being crowded out by the services of other states operating between them. This was particularly critical since the defeat of internationalisation at the Chicago conference had effectively vested the nation-state as opposed to the international organisation with the power to negotiate air routes. From 1944 onwards the principle that air routes would be determined by bilateral agreements between states became the norm, making the need for the United Kingdom and India to come to an agreement on air routes urgent.

Other routes were proposed to ensure that India had easy links with regions it had traditionally been connected with. A route to the Middle East from Karachi to Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Turkey, Syria and Egypt had great traffic potential and would be logical for India to seek. The war had led to the creation of a short route to East Africa from Karachi via the

¹⁸ BL, IOR L/E/8/6561, 'Post War Planning-External Air Services' (New Delhi, 1945), p 4.

Western Arab Desert possible. Wartime operations had also opened an air route from India to China. As the external services plan noted 'Shanghai is nearer to Calcutta than Cairo is to Karachi.'¹⁹ It would be to India's advantage to demand reciprocal rights for her airlines to fly to China since the Chinese nationalist Government's China National Aviation Corporation plied the China-India air route during the war.

The Directorate of Civil Aviation (DCA) proposed the formation of two corporations, one of which would carry traffic from India to its east, and another which would carry traffic westward. The DCA proposed that the two companies provisionally named 'Indian Western Airways Limited' (IWAL) and 'Indian Eastern Airways Limited' (IEAL) be established as share companies in which the government would hold significant stocks amounting to about twenty percent. A private airline or shipping firm would take up another fifteen to twenty percent of the stocks and be charged with running the airline. While this would be necessary to prevent competition between domestic commercial enterprises, other shipping firms and airlines would be permitted to hold up to twenty percent of the shares of the international airline. The remainder would be subscribed by the public and strict limits would be placed on transferring ownership of shares. IWAL would have a capital of three crores since it would require long range aircraft for the air route to the United Kingdom while IEAL's more modest needs would be met with two crores in capital.²⁰ The companies would begin external services as soon as possible in order to secure air routes though it was understood that it would take three years to raise the personnel and equipment to fly the United Kingdom-India route.

¹⁹ Ibid., p 1.

²⁰ Ibid., p 4.

The plan noted that the establishment of international air routes would serve three purposes. Firstly, it would ensure that India secured necessary air routes for itself before bilateral negotiations between other states weakened its negotiating position. Secondly, it would secure India's 'national aspirations to appear in the international air transport field.'²¹ Thirdly, it would increase India's necessary defence reserves. While the plan was never implemented, in large part due to the political instability leading up to Indian independence, it anticipates the formation of Air India International in significant ways. The plan was remarkably ambitious and points to the changes wrought by the war in India's relations with the United Kingdom. Though, unlike Australia and Canada, the GoI was forced, as a consequence of its colonial status, to defer to HMG on the issue of air routes, the eventual collapse of the latter's attempts to persuade the Commonwealth states to set up a Commonwealth airline caused the GoI to consider seriously the establishment of its own independent international airlines. To be sure the GoI would still have effectively been acting in the interests of the metropole by establishing international airlines since these would help Britain secure reciprocal air routes to India. Nonetheless the fact that this would be an advantage to HMG, which not even a decade before considered the establishment of independent international air routes an act of defiance, is remarkable. It is indicative of how fundamentally the political terrain in which Britain and the Commonwealth operated had shifted.

When in September 1947 JRD Tata presented his plans to the independent GoI to set up Air India International, it was to a government which no doubt inherited plans from the colonial DCA for the establishment of external air routes. Furthermore, as JRD Tata would note his

²¹ Ibid., p 11.

proposals were made in a transformed global context where air routes were ‘regulated wholly by bi-lateral treaties between countries’.²² The speed with which the government would move to approve Tata’s plans is therefore explained not only by reasons of ease and the need for political representation noted earlier, but also by the existence of earlier GoI plans to extend Indian airline services abroad. These in turn were a consequence of major political shifts in world politics, where Britain was being rapidly supplanted by the United States in the aftermath of the Second World War and by not entirely unrelated shifts in Commonwealth politics which saw leading dominions assert their independent aviation policies.

The Tatas had been closely following the air route negotiations and making their own plans for the post-war period. JRD Tata had been outraged to be excluded from the GoI delegation to the Chicago conference in 1944 due to pressure from other members of the Commonwealth who insisted that the Indian delegation be made up of government officials alone. In an exasperated letter written in October 1944 to the legislator F.E. James, JRD Tata had commented that the exclusion of ‘the very people who were going to run the air transport of the future’ from the delegation was pointless unless ‘it is the intention of these (Commonwealth) Governments to nationalise all air lines’. Later in the same letter he had noted that India’s ‘obvious lines of development’ were ‘to Burma, the Malay States and China on the one hand, and Persia, the Middle East and East Africa on the other’.²³ Tata would later state that he had laid some early plans for a possible air route to the United Kingdom during the war.²⁴ However he was also aware of the possibility that a Commonwealth airline might run the UK-India-Australia route and therefore appears to have

²² J.R.D. Tata, ‘The story of Air Transport’, p 11.

²³ TCA, T-53-DES-AVI-T9-4, JRD to F.E. James 24 October 1944.

²⁴ R.M. Lala, (1992), p 115.

expected to focus mainly on India's regional neighbourhood after the war.²⁵ The final collapse of the attempt to set up a Commonwealth airline and subsequent plans for India to found its own international airline, plans authored by DGCA Frederick Tymms who had close links with Tatas not least by, as seen in a previous chapter, the virtue of having been loaned to Tata Air Lines during the war, cleared the way for the realisation of Tata ambitions for an air route to the United Kingdom.

The establishment of Air India International conformed closely with the plan to establish Indian Western Airways Limited. The independent GoI consented to invest heavily in AII and also to subsidise it for a period of five years. Further in keeping with the prescriptions offered in the external services proposal, Air India International would be managed by an Indian airline company; Air India Limited. Similarities can also be noted in the capital subscribed. Where the actual establishment of AII diverged most from earlier plans, however, was in the scale of government involvement. The independent GoI eventually invested significantly more in establishing AII than the colonial government might have. Indeed government share in the company was only kept below fifty percent at the request of Air India Limited.²⁶ The heavy involvement of the government was indicative of two new trends ushered in by independence. Indian independence gave the Government of India the freedom to invest far greater resources in aviation which the colonial government would have not been able to afford. It also pointed to the inclination of the new government to have greater state control of aviation.

²⁵ TCA, T-53-DES-AVI-T9-4, F.E. James to JRD, 11 October 1944.

²⁶ J.R.D. Tata, 'The story of Air Transport', p 14.

The maiden flight of an Air India International plane to the United Kingdom was suffused with symbolism. On 8 June 1948 exactly a month after the formation of Air India International, the Lockheed Constellation *Malabar Princess* made the first international passenger flight by an Indian airline from Juhu airport, Bombay to Heathrow airport, London.²⁷ Tata himself would travel on the *Malabar Princess* and would be received by the India's first High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Krishna Menon, on his arrival. He was accompanied on the historical flight by the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar, famed for his interest in aviation, the wealthy industrialist Neville Wadia and the well known film director K.K. Murthy.²⁸ Two other Constellation aircraft, the *Rajput Princess* and the *Mogul Princess*, would start flying the United Kingdom-India route via Geneva and Cairo that year. Over the next four years, with the minor exception of 1952, Air India International earned profits and was successful in doubling its level of operations.²⁹ The airline later expanded to include a DC 4 flight from Bombay, India to Nairobi, East Africa by way of Aden. It would have two Constellations costing one crore Rupees on order from Lockheed by the time of nationalisation in 1953.³⁰ The United Kingdom-India air route expanded to include Pakistan, Italy and Germany. This was no mean feat for an airline that was now competing with some of the largest airlines in the world along one of the world's most competitive routes.

²⁷ R.M. Lala, (1992), p 114.

²⁸ R.M. Lala, (1992), p 114.

²⁹ J.R.D. Tata, 'The story of Air Transport', p 11.

³⁰ T53-DES-AV-A3-BO-1, AII Agenda and Minutes part I, 24 February 1949.

AIR-INDIA TIME TABLE

IN FORCE FROM 1-11-1948

BOMBAY—KARACHI (Thrice daily)

	Fit. No. 1 HOURS	Fit. No. 2 HOURS	Fit. No. 3 HOURS	Bombay—Karachi FARE	
Bombay Dep.	07.00	09.30	14.30	O.W.	R.T.
Ahmedabad Arr.	08.50	Non	Non	Rs. 150	Rs. 285
" Dep.	09.15	Stop	Stop	£ 11-5-0	£ 21-7-6
Karachi Arr.	11.45	12.30	17.30		

BOMBAY—DELHI (Twice daily)

	Fit. No. 1 HOURS	Fit. No. 2 HOURS	Bombay—Delhi FARE	
Bombay Dep.	08.00	15.00	O.W.	R.T.
Ahmedabad Arr.		16.50	Rs. 175	Rs. 333
" Dep.	Non	17.15	£ 13-2-6	£ 24-19-6
Jaipur Arr.	Stop	19.15		
" Dep.		19.35		
Delhi Arr.	12.00	20.40		

BOMBAY—CALCUTTA (Daily)

	HOURS	FARE	
Bombay Dep.	06.30	O.W.	R.T.
Calcutta Arr.	12.10	Rs. 250	Rs. 475
		£ 18-15-0	£ 35-12-6

BOMBAY—COLOMBO (Daily)

	HOURS	FARE	
Bombay Dep.	08.30	O.W.	R.T.
Hyderabad Arr.	10.45	Rs. 241	Rs. 458
" Dep.	11.15	£ 18-1-6	£ 34-7-0
Madras Arr.	13.20		
" Dep.	14.05		
Colombo Arr.	16.45		

BOMBAY—MADRAS

(5 services a week—Sun., Tues., Thurs., Fri. and Satur.)

	HOURS	FARE	
Bombay Dep.	12.55	O.W.	R.T.
Madras Arr.	16.55	Rs. 153	Rs. 291
		£ 11-9-6	£ 21-16-6

MADRAS—TRIVANDRUM (Daily Except Sundays)

	HOURS	FARE	
Madras Dep.	07.15	O.W.	R.T.
Bangalore Arr.	08.25	Rs. 100	Rs. 190
" Dep.	08.55	£ 7-10-0	£ 14-5-0
Coimbatore Arr.	09.55		
" Dep.	10.00		
Cochin Arr.	10.40		
" Dep.	10.45		
Trivandrum Arr.	11.35		

Route of the magic carpet



BOMBAY



CAIRO



GENEVA



LONDON

AIR-INDIA INTERNATIONAL

fly with me




Image IX: An Air India timetable for November 1948. Bombay and London were the most important destinations for Indian international flights. Also note local timings for flights to connecting cities.

Air India International was only the most remarkable of the Indian external services established after 1948. Himalayan Aviation flew regularly to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran from Calcutta with its fleet of three Douglas DC-3s. Indian National Airways, also based in Calcutta, in keeping with its Eastern focus flew to Burma and Nepal in addition to Pakistan.³¹ Bharat Airways meanwhile earned the distinction of opening long range air routes to the East with weekly Douglas C-54 Skymaster flights from Calcutta to Bangkok in May 1949, to Singapore in 1950 and eventually to Jakarta in 1952.³²

The Chicago Convention fundamentally reconstituted the map of international air routes at almost the same time as India became independent. At least one historian has compared the first years after the Chicago convention to the ‘scramble for Africa’, as countries vied with each other for the most lucrative air routes.³³ The failure to establish an organisation at the Chicago convention that allotted air routes and regulated quotas left negotiations on the five freedoms in the hands of individual states. The five freedoms, which continue into the present day, in order of numbering include: First the right of innocent passage over sovereign territory. Second the right to land for non-traffic purposes such as emergencies. Third the right to land passengers, mail and freight in the airline’s country of origin. Fourth the right to pick up passengers, mail and freight to the airline’s country of origin. A fifth freedom was the right to pick up passengers, mail and freight between two countries. Under the bilateral negotiation system sovereign states could concede as many or as few of the five freedoms as they wished to foreign airlines. The first two freedoms were generally conceded by most states while the fifth freedom was rarely permitted, despite being widely advocated by the

³¹ *Flight*, 6 March 1953, p 310.

³² TNA, CO/937/193/1, Secretary of State for Colonies to Governor Singapore, 3 October 1950.

³³ R.L. McCormack, ‘Imperialism, Air Transport and Colonial Development’, pp 374-395.

Americans, since it could potentially grant larger airlines an unfair advantage. A key reason for India's early entry into international aviation was the desire to leverage India's strategic position on the most direct route connecting Europe to East Asia in order to gain India the largest number of advantageous reciprocal air route agreements. Failure to enter into such agreements rapidly might have severely disadvantaged India in the long term lending them a degree of urgency. Consequently, India engaged in negotiations with a wide number of states including the United Kingdom, the United States, Pakistan, France, and the Netherlands with important consequences for the territorialisation of the new state's air space.

The first country to approach India for a bilateral air route agreement was the United States. As the premier civil aviation power after the war with an interest in establishing a round-the-world route, the United States, despatched a delegation to India to India on 4 October 1946 to negotiate an agreement as early as possible. Indeed Pan-American airlines had already begun advertising flights to the USA in Calcutta in winter 1945, much to the annoyance of the Director General of Civil Aviation.³⁴ As E.A. Johnston has demonstrated, the GoI had to exercise care to avoid being overwhelmed by American airlines.³⁵ The format of bilateral negotiations that had emerged from the Anglo-American Bermuda agreement was unsuited for two states whose aviation assets were as asymmetrical as India and the United States. Whereas several American airlines including Pan-American, Transcontinental and Western Airlines wished to acquire 'five freedoms' over India, India did not at the time even have a single airline that could fly to the United States. India, which at this time was formally under the Congress-Muslim League led Provisional government, would have to negotiate an

³⁴ E.A. Johnston, (1995), p 122.

³⁵ Ibid., p 125. Much of the rest of this paragraph draws on Johnston's account of the negotiation which draws on notes provided to him directly by DGCA Frederick Tymms while he was writing the latter's biography.

agreement that would prevent American airlines from overrunning its air routes while reserving for itself the eventual right to designate an Indian airline to fly to the United States at some future date. While the Americans expected negotiations to last for one week they dragged on for six. The Indian delegation led by DGCA Frederick Tymms and the American delegation led by President Truman's personal representative, Brigadier-General George Brownell, worked hard to evolve a new framework that would protect Indian interests while remaining acceptable to the Americans. Though the GoI was unable to convince the Americans that India reserved 'contiguous geographical area' traffic, which would have treated all of South Asia as a domestic area for Indian airlines, it successfully limited the number of American airlines flying to India and ensured that in the future an Indian airline would be granted reciprocal rights in the United States. The earliest international air route agreement was thus signed on 14 November 1946 in New Delhi with George Merrell, the U.S. Charge de Affairs and Brigadier General Brownell representing the United States of America, while Jawaharlal Nehru, India's external affairs member and Abdur Rab Nishtar, the member for communications represented India.³⁶ While the precise details are difficult to establish, Tymms would inform his biographer that Nehru had closely followed the negotiations.³⁷ This is indeed likely to have been the case given the future Prime Minister of India's interest in aviation and foreign affairs.³⁸

The negotiation with the United States had been important for a number of reasons. The GoI successfully staved off the threat of competition with American airlines and in doing so laid

³⁶ BL, IOR/V/27/770/5, Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of the United States of America relating to Air Services, (New Delhi, 1946).

³⁷ E.A. Johnston, *To Organise the Air*, (Cranfield, 1995), p 124.

³⁸ See Nehru's extensive writing on Aviation in: S. Gopal and U. Iyengar eds, *Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru*, (New Delhi, 2003), p 635.

the foundation for Indian international aviation. This would set a precedent whereby the GoI would strictly regulate the number and routes of foreign airlines flying to and over India while seeking reciprocal rights for its foreign airlines in the future. The Indian government would commonly permit one foreign airline to fly through India on a maximum of three routes with permission to carry fifth freedom traffic. This was the pattern for agreements signed with France and Netherlands in June and July of 1947 respectively.³⁹ KLM in the Dutch case and Air France in the French case would thus be designated to fly through India by their governments, effectively granting them a national monopoly. Even these relatively restrictive agreements were seen by many Indians inside and outside the independent GoI, including J.R.D. Tata, as being too liberal. Providing fifth freedom rights to foreign carriers was seen as a danger to Air India International. Consequently, the GoI would take the decision to denounce the agreement with the Netherlands and take a stronger stance against the United Kingdom in negotiations in 1951.⁴⁰

By far the most important state with which India had to undertake negotiations was the United Kingdom. The UK not only sat at the end of India's most important air route but the British Empire continued to border India in the period under discussion. In 1947 the British Empire still included Singapore and Malaya on India's Eastern flank and large parts of the Middle East and East Africa to its East. Though the United Kingdom and India needed access to each other's territories negotiations between the two had broken down in 1949. Ironically the United Kingdom found itself advocating a Bermuda type agreement with India that would secure it significant fifth freedom rights reminiscent of the American position, while India

³⁹ BL, IOR/V/27/770/6, Agreements relating to Air Services between the Government of India and the Government of the Netherlands, Government of France.

⁴⁰ TNA, CO 937/193/2, Note of a meeting held to discuss a briefing on for the Bilateral negotiations to be held in Delhi, 22 December 1950.

called for a policy of pre-determination that would heavily regulate British air traffic not unlike Britain's vis-à-vis the United States. Having signed agreements granting fifth freedom rights to American and Dutch companies, albeit permitting only a single airline from each country to traverse its air space, the Government of India changed its stance in 1948 taking what the British termed 'an intensely nationalistic attitude' that considered these agreements to have been too liberal. When a British delegation led by L.J. Dunnett had attempted to negotiate a Bermuda type agreement with India in 1949, it was confronted with Indian demands that would effectively place quotas on fifth freedom traffic to India. A stalemate in negotiations had led L.J. Dunnett into an exchange of notes with the Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Krishna Menon, whereby the two countries agreed to continue pre-existing arrangements for a year. For the HMG's new Ministry of Civil Aviation the Indian position appeared exceptionally stubborn. HMG officials felt that it was unreasonable for India to deny traffic to British airlines when most passengers flying on Air India International's London-Calcutta route were British, since few Indians could afford to make international flights due to the country's shortages of foreign exchange.⁴¹

A British delegation led by George Cribbett of the Ministry of Civil Aviation finally visited India in January 1951 to negotiate an agreement. They hoped to wean India away from pre-determined quotas and convince it to grant the United Kingdom a Bermuda type agreement that would permit BOAC access through India. During negotiations that took place in New Delhi over the course of fourteen days the two countries were able to come to an agreement. While the GoI did not concede full fifth freedom rights to the British explicitly, HMG made a number of important gains. BOAC could fly one service a week to Bombay, India's most

⁴¹ Idem.,

important air hub. It could also retain previous services along with eight route transits across Indian territory. Fifth freedom limitations would apply but as British airlines could carry twenty percent of their total capacity provided this was under forty percent of the total this would mean that BOAC could carry very large amounts of fifth freedom traffic. In return India insisted on a system of annual reviews whereby representatives of the two states would meet to discuss any perceived unfair actions by the airlines of the other. BOAC would not be permitted to increase its passenger capacity by more than ten percent without permission at the review and airlines in which Britain had an interest besides BOAC such as Qantas and Cathay Pacific would be severely restricted in India.⁴² The agreement was beneficial to both states since it protected the Indian passenger industry and also granted the United Kingdom a means to connect the Empire. The tough nature of the negotiations is revealing of the extent to which independent India had moved to establish a distinct aviation policy in the aftermath of independence. The negotiations demonstrated that independent India did in fact take ‘an intensely nationalistic’ position and regarded earlier restrictive agreements as being inadequate to protect India’s sovereignty over its air space, and consequently sought even greater regulation.⁴³

The Government of India found the asymmetry that it suffered from in terms of international aviation reversed when it came to negotiations with Pakistan. Pakistan’s state airline, Oriental Airways remained small and the Vultee Convair long range aircraft that it had ordered in 1947 to help connect East and West Pakistan had been severely delayed.⁴⁴ New Delhi hoped to secure significant concessions from Pakistan in light of its larger civil aviation sector and

⁴² *Idem.*,

⁴³ *Idem.*,

⁴⁴ BL, IOR L/E/8/6561, Extract from review of period from November 1948.

its need to connect India with the United Kingdom by air. Indeed Indian negotiators would briefly attempt to make the argument that Indian flights to Pakistan were not in fact international by arguing that Indian airlines ought to have cabotage rights through Pakistan.⁴⁵ As seen above the Indian DGCA had attempted unsuccessfully to protect Indian dominance of South Asia by seeking safeguards that would have considered the carriage of passengers and freight aboard Indian international flights to Pakistan as cabotage during air route negotiations with the United States. Pakistan, like India, would stubbornly protect its sovereignty in the face of foreign aviation and come to a deal with India in 1948 that was not dissimilar from that later arrived at between the UK and India.

Civil aviation between India and Pakistan had continued without an agreement between the two through 1947 despite the fact that the two states were embroiled in a conflict in Kashmir.⁴⁶ Only in January 1948 did the two states sign a provisional air transport agreement that formalised existing arrangements pending the signing of a more permanent bilateral agreement later in the year.⁴⁷ When delegations representing the two countries met in Karachi in April 1948 negotiations were initially cordial. The Pakistan government was unwilling to concede Indian requests for reciprocal cabotage that would have seen Indian and Pakistani airlines flying through each other's territory effectively treated as domestic flights. Pakistan representatives however appeared to be willing to grant India the fifteen air routes it requested through East and West Pakistan including three to the Middle East and one to the United Kingdom.⁴⁸ The two states were also able to agree on mechanisms to regulate airlines.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Extract from Opdom No 26, UKHC India, 26 March to 2 April 1948.

⁴⁶ See Chapter III.

⁴⁷ BL, IOR L/E/8/6561, Civil Aviation in India, Extract from 'Commerce' 10 January 1948.

⁴⁸ Ibid, Extract from Opdom 28, United Kingdom High Commission in Pakistan, 1-7 April 1948.

Negotiations however proved inconclusive due to disagreements on Indian air routes to Afghanistan.

The GoI had requested from Pakistan the right to operate airlines between Delhi and Kabul via Peshawar but was denied the route by Pakistan. As seen in chapter 4 India was engaged in a conflict at the time with tribesmen backed by Pakistan in Kashmir at the time and the Pakistan delegation argued that Indian aircraft overflying tribal areas were vulnerable. As a Pakistani note would later state, 'The tribesmen are all armed and there is reason to believe that they take delight in (sic) having snap shots at the passing aircraft.'⁴⁹ Moreover, Pakistani government officials could claim to be upholding the old 'prohibited areas' legislation dating back two decades. It is likely however that Pakistan was more concerned with preventing closer links between India and Afghanistan, both of whom it had troubled relations with as it permitted Iranian aircraft to fly over the prohibited area.⁵⁰ Indian aircraft were forced to fly to Zahidan and thence to Kabul, an extra distance of a thousand kilometres, since they were prevented from using Karachi airport. The matter would eventually be resolved by the Provisional International Civil Aviation Organisation but it served to delay the signing of an air service agreement between India and Pakistan until India decided to temporarily drop the demand for an air route to Afghanistan.⁵¹

Sri Prakasa, the Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan and Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, Pakistan's Minister for communications signed a bilateral agreement on civil aviation on 23 June 1948. The agreement gave Pakistan the right to fly the route from Karachi-Bombay-

⁴⁹ *Flight*, 4 July 1952.

⁵⁰ *Idem.*,

⁵¹ For absence of a route to Kabul see: BL, IOR L/E/8/6561, Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Pakistan relating to air services, Annex, 23 June 1948.

Colombo and Karachi-Calcutta-Rangoon. India received the right to fly three routes to the Middle East via Karachi in the West and the Calcutta to China route via Chittagong in the East. India would operate ten routes in total while Pakistan could operate nine. Much like India in its later negotiations with the United Kingdom, Pakistan won the principle of 'equal rights' for airlines of both countries to operate reciprocal routes and also for both countries to consult on practises considered to be unfair that the other country's airline was engaged in. Much like the United Kingdom, however, India could afford to concede principles of regulation given that the size of its air fleet dwarfed Pakistan's, ensuring that Indian airlines could dominate routes both sides had equal rights to fly. As G.D. Anderson the United Kingdom High Commissioner to India noted, '...India's present superiority in aircraft, facilities and organisation will mean that, for many years yet, she will not be giving much away.'⁵²

Indian air route negotiations are revealing of the nature of both the new Indian state and the post-war international order of which it now found itself a constituent. Air route negotiations showed India both the possibilities and limits of a world order that recognised sovereignty at the national level. In a global order that recognised all nation-states to be nominally equal, India could claim formal equality with both the United States and the United Kingdom. Aviation had failed to integrate states, as internationalists had hoped, but it had in a sense made neighbours out of previously distant countries. A world in which nation-states held absolute sovereignty over air space was one in which multiple agreements were necessary to set up air routes. However it was also a world in which formal equality often gave way to the realities of asymmetrical power. While the principle of reciprocity and therefore equality in

⁵² Ibid., UKHC to B.D. Tims, Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), 28 July 1948.

air route allocation could be won by a newly independent state like India, it was difficult to reconcile this with material inferiority. Indian negotiations with the United States showed that the former could at most hope to defend its own international airlines from being overwhelmed by American civil aviation. Indian hopes that its role as regional hegemon would be recognised by the leading world power were dashed when the United States refused to recognise Indian cabotage rights in neighbouring regions that had either been formally under the colonial Government of India's rule like Burma and Pakistan or like Ceylon had been closely associated with it. Negotiations with the United Kingdom, shaped partly by Indian frustrations with the results of the Indo-American agreement on aviation, were successful merely in winning India the right to annually put forward grievances that might arise from the great volume of British air traffic flying through India. India's negotiations with Pakistan formally opened the air space of both countries to each other's scheduled services, though as tensions over the route to Afghanistan route revealed Indo-Pakistan relations were increasingly coming to be defined by a hostility that transcended traditional competition for advantage in air route negotiations. Those tensions would nearly plunge the two countries into war in 1950 over the Bengal crisis and transform Indian aviation in the process.

II. Indian Aviation in the 1950 Bengal Crisis

The hope that the partition of British India would result in the creation of two closely integrated states with common interests was dashed by the outbreak of a conflict in Kashmir that threatened to plunge the two newly independent dominions into full scale war. The Kashmir war had ended in a stalemate and would subsequently poison relations between India and Pakistan more than any other single issue. As already seen in Chapter 3, the

Kashmir war was as much an ideological clash between India and Pakistan as it was a territorial conflict. Pakistan in keeping with the two nation theory that had underpinned partition had based its claim on Kashmir on the fact that the majority of the state's population was Muslim. India meanwhile justified its intervention in the state, among other things, on its secularism with its implications that minorities could enjoy the full rights as Indian citizens.⁵³ The stalemate in Kashmir did not resolve the wider ideological conflict between the two states and would return to threaten once more to plunge the two countries into a catastrophic conflict over the minorities question in Bengal a little over a year after the ceasefire in Kashmir. The Bengal crisis would have important consequences for both civil and military aviation, accelerating processes of expansion and nationalisation. Moreover, the aeroplane would play a small but important role in the crisis.

By December 1947 an overwhelming majority of non-Muslims had been evacuated from West Pakistan. While relatively small minorities of non-Muslims would remain in West Pakistan, the two states could claim to have effected a transfer of populations in the West by December 1947.⁵⁴ The situation in the East however was different. Despite migrations effected by the violence of partition, a significant Hindu minority numbering some 12 million remained in East Pakistan while some 5 million Muslims remained in West Bengal.⁵⁵ The status of this minority would be at the centre of the Bengal crisis.

The immediate cause of the 1950 Bengal crisis was a clash between East Bengal police and predominantly Hindu villagers in the province's Khulna district. Police searching for a communist fugitive had become involved in a fight on 20 December 1949 which had resulted

⁵³ For a detailed discussion of India's stance in the conflict see: A.G. Noorani, (2014).

⁵⁴ TNA, DO 35/2989, Memorandum CRO 13 March 1950.

⁵⁵ *Idem.*,

in the deaths of two policemen. In retaliation, two days after this, East Bengal police along with a number of *Ansar* (helper) paramilitaries had surrounded several Hindu villages in the region and commenced a campaign of repression. Despite later Pakistani government claims that the repression was aimed mainly at communists the effect of the action was to begin a large Hindu exodus to India by January 1950.⁵⁶ These refugees carried with them a number of atrocity stories that were then magnified and widely disseminated by the West Bengal press prompting anti-Muslim violence in the city of Calcutta. As had happened during partition this violence resulted in an exodus of Muslims to East Pakistan and prompted anti-Hindu violence in Dacca, the capital of East Bengal on 10 February 1950.

The outbreak of violence in Dacca prompted a rapidly increasing torrent of refugees travelling from East to West Bengal. Due to the shortage of railway facilities, several wealthier refugees made the short journey from Dacca to Calcutta by aeroplane. Air India and Orient Airways both flew shuttle services between the two cities, evacuating over a thousand refugees by 16 February. While not as heavily organised as the evacuations that had accompanied partition the Bengal airlift was co-ordinated by the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Dacca.⁵⁷ As in 1947 clear figures for the number of refugees evacuated in the Bengal crisis are impossible to tally, for a number of reasons. It is difficult to calculate the number of those who fled East Bengal from the only uncontested numbers available at the time, which are of those who stayed in refugee camps. Most well-heeled refugees flying out of East Bengal, like those who fled West Punjab, could move into the houses of relatives if they did not have property of their own. Indeed there was an element of speculation that

⁵⁶ TNA, DO 35/2989, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 24 February 1950.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Weekly report number 7 for period ending 16 February 1950.

accompanied the Bengal air exodus as male members of affluent families often stayed behind to defend property while women and children were flown out.⁵⁸

Whatever the actual figures, the numbers of Hindus fleeing East Bengal are likely to have been high since as the British High Commissioner estimated, some 300 were leaving everyday ‘with no sign of slacking’ as late as the 6 of March nearly a month after the riots in Dacca.⁵⁹ In the meanwhile large numbers of Muslims were flying out of Calcutta in the opposite direction. In a speech to Parliament, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stated that in the nine days from 12 February to 21 February about 3500 Hindus fled to India by air from East Pakistan while 2100 Muslims made the journey in the opposite direction. If the GoI’s figures are accepted then the number of those being evacuated by aircraft was a very high proportion of those being evacuated over the early ten day period. Nehru estimated that 16000 arrived in Calcutta between 13 and 20 February.⁶⁰ This would mean that one in four refugees moving to India in the first ten days after the Dacca riots came in by air.

There are several likely reasons for the rush on aeroplanes. Travel by train or steamer was likely to be dangerous. Dr Sita Ram the Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan reported that there had been ‘serious incidents’ at Jamalpur and Bahadurabad railway stations’ and that steamers had been attacked.⁶¹ Memories of attacks on trains from partition may have encouraged those who could afford it to travel by aeroplane. Only one serious attack on an aerodrome took place in East Pakistan at Kurmitola aerodrome on 12th February where a lorry full of rioters encountered a large number of undefended refugees killing twelve and

⁵⁸ Ibid., Report on a visit to East Bengal by Horace Alexander, March 9 1950.

⁵⁹ Ibid., UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 6 March 1950.

⁶⁰ TNA, FO 371/84246, Supplementary Extract from Pandit Nehru’s statement on 23 February 1950 about disturbances in Bengal.

⁶¹ TNA, DO 35/2989., *Reuters*, 13 March 1950.

injuring thirty.⁶² Subsequently all air operations were delayed till they were moved to the better defended Tejgaon aerodrome and no further incidents of violence occurred at the aerodrome.⁶³ Second the availability of aeroplanes was far greater than it had been during partition. Indian airline companies had expanded since 1947 and do not appear to have suffered the same amount of attrition during the Bengal evacuations as they did during partition.⁶⁴ The West Bengal Chief Minister Dr. B.C. Roy, for instance, was able to charter sixteen planes to ferry Hindu refugees into Calcutta.⁶⁵ Third, observers at the time have pointed to the presence of a large Hindu elite that sought to escape as the situation in Bengal worsened.⁶⁶ This elite could afford the high costs of air travel.

If the numbers of those travelling by aircraft was initially a high proportion of those fleeing India for Pakistan, and vice versa, then that proportion reduced as February turned to March. This was not because the numbers of those fleeing by air had reduced. It had not. As a report in the *Manchester Guardian* would note in mid-March, ‘..hundreds of refugees flee everyday by every available airplane from Dacca and Chittagong, their places being taken by equal numbers of Muslim refugees from Calcutta.’⁶⁷ Instead those participating in the air exodus a smaller fraction of the total numbers of those fleeing both states as over three hundred thousand refugees were displaced from their homes. This was partly a consequence of fear of communal violence being fanned in both countries by refugees and graphic tales in the

⁶² Ibid, Weekly report number 7 for period ending 16 February 1950.

⁶³ Ibid., Allen Emerson to Ministry of Civil Aviation, 17 February 1950.

⁶⁴ *Flight*, 1 September 1949.

⁶⁵ P.K. Chakrabarty, *The Marginal Men*, (Calcutta, 1999), p 27.

⁶⁶ *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1950, Loc cit DO 35/2989.

⁶⁷ *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1950, Loc cit Ibid.

press. It was also by March 1950, at least partly, a result of fears of the outbreak of a general war between India and Pakistan.

Srinath Raghavan has shown how the Indian government led by Jawaharlal Nehru coerced Pakistani authorities into coming to an agreement with India that would recognise the rights of minorities in Pakistan. Utilising the vocabulary of international relations Raghavan argues that Nehru made use of a ‘compellence strategy’ that eventually forced Liaquat Ali, the Prime Minister of Pakistan to offer him the best possible terms under the circumstances.⁶⁸ His work on the subject, the first of its kind, offers a detailed diplomatic history of the 1950 Bengal crisis rendering a narration of its events unnecessary. A brief precis of the crisis will therefore suffice.

Alarmed at the increasing numbers of Hindu refugees pouring into West Bengal and the growing anti-Muslim violence in India, that began in but was not limited to the province, Nehru wrote to Liaquat Ali, proposing a slew of measures aimed at restoring minority trust in both governments. This included the appointment of joint fact finding committees, permission for High Commissioners of each country to tour riot affected areas and also a proposal for both Prime Ministers to make joint visits to the worst affected areas to restore public confidence. When Liaquat Ali refused the last two of these Nehru, who was under considerable domestic pressure, ordered Indian military forces to begin mobilising at the end of February on both of India’s borders with Pakistan. By late March over 100,000 Muslims had fled India and 200,000 Hindus had fled Pakistan.⁶⁹ Unconvinced that an exchange of

⁶⁸ S.Raghavan, (2010), p 162.

⁶⁹ While these numbers are drawn from reports at the time they are difficult to verify since numbers provided by India and Pakistan vary and as the UK High Commissioner to Pakistan pointed out neither state had the means to perform a count given the chaotic atmosphere in which migrations took place. DO 35/2991, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 22 July 1950.

populations could realistically be effected and unwilling to plunge the subcontinent into a war that would be catastrophic for India, economically and communally, Nehru also attempted to press the United States and the United Kingdom to pressure Liaquat Ali to agree to his terms. Indian military moves and the apparent willingness of the USA and the UK governments to believe these were not aggressive finally convinced Liaquat to invite Nehru to Karachi for discussions. When Nehru instead invited him, Khan travelled to Delhi on 2 April 1950. After a week of negotiations an agreement was signed by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan assuring the citizenship rights of minorities in both countries. This would primarily achieved through the appointment of minority affairs ministers, the establishment of committees of enquiry, the punishment of rioters and the restitution of stolen property. In securing the agreement Nehru not only overcame the initial resistance of the Pakistani government to his terms but also an immense amount of domestic pressures from constituencies that included Hindu extremists, the Bengali press and a not inconsiderable segment of his party.

The Indian Air Force played a small but critical role in the 1950 Bengal crisis and was in significant ways transformed by it.⁷⁰ The force had made significant leaps in aircraft during the two years since independence. Under the supervision of Group Captain Harjinder Singh, the IAF had managed to recover 42 Liberators that the British had scrapped at Kanpur before their departure from the subcontinent.⁷¹ The bombers, which were flown one at a time to Bangalore, had been repaired at the Hindustan Air Limited factory. The force was also in the midst of inducting its first jet fighter, the De Havilland Vampire.⁷² Consequently, it

⁷⁰ The Indian Air Force dropped the prefix 'Royal' on 26 January 1946 after India declared itself a republic.

⁷¹ A.L. Saigal (eds), (1977), p 229.

⁷² V. Seth, (2000), p 39.

outnumbered and, in significant ways outgunned, the Royal Pakistan Air Force to a far greater extent than it had during the Kashmir conflict. Nevertheless the force had also been able to learn from the lessons of the conflict.

When Nehru instructed the Chiefs of Staff to draw up plans for possible military action against Pakistan the new Commander-in-Chief of the IAF, Air Marshal Ronald Ivelaw Chapman, insisted that it would be impossible to keep military intervention by the IAF into East Pakistan localised.⁷³ Air Marshal Chapman, the penultimate British commander of the IAF, was restating the views of his predecessor Air Marshal Thomas Elmhirst who, as seen in a previous chapter, sought to keep India out of a conflict with Pakistan both since this was against the Cold War interests of the United Kingdom and also because it would potentially pit British personnel serving the two dominions against each other. Though Ivelaw Chapman was transparently disinclined to go to war with Pakistan for these reasons he was not misstating the possibilities of escalation inherent in what might at first be conceived as a localised military operation targeting parts of East Pakistan.⁷⁴ As I have argued elsewhere air power had played an escalatory role in the Kashmir conflict despite the limited commitment of the RIAF there. Consequently, Chapman was not mistaken in arguing that IAF operations would be impossible to localise.

Two IAF squadrons were deployed as early as 3 March 1950 to the Bengal front, one of which was based at the Chakulia airfield dating back to the Second World War.⁷⁵ Plans were also put forward by Air Vice Marshal Subroto Mukherjee, the deputy Chief of Air Staff for

⁷³ S.Raghavan, (2010), p 169.

⁷⁴ Chapman like Elmhirst expressed a willingness to resign rather than command the IAF in conflict against the Royal Pakistan Air Force. J.I. Chapman, *High Endeavour*, (London, 1993), p 150.

⁷⁵ TNA, DO 35/2989, UKHC India to CRO, 4 March 1950.

the establishment of advanced air headquarters in Punjab and operational centres at Bombay, Jammu and Calcutta. This was in keeping with India's overall military plans which concentrated the bulk of army and air force units on the border with West Pakistan since that was where most Pakistani forces were based. Significantly Mukherjee acknowledged the possibility that senior British officers would be stood down in case hostilities with Pakistan commenced.⁷⁶ This was also the second time that IAF squadrons had made plans for a potential conflict against Pakistan along the Western border. During Operation Polo in September 1948, most of India's operational squadrons had been placed on high alert to meet a possible Pakistani attack in support of Hyderabad. Plans for this, as seen in a previous chapter, had been drawn up in large part by Mukherjee.

Pakistani reactions to Indian military movements were initially restrained. The Defence Council of the Government of Pakistan did not at first take the threat of an Indian attack seriously since it was felt that India would not risk any action that would almost certainly lead to mass violence against the Hindu minority in East Pakistan.⁷⁷ This was not necessarily an irrational conclusion to draw and there is some evidence that much of the migration by Hindus out of East Pakistan had in fact been driven by the possibility of an Indian invasion that would result in Muslims massacring Hindus in large numbers.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Pakistani military did not expect an attack on the Western Frontier.⁷⁹ As it became clear by the third week of March that India had the means, if not the intention, to launch attacks in the West as well as the East, Pakistani General Headquarters scrambled its forces. The Royal Pakistan

⁷⁶ Ibid., UKHC India to CRO, 9 March 1950.

⁷⁷ Ibid., UKHC Pakistan to UKHC India, 16 March 1950.

⁷⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1950 Loc cit TNA, DO 35/2989.

⁷⁹ TNA, DO 35/2989, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 11 March 1950.

Air Force was ordered to prepare to move at 24 hours' notice.⁸⁰ India and Pakistan appeared to be on the brink of war to an extent not seen since the final month of the Kashmir conflict a year previously. As the *New York Times* noted late in March, 'It is the one place in the world today where war is a real possibility.'⁸¹

In the event, war did not begin and a pact between the two countries was signed in New Delhi in April 1950 in which Pakistan agreed to take measures to protect its minorities.⁸² Despite the signing of the pact however it was unclear whether war had been averted or merely postponed. Consequently the Indian military mobilisation was maintained and even increased. The Indian government in May 1950 approved the Defence Ministry's Plan *Shikar* (Hunt). Under Plan Shikar the Indian Air Force was expanded from eight to fifteen squadrons as an emergency measure. This would enable it to deploy for a greater number of air operations if war with Pakistan did break out. For an air force that had planned to expand to no more than eleven squadrons, the plan caused serious attrition and threatened to dangerously undermine efficiency. Nonetheless by 1952 the Indian Air Force numbered fourteen and a half operational squadrons.⁸³

Plan Shikar placed the Government of India into a quandary about air force expansion. The finance and defence ministries clashed in December 1953 about what was to be done about the squadrons, many of which were understrength, brought into existence by Plan Shikar. The finance ministry insisted on reducing the size of the air force in order to ensure that expenditure was kept below thirty five crores. Tellingly, the defence ministry successfully

⁸⁰ Ibid, UKHC Pakistan to CRO, 23 March 1950.

⁸¹ *New York Times*, 'Playing with fire', 29 March 1950 Loc cit TNA, DO 35/2989.

⁸² S.Raghavan, (2010), p 184.

⁸³ MoD(I), 601/14513/H, Expansion of Air Force and Air Force matters.

argued that the results of Plan Shikar needed to be formalised even if it meant greater expenditure since Pakistan had received American military aid and had ordered forty Gloster Meteors from the United Kingdom.⁸⁴ The GoI decision to go ahead with a fifteen squadron expansion of the Indian Air Force taken on 23 December 1953 is illustrative of the increasing militarisation of the Indian state as part of a broader arms race. Less than two months before Plan Shikar was adopted, Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter to his chief ministers had lamented that, 'It is in the long run, impossible for us to spend 50% of our Central budget on Defence.'⁸⁵ Despite the Congress party's ostensible commitment to pacifism with its implications for disarmament, the Bengal crisis had served to wed the party to the state and military.

The decision to expand the IAF to fifteen squadrons in certain ways recalls similar plans from the Second World War. A previous chapter discussed how when confronted with the need for air defences during the Second World War, the colonial GoI had considered expanding the IAF to fifteen squadrons in 1941. Those plans had failed because of a shortage of personnel and experience stemming from India's status as a colony. A little over a decade later, despite the difficulties of partition the Indian Air Force was on its way to reaching the fifteen squadron goal. By then India could also boast a modest aircraft production infrastructure centred on the Hindustan Aircraft Limited (HAL) factory in Bangalore and an armament wing at Kanpur. The first steps towards indigenous aircraft production were taken when HAL designed and produced the HT-2 trainer aircraft in 1953.⁸⁶ That year also saw the total Indianisation of the Indian Air Force as Air Marshall Subroto Mukherjee became the

⁸⁴ Ibid., Statement of case for Defence Council Committee, 22 December 1953; For a detailed breakdown of squadron expansion see: P. Singh, (2007), p 47.

⁸⁵ G. Parthasarathi ed., (1986), p 45.

⁸⁶ MoD(I), 601/14362/H, History of the IAF.

first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the IAF completing the process of Indianisation that had been inaugurated with the founding of the IAF twenty years before.⁸⁷

The 1950 Bengal crisis served to entrench the military's political importance in both India and Pakistan. This was part of a broader trend that I have traced back to the partition riots and the conflict in Kashmir, a trend which in certain ways continues into the present. Subsequent Indian militarisation including the expansion of the Indian Air Force was aimed at preventing the recurrence of threats to the minorities that had so threatened to destabilise the new state. One effect of the militarisation of the Indian state would be felt in 1953 by the civil aviation sector.

⁸⁷ G. Gibbs, *Survivors Story*, (London,1956), p 171.



Squadron-Leader Mehar Singh (left) with Wing-Commander Suboto Mukerji

Image X: Subroto Mukherjee (Right) with the famous Baba Mehar Singh, architect of the Kashmir operations, c 1946. Mukherjee served in the IAF from its inception in 1933 before going on to become the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the IAF in 1953.

III. Nationalisation of Civil Aviation

The nationalisation of aviation in 1953 can justifiably be considered to mark the beginning of a new era in the history of aviation in India. The absorption of Indian aviation companies by the government of independent India marked the near total monopolisation of Indian aviation by the state. With the exception of a few privately owned independent operators, private aircraft and some of the training aircraft at flying clubs aviation in India, all Indian aircraft would belong to the government for the next four decades until the liberalisation of the aircraft industry in 1991.⁸⁸ The reasons for the government takeover of aviation have been widely discussed and written about almost from the moment that it became clear that the state meant to implement nationalisation.⁸⁹ This is partly due to the controversy generated by the decision, partly due to subsequent issues with the state corporations which ran Indian aviation, and partially because of the GoI's own opaque reasoning for the decision. While the discussion that follows will highlight some of the reasons nationalisation happened, it will seek to root nationalisation in its wider historical context and to outline the ways in which nationalisation was implemented. In doing so it will argue that nationalisation was a multi-faceted event with diverse outcomes for different firms depending on their conditions at the time of nationalisation.

Though nationalisation finally occurred in 1953 it had long been under discussion by both the colonial and the independent governments of India. In a letter to J.R.D. Tata as early as October 1944 the legislator F.E. James had mentioned that there 'was strong opinion in the highest quarters' of the government 'in favour of the state operating civil aviation, both

⁸⁸ *Indian Skyways*, 'Independents are essential to National Air Power', December 1955.

⁸⁹ See for instance: *Indian Skyways*, 'Our Nationalised Corporations', August 1955.

internal and external.’⁹⁰ The Second World War had seen modest yet unprecedented state intervention in civil aviation and this had the effect of prompting consideration of nationalisation by the colonial GoI. DGCA Frederick Tymms who had been given special responsibility for post-war planning however decided, after two years of closely studying the Indian civil aviation sector that nationalisation was undesirable since as he would later explain the country was ‘too large to be serviced by a single operator, whether it be the State or private enterprise.’⁹¹ Tymms eponymous plan for post-war civil aviation therefore called for the formation of an Air Transport Licensing Board which would limit the number of operators to ensure private airline profitability with a degree of government regulation. As I have argued in an earlier chapter however the Tymms plan was a victim of the dysfunction that characterised the politics of partition. In the lead up to Indian independence Abdur Rab Nishtar, the Muslim League member for communications of the interim government embarked on a liberal policy of airline license distribution bringing a large number of companies into existence. After partition India found itself with twenty three companies operating only twenty two routes between them.⁹² This severely damaged the profitability of the Indian airline sector and would eventually help justify nationalisation. For the moment however despite the ongoing reversal of the Tymms plan the interim government decided to forgo nationalisation.

This was not easy given the prevailing political sentiment of the time which favoured the nationalisation of all industries. Nationalisation was seen as a natural outcome of Indian independence and had been enshrined as an important objective of the nationalist politics.

⁹⁰ TCA, T-53-DES-AVI-T9-4, F.E. James to JRD Tata, 11 October 1944.

⁹¹ *ToI*, 8 May 1947.

⁹² BL, IOR/L/E/8/6561, Progress of Civil Aviation in India, 7 June 1948.

The Congress party for instance, had pledged in its election manifesto of 1946 to bring all industry under state control and it was not uncommon for Indian politicians at the time to call for the nationalisation of everything from transportation to land.⁹³ Much of the ardour for nationalisation sprang from the very vagueness of the term. Confronted by enthusiastic calls for the nationalisation of aviation on 16 November 1946, the communications member Abdur Rab Nishtar revealingly expressed his support for the principle of nationalisation but pointed out that his fellow legislators were simply not too clear on what they meant by it. Did nationalisation mean strict state control or did it mean state control along with state investment? Did it mean a completely state owned service or did it mean private domestic airlines and state owned external services?⁹⁴ A week before Vallabhai Patel, the Home member had had to stanch demands that airlines be nationalised by pointing out that the interim government had not had the time to consider the nationalisation of aviation.⁹⁵ Future events driven partly by the failure of the Tymms plan would however strengthen calls for nationalisation.

The losses caused to the aircraft sector by the abandonment of the Tymms plan were exacerbated by the partition of the subcontinent which resulted in the loss of the critical Karachi route. The refugee evacuation operations and the Kashmir operations offered Indian airline companies some respite but this was short lived as losses began to mount in 1948. J.R.D. Tata, who had always been one of the Tymms plan's most ardent advocates, argued that one way in which the Government of India might have chosen to end the civil aviation sector's crisis might have been to permit 'the process of contraction' to take its course until

⁹³ *ToI*, 28 September 1948; Congress Election Manifesto, *Our Industrial Policy*, (New Delhi, 1951), p 3.

⁹⁴ *ToI*, 18 November 1946.

⁹⁵ *ToI*, 9 November 1946.

only those companies survived that could make a profit.⁹⁶ Tata's sanguine view of the affair no doubt sprang from the fact that he ran one of the most well established airlines which in turn was part of one of India's largest business empires. The imperatives that led the Government to in 1949 grant ten year licenses to the new airline operators who had thus far been running on provisional licenses are unclear. Tata claimed that government was unwilling to face the political costs of the airline company failure while at least one scholar has suggested that the move was prompted by Nehru-led government's socialistic views.⁹⁷ It is possible to argue that the decision might well have been driven by extra-business concerns. The large pool of aeroplanes that the airline companies represented had served the government of India during the partition crisis and the Kashmir conflict and the government might well have been reluctant to liquidate these companies through the withholding of ten year licenses. Whatever the case, the effect of the grant of ten year licenses effectively implicated the independent Indian government in the decision made by Abdur Rab Nishtar abandoning the Tymms plan.

The government cast about for means to address the deteriorating condition of the civil aviation sector. By mid-1948 Ambica Airlines and Jupiter airlines were bankrupt.⁹⁸ Small rises in fares were permitted, customs duties on aviation fuel were reduced, and aircraft were permitted to carry greater loads. When these proved to have a limited impact the Ministry of Communications decided in October 1948 that the best way to aid aviation was to charter airlines for the carriage of mail. At a meeting on 12 January 1949 however airline operators who had sent in bids for the charter scheme were told that plans for the scheme had been

⁹⁶ J.R.D. Tata, 'The story of Air Transport', p 9.

⁹⁷ Idem; B.R. Nayar, (1994), p 56.

⁹⁸ R.M. Lala, (1992), p 135.

dropped by the government. Instead the government envisioned a night air mail scheme and invited bids from companies to operate on the Bombay to New Delhi route.⁹⁹ Three days later companies were informed that the Ministry of Communications planned to expand the Night air mail scheme to include the two new routes of Bombay-Nagpur-Calcutta and Delhi-Nagpur-Madras. Shockingly, this news was accompanied by the announcement that the two new routes had already been awarded by the ministry to Indian Overseas Airlines (IOA) Limited. Despite protests from other operators about the ‘irregularity in the procedure adopted for granting a license to IOA’ without seeking tenders, the night air mail scheme commenced on 31 January.¹⁰⁰

The decision to grant IOA routes on the night air mail most likely sprang from the fact that the company was willing to operate on terms no other company would. This was largely as a consequence of the fact that the airline was in the process of going bankrupt.¹⁰¹ By granting IOA the night air mail route licenses the government simultaneously kept costs within what it considered reasonable limits and also simultaneously ensured that it had greater control of the scheme. This reflected independent Indian government’s contradictory imperatives to simultaneously seek to aid the airline sector, which was facing heavy losses, and curb what it saw as capitalistic excess. A strong element of anti-capitalism characterised the discourse of the Congress party before and after independence.¹⁰² The government was keen to prevent taxpayer Rupees from subsidising private enterprise while at the same time recognising the

⁹⁹ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-T9-5-PG-76, Night Air Mail.

¹⁰⁰ *Idem.*,

¹⁰¹ J.R.D. Tata, ‘The story of Air Transport’, p 10.

¹⁰² The party also had a number of members friendly to capital the foremost of whom was Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhai Patel. Nevertheless anti-capitalism was a highly popular idea at the time of independence. For a nuanced study of the relations between the Congress party and private enterprise. M. Misra, *Business, Race and Politics in British India 1850-1960*, (Oxford, 1999), p 185; Also see: A. Mukherjee, *Imperialism, Nationalism and the Making of the Indian Capitalist Class 1920-47*, (London, 2002).

need to keep civil aviation functional in the national interest. This would, as will be seen, become a key source of contention between communications minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and J.R.D. Tata.

Another scheme conceived of by Rafi Ahmed Kidwai was the carriage of all mail by air using the night air mail scheme. Under the All-Up Night Air Mail Scheme, which built on routes first used by the night mail scheme, Indian airline companies would fly aircraft from the four metropolises of Calcutta, Madras, Delhi and Bombay to converge at Nagpur where the planes would exchange mail before either flying on to another city or flying back from their point of entry. According to Kidwai the scheme would serve two purposes. By aligning all post from the metropolises it would ensure that letters posted in the evening reached their destination by the next morning. It would also attract more traffic to the airlines which were suffering from an excess of capacity.¹⁰³ The scheme was in certain ways not unlike the All-Up Empire Air Mail scheme which had also been an attempt by the state, in that instance the British government, to prop up failing air services. Like the All-Up Empire air mail scheme the All-Up Night Mail scheme was doomed to failure.

Indian Overseas Airlines which had been flying the Night Air Mail, commenced the All-Up Night Air Mail on 1 April 1949. By 14 May IOA, which had been facing bankruptcy, dropped out of the scheme as the company went into liquidation.¹⁰⁴ Indian National Airways and Deccan Airways, in which the Indian government had taken over the Hyderabad government's majority shares, stepped in to take over IOA's routes on a temporary basis pending agreement between the communications ministry and airline companies.

¹⁰³ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-T9-5-PG-61, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai to J.R.D. Tata, 29 September 1949.

¹⁰⁴ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-T9-5-PG-76, Night Air Mail.

Subsequent attempts at negotiating the takeover of the All-Up Night air mail scheme by airline companies were the cause of disagreement between the government and airline operators. Much of this was due to the arbitrary behavior of the communications ministry.

Even as IOA was showing signs of failing, communications minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai summoned Air India's Delhi representative, Sir Gurunath Bewoor, and proposed that the airline take over the service. When Bewoor asked for time for Air India to respond to the ministers proposal, he was told that the decision would have to be taken immediately. Negotiations broke down when Bewoor insisted that he could not do this since the company's board was located in Bombay. Similar negotiations between the government and other operators including Air Services of India, Indian National Airways and Deccan Airways also collapsed over the summer of 1949.¹⁰⁵

An acrimonious exchange of letters followed between J.R.D. Tata and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai which is revealing of their opposing views. Tata had always been at the forefront of opposition to the Night Mail scheme since he felt that Indian aviation was simply not prepared to safely fly night mail in 1949. From the economic perspective too Tata felt that the scheme had not been well thought out by government. Tata excoriated Kidwai's suggestion that a Dakota carrying mail at fifty percent capacity could hope to make a profit, since even a Dakota fully loaded with mail was likely to make a loss. Further, the entire night scheme failed to meet its stated purpose which was to subsidise the civil aviation sector, since it diverted the mails that were being carried by day to the night services. Tata would argue that this purpose would have been better achieved by simply transferring several day services

¹⁰⁵ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-T9-5-PG-09 Air India File F 35, Extract from note prepared by Sir G.V.B. Bewoor.

into night services.¹⁰⁶ Kidwai in turn felt that Sir Gurunath Bewoor had been most unhelpful in the matter of organising an alternative to IOA's All-Up Night Mail Service. Bewoor had earlier criticised T.P. Bhalla the Director General of Civil Aviation and a key supporter of Kidwai for claiming that the All-Up airmail scheme paid the companies 'something like 65 lakhs a year' whereas according to him Air India made one and a half lakhs a month.¹⁰⁷ Further, Kidwai accused Bewoor of organising a 'Combine' of the operating companies to resist government's attempts to lowering down the charges.¹⁰⁸ Attempts to reconcile the commercial interests of airline companies with state support in the period after independence were clearly not successful. The Tata-Kidwai exchange, the Bewoor-Kidwai meeting, and the decision to hand IOA the Night mail license hint at a state that regarded airline operators as adversaries and prized government control.

As conditions in the airline industry worsened rather than improved, due to the All-Up Night Air Mail scheme, the government appointed an inquiry committee in February 1950 to look into ways to salvage an industry that was increasingly becoming a national embarrassment. The Rajadhyaksha Air Transport Inquiry Committee (ATIC), named after the retired chief justice who headed it, blamed the deterioration of the Indian civil aviation sector on the licensing of too many companies.¹⁰⁹ It called for the rationalisation of the airline sector through the merging of smaller companies and the non-renewal of licenses for those companies which had no hope of attaining profitability.¹¹⁰ As I have argued in a previous chapter and several contemporary observers pointed out, the ATIC effectively upheld the

¹⁰⁶ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-T9-5-PG-62, J.R.D. Tata to Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, 30 September 1949.

¹⁰⁷ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-A2-2, All Up Mail scheme.

¹⁰⁸ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-T9-5-PG-61, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai to J.R.D. Tata, 29 September 1949.

¹⁰⁹ NMML, G. Rajadhyaksha et al, Report of the Air Transport Enquiry Committee 1950, (New Delhi, 1950), p 13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp 15-17.

post-war Tymms plan which had been abandoned by both the interim and independent governments of India. The report also considered nationalisation at length before arguing against it. The ATIC held that there was no correlation between nationalisation and improved airline performance and that nationalisation ought to be postponed at least five years. If nationalisation was eventually embarked upon, then airlines ought to be placed under a statutory corporation with extremely limited government intervention. While private airlines ought to be carefully regulated through the Air Transport Licensing Board, they should also receive subsidies until they were able to attain profitability, something the report acknowledged was likely to take years given the state of the Indian airline sector.¹¹¹ The ATIC's recommendations that the airline industry be subsidised and that state control be limited was not calculated to receive the support of the government. Less than two years later the GoI began the formal process of nationalisation.

The question of why the Indian government nationalised airlines is one of the most fraught in the history of aviation in independent India. Indeed focus on the motivations behind nationalisation has served to detract from the other aspects of nationalisation. Part of the reason for this excessive speculation is the politically charged nature of the decision which touched on the question of the relationship between the state and private enterprise. The nationalisation of aviation has rarely been examined as historically contingent, but has rather become a talking point in the broader discussions of the merits of nationalisation versus privatisation.¹¹² Nevertheless it is worthwhile dwelling briefly on the rationale for nationalisation. Explaining the decision to nationalise in Parliament on 20 April 1953, the

¹¹¹ Ibid., p 27.

¹¹² Present day excoriations of nationalisation as an unmitigated failure born of governmental overreach ironically echo past criticisms of private enterprise as an anachronism. See for instance A.W. Nawab, (1967).

day of the debate on the issue, India's third communications minister Jagjivan Ram outlined four major imperatives driving nationalisation. Firstly, the state could rationalise the assets of the different airlines under the umbrella of a single domestic state run airline. Secondly, state control would permit better use of air assets for defence. Thirdly, air transport was a national asset which ought to be developed by the state free of the imperative of profit that governed private industries. Fourthly, that the rising costs of aviation meant that only the state had resources adequate to keep Indian aviation's technological edge.¹¹³

J.R.D. Tata subsequently argued that the government had found it politically expeditious to implement nationalisation.¹¹⁴ Certainly there was an appetite for nationalised aviation in political circles, though as I have pointed out this dated to the period before independence. Panduranga Rao has shown for instance how the first five year plan suggested that the airline sector ought to be pruned through nationalisation in the interests of economy.¹¹⁵ Baldev Nayar meanwhile has argued that the socialist predisposition of the government meant that aviation had always been a certainty and that its implementation was inevitable.¹¹⁶ Nayar states that the death of Vallabhai Patel, who had resisted earlier attempts to nationalise aviation, cleared the path for a decision that he perhaps rightly attributes ultimately to Nehru. This is probably true, though it is also fair to point out that Patel was successfully able in large measure to oppose nationalisation because it had yet to take concrete shape in 1946.

The nationalisation decision was most likely motivated by several factors including the ones above. Much has also been made of the perceived abandonment of the ATIC report's

¹¹³ V.B. Singh ed, (1965), p 365.

¹¹⁴ J.R.D. Tata, 'The story of Air Transport', p 13.

¹¹⁵ P. Rao & G Rao, (1997), p 82.

¹¹⁶ B.R. Nayar, (1994), p 56.

recommendations. Other factors that have often been marginalised in the debate are worth highlighting however. While the ATIC report validated the Tymms plan it also did not necessarily condemn all of independent India's aviation policy decisions. The report's recommendation for the establishment of trunk routes connecting Hyderabad, Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta was remarkably similar to the Night Air Mail Scheme.¹¹⁷ Moreover, while the committee's call for nationalisation with a statutory corporation was not heeded by the GoI, the suggestion for the establishment of a state run corporation which evolved to include two corporations was eventually adopted. Arguably the most neglected of the government's reasons for nationalising aviation however is Jagjivan Ram's claim that state run corporations would be better able to respond to national emergencies, especially those pertaining to defence. The government's decision making after independence was opaque. The GoI did not, for instance explain why it had not implemented the Rajaadhyaksha report. Yet given the historical context in which Jagjivan Ram was tasked with implementing nationalisation it is not difficult to see why defence factored in as a key reason for nationalisation. I have argued elsewhere that the lines between civil and military aviation in a poor state with limited aviation resources were blurred. Civil aircraft had over the first five years of Indian independence alone played a key role in the evacuation of refugees from West Pakistan in 1947 and East Pakistan in 1950 as well as been critical to the ferrying of troops to Kashmir.¹¹⁸ Civil aircraft had also played a critical role in the military led flood relief operations in Assam in 1951. The First Five Year Plan which had taken forward the recommendations pertaining to nationalisation of the ATIC, had explicitly pointed to the role of civil aircraft 'in the

¹¹⁷ NMML, G. Rajadhyaksha et al, Report of the Air Transport Enquiry Committee 1950, (New Delhi, 1950), p 14.

¹¹⁸ See for instance: B. Kumar, (2007).

evacuation after partition and in West Bengal and Assam in 1949-1950.’¹¹⁹ Significantly it also stated that, ‘...the defence aspect of civil aviation should not be lost sight of.’¹²⁰ Total control of aviation would significantly increase the state’s ability to project power.

The debate on nationalisation in parliament on 20 April 1953 was remarkable for its lack of debate on whether aviation ought to be nationalised. Instead Jagjivan Ram was assailed from multiple directions for the perceived pro-capitalist bias of the nationalisation bill. Communist members of the house, representing the main opposition party in independent India, expressed their anger at what they considered to be a bill that was not true nationalisation.¹²¹ They also demanded that the state ought not to compensate airline companies since their property was being expropriated for the national good. Even Congress members were outraged by the shape of nationalisation, in large part because it left J.R.D. Tata in charge of Indian international aviation.¹²² This was because nationalisation had over the five years from Indian independence evolved from a ‘salutary principle’ to a concrete act; the Air Corporations Act 1953.

The principle of nationalisation as I have shown was popular with both the colonial and independent governments of India. Much of this popularity stemmed from the ambiguity of what nationalisation would entail. When the decision to nationalise was taken in early 1952, sometime after the First Five year Plan, the final form that nationalisation would take was the object of intense discussion. As the report of the British civil aviation adviser noted as late as January 1953, ‘The most striking feature here is firm determination of the government

¹¹⁹ ‘First Five Year Plan, Government of India’, <http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/1st/1planch31.html> accessed 5/3/2017.

¹²⁰ Idem.,

¹²¹ *House of the People, Parliamentary Debates: Official Report*, (New Delhi, 1953), pp 4635-36

¹²² *Times of India*, 19 May 1953.

to nationalise and its complete weakness in settling the methods of nationalisation.’¹²³ Initially the GoI intended to follow the advice of the Planning commission and set up a single state airline that would run both internal and external air routes. However J.R.D. Tata was able to have a strong say on the matter as the Nehru led government hoped to retain him as the Chairman of the Corporation despite his strong resistance to nationalisation. Consequently, Tata insisted that he could only serve as Chairman if two corporations were established, one for foreign and the other for domestic flights. He would then serve as the Chairman of the foreign corporation which would effectively mean that he would serve as the head of Air India International, since it was the largest external service.¹²⁴ The implementation of nationalisation, a policy with strong anti-capitalist undertones, was thus significantly influenced by the scion of one of India’s largest business families.

The Air Corporations Act 1953 brought into existence two corporations. Air India International would consist of the previously established company of the same name and Bharat Airways’ Far Eastern service. It would, as its name indicated, serve as India’s international flag carrier. India’s domestic needs would be served by Indian Airlines Corporation which would absorb eight domestic airlines; Deccan Airways, Airways India, Bharat Airways, Himalayan Aviation, Kalinga Airlines, Indian National Airways, Air Services India and Air India. With 99 aircraft it was one of the largest domestic airlines in Asia. Government would eventually pay out 6.2 crores in compensation to shareholders.¹²⁵ Jagjivan Ram had hoped to pass the nationalisation bill in time for the Corporations to be inaugurated on 1 April 1953. Parliamentary delays however meant that the Corporations were

¹²³ DO 35/ 4919, Confidential report, January 1953.

¹²⁴ *Idem.*,

¹²⁵ V.B. Singh ed, (1965), p 364.

only inaugurated on 1 August 1953.¹²⁶ At a large ceremony attended by the minister of communications and a large number of members of Parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharal Nehru was to press an electronic switch that would unveil a curtain on a former Indian National Airways Dakota aeroplane. Behind the curtain were the words 'Indian Airlines'. When Nehru pressed the button however there was no parting of the curtains. It took some time for the realisation that the button was not in fact connected with electricity. With this mistake rectified Nehru officially completed the ceremony that would make aviation into a state monopoly for the next four decades.¹²⁷

Nationalisation had different consequences for India's airlines and their employees. The question of compensation had been a vexatious one from the time the GoI had seriously begun considering nationalisation. Airline companies led by J.R.D. Tata attempted to resist nationalisation but when it became clear that this would not be possible began to look into the best deal that they could extract from the government. Airline companies mostly sought the costs of their equipment at international market rates and compensation for business lost. However the government countered that their equipment could not be sold abroad due to government restrictions and that it would have few buyers domestically. Indian airline companies were offered the cost price of their equipment minus eighteen percent a year in depreciation.¹²⁸ There is some evidence to show that larger companies were better able to confront nationalisation. The most famous example was Air India International which retained its name, its chairman, its personnel, its equipment and even its mascot; the iconic Maharaja. Others however also might have had opportunities to adapt to nationalisation.

¹²⁶ DO 35/ 4919, Confidential report, August 1953.

¹²⁷ *Idem.*,

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, January 1953

Deccan Airways had functioned as a semi-nationalised company ever since the government of India had taken over the controlling stake that the independent Hyderabad government had exercised in the company.¹²⁹ For the pilots of Indian National Airways the prospect of better pay and benefits as a consequence of becoming government employees after nationalisation was appealing.¹³⁰ Smaller companies however received aviation with less enthusiasm. The compensation which government was offering airlines would cause substantial losses for smaller operators like Himalayan aviation whose total capital amounted to only ten lakh Rupees.¹³¹ With depreciation rates for compensation fixed at 18 percent the company's shareholders would be unable to recoup even their initial investments. Consequently, while larger companies attempted to maintain their air fleets in an attempt to get the largest possible compensation, smaller operators adopted a policy resembling scorched earth whereby equipment maintenance was discontinued so that government would inherit barely functional aircraft after nationalisation.¹³² Even when companies did receive adequate compensation, the results were likely to be mixed. Air India for instance received 284 lakh Rupees in bonds from the government after a long negotiation in October 1954. This included government compensation for losses between January and August when the uncertainty caused by nationalisation drove stock prices down. Despite granting compensation however the GoI withheld the payment of salaries for the period when Air India staff had been on leave.¹³³ The process of distributing government compensation to shareholders would then drag on well beyond 1955.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ A. Reddy, (2001), p 157.

¹³⁰ DO 35/ 4919, Confidential report, August 1953.

¹³¹ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-T9-5-PG-91, Extract from meeting of the ATLB, 3 January 1950.

¹³² DO 35/ 4919, Confidential report, August 1953.

¹³³ TCA, JRDT AVI A2 4-TA AI 29, Extract from minutes of the agents meeting, 15 December 1954.

¹³⁴ TCA, T53-DES-AVI-A2-2-PG-15, Air India Limited to Shareholders, 6 May 1955.

Nationalisation's varied results for the two air corporations were widely recognised even at the time.¹³⁵ Air India International substantially retained its identity and structure and after nationalisation continued to remain one of the leading Asian airlines.¹³⁶ Indeed J.R.D. Tata was able to use the airline's monopoly on external services and his own close links to the government to win concessions at the cost of Indian Air Lines Corporation. Santa Cruz airport, for instance, was reserved exclusively for Air India International aircraft despite its obvious importance for the domestic airline.¹³⁷ Air India International would remain internationally competitive for the next two decades partly because of the state support that J.R.D. Tata could expect to enjoy. Indian Airlines Corporation (IAC) in contrast would go on to make losses for several years and become something of an example of government mismanagement.¹³⁸ This was in large part due to the twin problems of integration and management. Whereas Air India International consisted overwhelmingly of the personnel and equipment of the pre-nationalisation corporation of the same name, IAC had to integrate nine different airlines with their varied equipment into one corporation. This merger, difficult as it was, might well have been achieved since early nationalisation plans after all called for the merging of all of India's airline companies. However matters were complicated by poor state management. The first five year plan had called for nationalisation to occur but for the state to limit its involvement in any corporation.¹³⁹ This principle was duly abandoned by a government for which much of the reason for nationalisation was the imposition of closer state control. As a result of this the Indian Airlines Corporation would go on to become a

¹³⁵ *Indian Skyways*, 'Our Nationalised Corporations', August 1955.

¹³⁶ D. Shaftel, 'Karachi to Bombay to Calcutta', *Air and Space Magazine*, November 2011.
<http://www.airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/karachi-to-bombay-to-calcutta-77003851/> accessed 5/03/2017.

¹³⁷ *Indian Skyways*, 'Indian Airline Corporation's finances', August 1955.

¹³⁸ *Indian Skyways*, 'Be fair to the "IAC"', October 1955.

¹³⁹ 'First Five Year Plan, Government of India',
<http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/1st/1planch31.html> accessed 5/3/2017.

byword for crippling bureaucratic mismanagement. The losses incurred by IAC have since been the subject of much of the analysis of nationalisation, to the detriment of historicising the process.

Nationalisation was meant to serve as a means to standardise the chaotic organisation of Indian civil aviation which involved a number of competing airlines operating different equipment. Instead it served to sweep away a number of smaller companies, many of which were likely to have been liquidated in a few years because they could not afford to upgrade to newer, larger and costlier aircraft. A focus on the consequences and causes of nationalisation however fails to situate it in its historically contingent context. Nationalisation was popular with the colonial government, the composite Muslim League-Congress interim government and the independent Congress led government in ways that few policies have been. Indeed it is not an exaggeration to state that nationalisation was internationally popular, the United Kingdom to which India looked for guidance on aviation matter had continued to maintain nationalised airlines in the period after the Second World War.¹⁴⁰ Indian airline companies were nationalised for a variety of reasons not the least of which was their vast defence potential. Narratives of nationalisation have thus far tended to focus on how the failures of Indian aviation led to its takeover by the state. It is possible however to make the opposite argument as well. Indian airline companies might well have been victims of their success in serving the state in emergencies. As I have argued through much of this thesis, the services of Indian airline companies in multiple crises from partition to the 1950 Bengal evacuations helped defend the interests of the state. If aircraft had not been available during partition, in the Kashmir operations, and the 1950 Bengal crisis the political and humanitarian

¹⁴⁰ See for instance: R. Higham, *Speedbird*, (London, 1974).

cost would have been immense. The possibility of totally controlling extremely valuable assets for state security was very attractive to the Government of India and ought to be taken seriously in writing on the subject.

IV. Conclusion

The half decade after Indian independence was formative for both Indian aviation and the state. For Indian aviation the period was one of contradiction. Indian aviation after the war had boomed, yet by 1950, was in a state of severe decline. It was simultaneously more international than ever and subject to nationalisation. Much of this contradiction is explained by the expansion of the independent state in its quest for sovereignty both domestically and abroad. In 1948 India was a state that had just emerged from a confrontation with Pakistan and the partition of the subcontinent. By 1953 the government of India had effectively imposed its control over private enterprise in the field of aviation and also completed the Indianisation of the Indian Air Force. Three moments in the history of aviation enable us to trace the transformation of India from newly independent dominion to increasingly confident republic; the establishment of Air India in 1948, the 1950 Bengal crisis and the nationalisation of airlines in 1953.

Taken together the three moments reveal that independent India exercised sovereignty on three interconnected levels. Internationally India emphasised its status as an independent nation-state in a world order that solely recognised nation-states. In doing so India was not distinct from other nation-states and it is possible to make a case for the fact that Indian sovereignty at this level, at least within the field of aviation, sprang from the actions of other states such as Canada which had sought to undermine the old imperial order. Regionally

India defined itself in opposition to Pakistan. The two states were ruled by governments whose parties had disagreements that preceded independence. After independence an inter-party dispute was transformed into a military rivalry. Both the Congress and the Muslim League sought to legitimise their opposing ideological visions with the full paraphernalia of statehood, the most obvious of which was the military. The overwhelming superiority of the Indian Air Force in particular and the Indian military in general effectively forced Liaquat Ali Khan to cleave to Jawaharlal Nehru's demands and in doing so formally resolved the minorities issue. Imposing its will on Pakistan and functioning as an independent nation state on the world stage deepened the Congress led government's pre-existing preference for centrality. Domestically therefore the independent Indian state sought to maximise centralisation. The importance of aircraft in serving the state through multiple crises and its potential for projecting state power set the Indian government down a path that would culminate in the nationalisation of private airline companies. This inaugurated a new era for Indian aviation; four decades of state control.

Conclusion: India and the aeroplane

To write a national history of the aeroplane is to write a history of the unevenness of the adoption of the nation-state model that emerged after the Second World War. Decades before independence, the aeroplane, with its potential for violence, was tied in Indian minds to conceptualisations of national sovereignty. Indian politicians would argue repeatedly, during the years leading up to the Second World War, that control of aviation was an essential prerequisite for the realisation of sovereignty. The colonial Government of India (GoI) however had no intention of truly conceding sovereignty to Indians. As Achille Mbembe has pointed out, colonial sovereignty rested ultimately on violence meaning that the maintenance of military control was essential for continued colonial rule.¹ This meant that while Indian nationalists were able to extract limited concessions, such as the establishment of a small Indian Air Force, from the GoI, control of the Indian military remained firmly in British hands until 1939.

The Second World War weakened British military control in India, fatally weakening colonial rule. Confronted with the existential threat of an air war for which it was not prepared, the GoI would take the radical decision to concede military control to Indians by recruiting Indians in unprecedented numbers into the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF). While this helped the British Empire win the Second World War, it came at the cost of undermining colonial military control. The rapid expansion of the Indian Air Force resulted in widespread ‘strikes’ following the war. Combined with widespread indiscipline in the Indian armed

¹ A. Mbembe, (2001), p 25. I am aware of several of the ideological justifications for colonialism, the most relevant for the purposes of this thesis was an increasing reliance on developmentalism. Nevertheless my research supports Mbembe’s contention that colonial sovereignty was reliant ultimately on violence for its maintenance. See: T. R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, (Cambridge, 1995); B. Zachariah, (2005).

forces and the Royal Air Force the strikes revealed the extent to which Britain's ability to maintain colonial rule in India had been eroded and contributed to the decision to grant India independence. Nonetheless British planners expected Britain to play a continued central role in South Asia. The British government expected India and Pakistan to serve as its allies in the context of the Cold War, retaining colonial India's role as a British barracks and strategic outpost. This expectation sprang from the belief that the new dominions would continue to remain dependent on the United Kingdom for equipment, personnel and training, especially for their air forces. British planners therefore focused on enabling the establishment of large centralised states in South Asia that could serve British military needs. A key consequence of this was the decision not to support the bid of the Indian princely states for independence. Not only did the British government prevent princely states from asserting their independence but it was also complicit in helping the dominions to forcibly integrate them where necessary. In the case of Hyderabad for instance, the British government not only prevented the state from recruiting retired Royal Air Force personnel to set up its own air force but also actively legitimated an Indian blockade of the state. This was in stark contrast to its stance on the 1947 Kashmir war, during which it pressured India to rein in military moves against Pakistan. This effectively made invisible violence aimed at consolidating the nation-state, as long as it was not directed at other nation-states.

Another major factor behind the coercion and violence unleashed against the princely states by independent India was the commitment of the new state's ruling party, the Congress, to centralising power. The Congress party's commitment to centralisation had been strong before independence. This commitment to centralisation was further deepened by an existential crisis during which it had been forced to rely on the military; Partition violence.

If, as seen above, the Second World War had politicised the Indian military it also militarised Indian politics. Sectarian militias using sophisticated military tactics led campaigns of mass violence against the minorities that threatened to overwhelm the new Indian state. In order to re-establish its monopoly on violence, the Indian state mobilised high technology such as tanks and aircraft. The Royal Indian Air Force played an important role in the restoration of order by ferrying supplies, performing reconnaissance and protecting refugee columns on the ground. Aircraft were also used for the critical task of effectively constituting the governments of the two new states by evacuating government employees stranded in the wrong dominion, necessary to expedite the transfer of populations. The chaos of partition and subsequent reliance of the state on technology to restore order served to confirm the Congress party's belief in centralisation. It also led to the paradoxical entrenchment of the Indian Air Force under a ruling party that prided itself on its commitment to non-violence.

Even as it continued to grapple with the problems of Partition, the new Indian state was plunged into a conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir. The 1947 Kashmir war is remarkable primarily for the degree to which it was an exercise in escalation management. As India and Pakistan pressed their claims to the princely state of Kashmir they were careful to prevent the eruption of a full scale war that was certain to prove ruinous for both sides. The shortage of aircraft, both civil and military, with which the Indian government could prosecute the conflict meant that New Delhi relied heavily on prioritisation and improvisation to ensure the fulfilment of its political goals. The ways in which aircraft were used therefore is indicative India's wartime political goals and more broadly its notions of sovereignty. RIAF air crews were saddled with numerous regulations to prevent them from escalating the conflict in any way which might be viewed as an Indian violation of Pakistani sovereignty.

While these regulations sprang from both Indian fears of a wider conflict and from serious international pressure they are also revealing of an Indian recognition of the sovereignty of Pakistan, springing from its status as a sovereign nation-state. The Kashmir war also effectively ended British hopes that India and Pakistan would provide for its military needs. India and Pakistan turned against each other putting an end to hopes that the two countries would become close allies after independence.

The role of aviation in Partition and the 1947 Kashmir war is revealing of the ruptures that characterised the end of colonial rule. Though scholars like Partha Chatterjee have emphasised the continuities between the colonial and independent governments of India, the history of aviation points to the emergence of both new self-conceptions and institutions in independent India.² The post-independence Royal Indian Air Force, for instance, was shorn of most of its Muslim personnel and featured new headquarters. Moreover, the Indian state exhibited radically new notions of sovereignty which privileged the nation-state as the sole legitimate repository of sovereignty. Independent India sought to project what I have termed 'deep sovereignty' which refused to accept any mediating authorities between itself and its citizens. As such it proved willing to use violence, including in the form of the Royal Indian Air Force, to compel princely states to integrate.

The governments of the Indian states had anticipated the possibility of friction with an independent government and taken various measures to strengthen their positions in any constitutional settlement.³ The princes had played an important part in the Second World War and had contributed heavily to the air war in order to extract concessions from the

² P. Chatterjee, (1997), p 203.

³ See: I. Copland, (1997).

British. They had also moved, in the period before independence, to cement claims to their modernity and therefore their legitimacy by investing in modern technologies such as aviation. The governments of the Indian states displayed a keen understanding of both the ideological and the strategic dimensions of aviation. The collapse of the princely order in the face of new nation states following independence is indicative less of the competence of the governments of the Indian states than it is of the contingency of the process of decolonisation.

As noted above a key reason for the rapid integration of the princely states by independent India was the support extended to the latter by the British. However the British privileging of nation-states over older forms of sovereignty was also a consequence of broader global shifts. The Second World War brought into existence a new global order enshrined in the United Nations constituted by formally equal nation-states. The new international order heavily privileged the nation-state as the sole legitimate repository of national authority and did little to accommodate alternative state structures such as that of the Indian princely states. There was therefore, for instance, little concern in the United Nations following the Indian invasion of Hyderabad in contrast to the immense interest caused by the Kashmir war.⁴ In the world of aviation this trend was represented by the decision taken at the 1944 Chicago Conference that international air routes would be negotiated through bilateral agreements between sovereign states. This decision's consequences profoundly reshaped the ways in which air space was territorialised and led eventually to the decision by the British government to encourage the Indian government to set up its own airlines in order to ensure that it retained access to important air routes. After independence the Indian government would rapidly embark on a number of negotiations in order to ensure it secured reciprocal

⁴ M. Witmer, *The 1947-48 India-Hyderabad Conflict*, (unpublished thesis, Temple University), 1995, p 316.

rights with countries that used its air routes. Despite the newly independent government's deep distrust of the intentions of wealthier western states as well as its zealous commitment to safeguarding its rights the shortcomings of the new world of nation-states became rapidly apparent. Formal equality between mutually recognised sovereign states served merely to paper over the deep asymmetries in wealth that characterised the new international order. India could therefore seek safeguards and strictly regulate its international aviation agreements but the best that this could accomplish was to protect India's tiny international aviation sector from being overwhelmed by foreign competition. Significantly formally equal nation-states behaved in remarkably similar ways when confronted with power asymmetries. Indian negotiators took much the same stance with Pakistan as British negotiators had with India, offering safeguards secure in the knowledge that the poorer state would not be able to compete with them. Significantly independent India would make a failed bid to assume the mantle of its colonial predecessor as regional hegemon by seeking concessions to treat all of South Asia as a domestic air route.

The history of aviation in India points to the contingent nature of decolonisation. The transformation of the British Raj into two centralised nation-states following the Second World War was an outcome of a unique confluence of factors. British Cold War calculations, Congress centripetalism and the emergence of a world order based on formally equal nation states together contributed to the triumph of the nation-state in South Asia. This triumph was far from an inevitability. As Tarak Barkawi will argue, in an upcoming book on the Indian army, colonial India belonged to a global order in which the nation-state was the exception rather than the rule. Indeed the period before the Second World War was characterised by

multi-ethnic empires in which sovereignty could be ordered in a variety of ways.⁵ The emergence of the nation-state in India therefore was occasioned by a series of complex factors, several of which were not immediately apparent at the time.

The triumph of the nation state is perhaps nowhere represented better than in the decision to nationalise airline companies in 1953, a decision driven by the belief that the central government was well placed to preside over the airline sector. To be sure it was a decision driven by a series of complex interlinked factors not the least of which was the proven importance of aviation for national defence. Nevertheless the nationalisation of Indian airline companies is also revealing of an optimistic belief in the capabilities of the modern nation-state bordering on triumphalism. Conversely it is representative of the recognition of the importance of the aeroplane to projecting and legitimating state power.

The year 1953 marks the beginning of a new era in Indian aviation serving as a convenient climax for both civil and military aviation. Indian civil aviation was largely nationalised effectively rendering Indian aviation as whole, with a few relatively less significant exceptions, into a state monopoly. The Indian Air Force meanwhile achieved total Indianisation with the departure of the last British commander-in-chief Gerald Gibbs. The next four decades tell a complicated story that is equal parts about the triumph of the state sponsored technological progress, as seen with the production of the indigenously built Marut jet aircraft, as well as about state mismanagement as seen in the case of the Indian Airlines

⁵ T. Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, (Cambridge, expected date of publication: June 2017), p 8. Other scholars have also echoed this view. Faisal Devji has shown how Indian political philosophers in the period before the Second World War considered the nation-state to be an unsatisfactory model around which to organise an independent Indian polity because of its exclusionary nature. Indeed the colonial period permitted more expansive thinking on the nature of the state due to the necessarily multiethnic nature of Empire. See: F. Devji, (2013), p 71.

Corporation.⁶ Given the lack of attention paid to Indian aviation by academic historians this is a story that remains to be told. Moreover, work on post-1953 developments in aviation until now would have been affected by the obvious lacuna in studies of the period preceding it. Whatever the case, the history of Indian aviation remains a rich field for research of which this thesis is the first example.

⁶ D. Edgerton, (2006), p 125.

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