Bound 'together by the golden thread of a common tradition'?

Decolonisation and the complex British relationships of South Asian Leaders

Keywords

Decolonisation, British, South Asian, Leaders, Education

Abstract

Accounts of the British transfer of power in South Asia have often emphasised the British educational and formative experiences of post-Independence leaders. We argue that it was these figures' very engagement with British education and culture that helps to explain why the British were unable to achieve their strategic objectives during the process of decolonisation. Our article develops this argument by attending to symbolic meaning in the words of those who came to power at the end of British rule in South Asia. We examine speeches and writing by and about South Asian leaders to argue that the length and quality of time they spent in Britain did not necessarily determine their attitudes and values, and therefore could not be relied upon as a marker of loyalty and common cause by British administrators. Instead, when they thought about their experiences of British education and their relationship with British identities and traditions, South Asians understood and expressed these in ways that were also shaped by other crucial factors such as class, region, and personality. As a result, political loyalties to Britain itself could not be stably derived, suggesting an important limit to the British political planning of decolonisation.

In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, on 11 March 1948, his British counterpart Clement Attlee delicately enquired about India's anticipated relationship with the Commonwealth after news had broken that India might adopt a republican constitution.[1] Sources in Britain believed that, if ratified as a new republic, India would exclude regal associations with the British monarch and, in turn, abandon the symbolic cornerstone of the Commonwealth. If enacted, India's consideration of governmental change, in turn, would seriously harm Britain's post-war political and economic strategies to reassert itself as a global power. Clearly then, there were international consequences of a weakened Commonwealth at stake in India's critical decision.

Interestingly, however, in making the case for why he thought India should remain, Attlee hardly dwelt on these issues at all. Instead, the British Prime Minister took the time to remind Nehru that the British Commonwealth had evolved 'not by design or by the application of theories of the interrelation of States, but from the application of democratic principles of self-government and from the practical needs of the age'. He explained:

> I have myself always regarded the Commonwealth and Empire as a collection of nations all moving to a common goal of self-government and equal status, though necessarily at different rates in accordance with their individual histories and internal conditions. It has been a matter of pride to me that during my Premiership in Great Britain the family circle should have been enlarged by the coming of age, so to speak, of the nations in Asia.

Attlee was giving his fellow premier a personal account of the meaning of the British Commonwealth's development and expansion during his lifetime. In addition to Canada,

1 The National Archives, UK (hereafter TNA) PREM 8/820.

Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, now India, Pakistan, and Ceylon would be admitted to the club. Moreover, while 'mostly intangible' links such as 'common racial background' and 'economic interests' had formerly bound it together, Attlee believed that what really linked the Commonwealth was 'rather moral than economic'. He suggested:

> Adherence to certain absolute values, faith in democratic institutions, belief in the rule of law and acceptance of the need for toleration. All these things make up together a "way of life" which with many local differences yet give a general sense of community.

Nehru's reply to Attlee arrived a month later with an apology for the delay and an admission that it was the Indian Constituent Assembly that would ultimately have to decide. Nehru acknowledged that he had personally wanted 'real friendship and cooperation' rather than 'a formal link', but had also observed 'the heavy legacy of the past' in Indian debates about Commonwealth membership. 'The problem before us', Nehru thought, involved 'close psychological as well as other relationships'.[2]

At a certain level, this seems like a normal exchange between two national leaders over a matter of mutual concern. Notwithstanding public opinion, they substantially agree that they should strive to retain India's link to the British Commonwealth. But a closer look reveals subtle differences between these two men who were temperamentally and ideologically so alike. What they differed on, ultimately, was the history of the Anglo-Indian past, which meant, of course, in some cases, their own historical and sometimes exhilarating happy or painfully sad personal experience.

Attlee had admitted that names were important and he reassured Nehru that the title of 'Dominion', which had originally been bestowed on Canada, did not 'imply domination' over

2 Ibid.

India. He went on to explain how 'we are in this country rather insensitive to the content of names and cheerfully keep on titles that have come down to us from the past'. In his reply, Nehru agreed that words were important, but added: 'Behind the words, of course, lies a complex of thoughts and memories, both conscious and sub-conscious, which exert a powerful influence on the minds of people'.[3]

The various associations that the British Commonwealth represented around mid-century are well documented in the literature. Its core values, which Attlee had stated in his letter, were developed through such traditions as Anglican history at Oxford, with its liberal idea of Empire.[4] His Victorian and Edwardian upbringing, and Oxford degree in history, had played an important part in Attlee's perception, as the Prime Minister of postwar Britain, that the Commonwealth represented not the end but rather the maturation of Empire.[5] But in its turn, Nehru's reply represented a far less well-understood South Asian perception of the British Commonwealth. Nehru's emphasis on the 'psychological' aspects influencing Indian debates about Commonwealth membership raises the question of how being a subject of the British Commonwealth might come to shape South Asian politicians' understanding of what the association meant.

This article explores South Asian 'thoughts and memories' of British cultural traditions that diverged from British perceptions. While no sustained attention has been paid to

3 Ibid.

4 See Robinson, "Oxford in Imperial Historiography".

5 See Bew, *Citizen Clem*.

this subject at the collective level of the Commonwealth, there are many useful biographical studies of Asian political leaders, and several of them have left memoirs.[6]

South Asian political leaders had complex, sometimes contradictory thoughts and feelings about British culture, which are not reducible to the length or quality of the time they spent in Britain, although many received at least part of their education in England and were drawn to ways of thinking and working that they associated with their experience. At one extreme, there were a few South Asian intellectuals for whom contact with Britain and British culture seems to have been almost wholly positive. According to Lionel Curtis, for example, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the first vice-president and second president of India, 'almost wept with joy' at the news that he would be elected a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. Radhakrishnan suggested that All Souls 'was his only home in England' SAY SOMETHING MORE (ONE MORE CLAUSE). At the other extreme, there was S. W. R. D. Bandaranaiake, the fourth Prime Minister of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), who, despite being elected secretary of the Oxford Union, was to display much more conflicting attitudes toward the British. After a privileged childhood in which his family were close to the British governor, he described his first year as a classics scholar at Christ Church, Oxford in 1921-2 as one of 'disappointment and frustration', which he associated with the lot of his fellow 'Eastern students'.[7] Reflecting bitterly on the experience of isolation and subtle ostracism he wrote: 'There is nothing that saps the self-respect of a man more than the feeling that his fellow-men, with whom he is brought in contact, are continually looking on him as an inferior and one who is fundamentally

6 Two excellent studies are Gopal, *Nehru*, and Manor, *Expedient Utopian*.

7 Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings*, 3, 10.

repugnant to them'.[8] Between these two starkly divergent trajectories, there are numerous other South Asian leaders who spent significant amounts of time in Britain and presumably drew a mix of conclusions about British institutions and culture from that experience. These include Krishna Menon, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, Iskander Mirza, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Mohammed Ayub Khan, the Ceylonese Minister Chellappah Suntharalingam, the Pakistanis Zafarullah Khan and Khawaja Nazimuddin[9], and the Indians B. N. Rau[10] and Girija Shankar Bajpai. What is more, there is an important distinction that needs to be drawn between those South Asians who received a traditional liberal education and that smaller class of South Asians who were schooled at one of the British military institutions. The future Pakistani leaders Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan, for example, both attended Sandhurst and their ideas about the British Commonwealth appear to reflect a schooling in British military training and martial values rather than an interest in classics or comparative religion.

This study offers a more in-depth understanding of the meaning of the Commonwealth during an important period in its history—the decade following South Asian independence—by looking at the relationship between key South Asian figures and their entanglement with British politics and society. Intellectual as well as personal connections to Britain and its people, places, and traditions helped to produce concrete but divergent meanings of the British Commonwealth and the political agency that it represented.

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8 Ibid., 41-2.

9 British officials in the 1950s noted he 'still plays good tennis and shoots well'. TNA DO 35/3188.

10 The British High Commissioner described Rau as 'a suitable Indian' who 'we could make discreet use of'. TNA PREM 8/820.

Of all the leading South Asian political figures at independence to have received a British education, Vallabhbhai Patel had perhaps the shallowest roots in British culture. Despite studying, belatedly, in London at the Middle Temple, on returning to Ahmedabad to start up a legal practice his life was only outwardly Anglicized, 'wearing English clothes, playing bridge, and spending his evenings at the Gujarat Club'.[11] Yet Patel was also among the few Indians in 1948 who desired to give the Commonwealth a chance and to delay any quick decision about India's relationship with it, which would effectively have meant severance.[12] His role in India's decision to remain is undoubted.[13] Levels of education in Britain and adherence to the British Commonwealth were not a necessarily link in that circumstantial factors had a share in decisions over such issues.

Jawaharlal Nehru, a Kashmiri Brahmin, son of a 'moderate' Indian nationalist lawyer, and educated at Harrow and Cambridge, is often held as the paradigmatic example of the Anglicized Indian post-colonial leader; yet, he inherited complex traditions from the West and underwent a mixed social experience in Britain, which would inform his world view as India's first Prime Minister as well as his political behavior in the Commonwealth. Despite his oft-stated love of the British liberal tradition, he was regarded as an 'extremist' at Cambridge, attending the Majlis but too shy to speak.[14] Later, visits to an anti-colonial meeting in Europe and to the Soviet Union in 1927 solidified his growing radicalism, and he established

11 Brass, "Patel".

12 TNA PREM 8/820.

13 Brecher, *India and World Politics*, 28-9.

14 Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 35.

connections with other overseas nationalists. In *Glimpses of World History* (1934), written while in prison, he had regarded the notion of India remaining a Dominion after independence as 'ridiculous and humiliating', and did not believe in 'reforming imperialism by entering into a partnership with it'.[15] Yet with 'anxiety', 'anger' and 'resentment' while in prison, he nevertheless confessed that England was in his 'mental make-up' and he could not 'get rid of the habits of mind, and the standards and ways of judging other countries, as well as life generally, which I acquired at school and college in England'.[16]

Perhaps there is no fundamental contradiction here. Both Nehru's firebrand anti-imperialism and his later desire for Commonwealth co-operation may have been 'founded on the same premises of respect for traditional links and opposition to exploitation and oppression'.[17] Once India had decided to remain in the Commonwealth, Nehru became one of its most enthusiastic advocates, claiming that India's association with it brings 'certain psychological advantages in regard to world peace'.[18]

Nehru's ideological inheritance of neo-liberal humanism, which C. A. Bayly describes as 'Fabian socialism', connects Nehru with late nineteenth century English idealists.[19] Another important precursor was Lionel Curtis' 'Christian idealism', by way of the Oxford tradition of analyzing the British Empire as a story of 'moral progress'.[20] A scientist by training, Nehru yet

15 Ahmed, "India's Membership", 43-44.

16 Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 266.

17 Ahmed, "India's Membership", 47.

18 Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Nehru*, 310.

19 Bayly, "Ends of Liberalism", 616.

20 Robinson, "Oxford in Imperial Historiography", 35-6. See also Gopal, "All Souls and

had a lasting love of history and the stories it had for the present. Nehru's shy and withdrawn personality also has something to do with this attraction to certain strands of late Victorian thought. His 'emotional contractualism', his 'regular invocation of affect or emotion in his discussions of political concepts', distinguished him from the language and tone of his Marxist and socialist peers, including other Indians.[21] This mixture of experience, personality, and deep conviction shaped his political behavior, as Harold Macmillan noted at the watershed 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference. Then, it was Nehru who was quietly pulling strings behind the scenes in the age-defining decision to reject South Africa's application for renewal of its membership.[22] Macmillan had also observed that Nehru 'likes to talk alone', when 'he speaks more freely and less circumspectly'; such occasions brought him into 'a reflective and relaxed mood' and Nehru had himself observed that 'the Commonwealth association is most valuable because it encourages [such] friendly contacts'.[23]

One of Nehru's closest and most controversial colleagues, Krishna Menon, was also a graduate of the British higher education system and became a London councilor. The two had in common a secular outlook and a commitment to Fabian socialism, and their friendship was grounded in personal loyalty as well as a shared vision of the ideas that should underpin independent India. Just as British officialdom during the 1950s was extremely critical of what it believed to be Nehru's rather calculated idealism, it was also suspicious of Menon's influence

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India".

21 Bayly, "Ends of Liberalism", 614-5.

22 Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 298.

23 Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 80, 386.

on him.[24] Yet, as with Patel, Menon was a strong supporter of republican India's remaining in the Commonwealth and he was the first High Commissioner of independent India in London, although there had been other High Commissioners of India under British colonial rule.

In an interview with the distinguished Canadian political scientist Michael Brecher, one of the most prominent Western scholars of India and South Asian politics and foreign policy, Menon had strongly rejected the interviewer's linking of Commonwealth politics with personal attachment to the United Kingdom: 'It is a mistake to think that the Commonwealth tie was created just because some of us were Western-educated or something of that kind'. Instead, he added, the Commonwealth connection was maintained simply because it already existed, because it 'would not mean any derogation in our independence', and because 'we would be less prone to be absorbed into other combinations', by which he seems principally to have meant the international alliance system led by the United States during the Cold War.[25] Brecher remained unconvinced by this explanation, however, noting that 'Menon went through the indelible process of political socialization in England' and even his 'diplomatic technique… namely the patient application of conciliation, may be traced to his familiarity with British party politics'.[26]

'The patient application of conciliation' might also well describe Mohammed Ali Jinnah's approach to diplomacy. While he and that other Asian architect of Pakistani independence, Liaquat Ali Khan, came from different social backgrounds, had contrasting personalities, and represented different ways of relating to Britain, both were arguably

24 TNA DO 196/119.

25 Brecher, *India and World Politics*, 28-9.

26 Ibid., 311-2.

comfortable in a consultative setting in which a small handful of men convened on issues of wide import. Jinnah and Liaquat were also both committed above all to the territorial integrity of Pakistan, won through years of struggle against the Indian National Congress and provincial rivals. Furthermore, they shared with other South Asian leaders a strong attachment to British culture and liberal political traditions.

Nehru – admittedly not an unbiased witness – noted Jinnah's difference from the 'Indian masses' during rallies when they were both Congress men:

> He felt completely out of his element in the *khadi*-clad crowd demanding speeches in Hindustani. The enthusiasm of the people struck him as mob hysteria.[27]

Jinnah could have, and for a time did, fit comfortably into the English upper class, when he lived in Hampstead on what turned out to be a hiatus from Indian politics. In the mid-1930s Liaquat persuaded him to return from London to lead the Muslim League's movement for Pakistani sovereignty. Wherever he went, Jinnah's staples included silk ties, Savile row suits, marmalade at breakfast, roast beef and whisky.[28] The chameleon-like changes of his political career and his recognized talent as an actor lend him more the air of a South Asian Disraeli than the stiff and aloof figure of popular characterization.

Jinnah's commitment to liberalism was not merely material comforts. On Pakistani independence in 1947 he had addressed the people as Governor-General: 'You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of

27 Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 68.

28 Long, '*Dear Mr. Jinnah*', 314; Robinson, "Jinnah, Mohamed Ali".

worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State'.[29] This statement was made in the context of an exposition on religious sectarianism in English history, a situation that he was at pains to avoid repeating in Pakistan. Jinnah was also far earlier committed to the idea of the Commonwealth than were some of his erstwhile Indian colleagues, including Nehru. In 1920, for example, he had preferred constitutionally enacted self-government within the British Commonwealth to others' more radical nationalist claims for Swaraj.

Although a staunch democrat and a liberal interpreter of political community, Liaquat was a different kind of Commonwealth supporter to both Jinnah and Nehru. Hailing from a wealthy landholding family, his education took him through Aligarh, Allahabad, jurisprudence at Oxford, and then the Inner Temple before returning to India to take up a political career with the Muslim League.[30] Perhaps because of his conservative social background he was more ideologically committed to opposing communism than were his fellow South Asian Prime Ministers, asserting that communism 'thrives on chaos'[31] and was 'a menace to human liberty'.[32] His early objective was to bring the countries of the Commonwealth closer together. 'If the Commonwealth were consolidated politically and economically, it could make a much greater contribution to world peace.'[33] Indeed, for a period after 1947, Liaquat's conviction of the unity of the Commonwealth and the political possibilities afforded by it was unrivalled.

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29 "Mr. Jinnah's Presidential Address".

30 Hasan, "Foreign Policy", 38; Burki, "Liaqat Ali Khan".

31 Afzal, *Speeches and Statements*, 181.

32 TNA PREM 8/734.

33 Ibid.

Since all of its members shared the 'same way of life and… same democracy' their bond was 'even stronger than racial ties', he claimed.[34] The Commonwealth was an active and engaged forum where members helped each other 'to discuss their problems like brothers'.[35] The perception that the Commonwealth could play such a role, and on these intimate terms, was extremely important, particularly for fledgling South Asian states in the early years of the Cold War. It undercut the racial ties that had formerly held the Commonwealth together and pointed the way toward a workable multiracialism. Liaquat was a strong early exponent of Commonwealth unity underpinned by political solidarity, whose ideas and convictions came as much from his South Asian upbringing as from his British experience and values.

The Ceylonese Prime Minister Don Stephen Senanayake was the only one of the first leaders of independent South Asia not to have received an education in Britain. It did not prevent him, however, from establishing himself comfortably within the Commonwealth, an idea that for him reflected the British 'genius for compromise'.[36] Senanayake came from a powerful rural landowning family in which, as the younger son, it had originally fallen on him to remain at home and look after the family's estates. Over time, "Jungle John" – as he was called by the British – established a political career through a mixture of practical wisdom and stoutheartedness allied to the political guile of his colleague Oliver Goonetileke and the well-trained mind of the constitutional lawyer Ivor Jennings.

Senanayake's close working relationship with Jennings is symbolic of Ceylon's distinct journey in the Commonwealth. Jennings was a Cambridge educated academic who was

34 Mansergh, "The Commonwealth in Asia", 8.

35 Afzal, *Speeches and Statements*, 249.

36 Jayawardane, *Documents*, 3.

involved in constitution-building across many parts of the New Commonwealth. In mid-1943 Senanayake chose him as his principal advisor on constitutional affairs during the transfer of power.[37] Jennings is one of those British figures, comparable in some ways to Mountbatten and Attlee, who helped to direct the narrative of decolonization in South Asia. Under his direction, it consolidated the image of a negotiated handover of power to responsible national governments. Beneath the fanfare, it was his stated aim that Ceylon should 'secure Dominion Status at the earliest possible moment' because it 'was neither large enough nor rich enough to dispense with such help as the Commonwealth could give by agreement'.[38] Senanayake had followed him on this, and in so doing he departed from Ceylonese popular opinion.[39]

Among Senanayake's successors, the leader of the newly formed Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Solomon Bandaranaike, strove to present himself as a liberal in the fullest sense of the word. In a 1957 speech in New Delhi, he reflected that the Commonwealth stood for a 'conception of democracy' that was 'an agglomeration of freedoms, individual and collective'.[40] Elaborating what this might mean for an organization that did not bind its members legally, he introduced one of his favourite metaphors from his days in the Oxford Union:

> I do think that the most important bond of the Commonwealth today is this, that even

37 De Silva, *Sri Lanka*, lxi.

38 Ibid., lxxi.

39 Ibid., lxxii.

40 Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings*, 401-4.

> if we are not bound together by the crimson thread of a common blood, we certainly are bound together by the golden thread of a common tradition. What is that tradition? I feel, when history sums up the contribution of the British people to civilization and to human welfare, it will say that their chief contribution has been the development of the spirit of democracy, as I have explained it, through the broad forms and machinery which they have devised for the purpose of the parliamentary system of Government.

It would be useful to consider how Bandaranaike was able to arrive at such a statement a year into his leadership of a politically fractured Ceylon. After all, the lover of the 'common tradition' became, on his return from study at Oxford, the leading political figure in an ethnically divisive Sinhala Buddhist revival.

Yet Bandaranaike also carried with him from Oxford the 'Liberal Anglican' understanding of the development of the Empire-Commonwealth from which historians have sought to dissociate themselves.[41] University life apparently was suffused with this Whiggish notion. A newspaper report on his performance at a Union Debate over the motion '"That indefinite continuance of British Sovereignty in India is a violation of British Political Ideals", records a summary of his speech:

> He argued that the whole of British policy in India had been directed towards encouraging the ideal of liberty since the Montague-Chelmsford reforms. The life of England was permeated with freedom. Without it a nation was paralysed and nervous.

41 Robinson, "Oxford in Imperial Historiography", 42.

> His bold suggestion that in the British Empire there lay the possibilities of a real League of Nations brought down the House, and Mr. Bandaranaike received such applause as falls to the lot of few Union orators.[42]

Lionel Curtis, Oxford's own Commonwealth "prophet", would not have been able to put the story better than that.[43]

In his opening remarks at his first Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting, in June 1956, Bandaranaike claimed that the Commonwealth countries shared a parliamentary democratic tradition and 'administrative and judicial system… that evolved over many years in the UK'.[44] He had clearly absorbed a progressive perspective on Britain's imperial history, which he was comfortable in applying to the political situation of the contemporary Commonwealth. What he was perhaps best equipped to understand about the Commonwealth of his time, however, were the emotional and psychological sensitivities involved in its relationships. For this, too, he was able to draw from his Oxford years since, then, he had been put in the position of India's 'foremost spokesman' and with the help of his Indian colleagues 'interpreted the problems of that country in terms of those of my own, and the general similarity between them, combined with the racial and cultural relationship between Ceylon and her

42 Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings*, 65-6.

43 See Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth.*

44 TNA CAB 133/148. Bandaranaike remembered Anthony Eden, the British Prime Minister at the time of this meeting, as a student at Oxford, having had 'the rare good fortune of not being gifted with that mental insularity and racial arrogance which appear to be such common national characteristics'. Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings*, 16.

neighbour, enabled me to present the Indian point of view with sympathy and fairness'.[45] This awareness and experience contributed to his closeness to Nehru, who he described in a birthday tribute as a 'sensitive aristocrat' and as a friend.[46] Having served both as an Officer of the Oxford Union and as President of the Majlis, Bandaranaike felt able to make a psychological comparison between the two. His observations are also suggestive about the atmosphere at the New Commonwealth meetings, peopled as they were with figures from such groups:

> At the Union we were, on the whole, a happy family, and did our work smoothly and, in spite of party differences, in a friendly manner. In the Majlis, though it consisted of only sixty or seventy members, there were endless bickerings over the most trivial things between various sections, and the exchange of hot and bitter words between individuals was not uncommon… But there was something childlike in these wrangles; they were mostly on the surface, and a little tact and a sense of humour usually sufficed to smooth them over. In reality they were all friendly towards each other, and would go out of their way, whenever the need arose, to be helpful and even generous… At the Union…though we did not get on each other's nerves so often, there was always a certain coldness and reserve, and it was possible for two men never to have exchanged a word, although sitting in the same hall and taking part in the same debates for years'.[47]

45 Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings*, 46.

46 Ibid., 545.

47 Ibid., 46-7.

Sirimavo Ratwatte, Bandaranaike's wife, became Ceylon's Prime Minister in 1960, the year following his death. Neither especially politically inclined nor trained for a life of public service, her perception of the Commonwealth was marked by a hardening stance towards national independence. In a speech to the Ceylon parliament in 1964 she avoided all talk about a middle way and focused on the 'new prevailing concept of the Commonwealth', which 'allows for free and independent nations…to exchange views freely and frankly and to help one another without in anyway surrendering their sovereignty or subordinating themselves'.[48] Under her authority there was to be no common thread in tradition; instead, values would be shaped by the times.

Most of the examples so far have focused on the relationship between South Asian leadership within the Commonwealth and the liberal aspect of the British experience. With the Pakistani leaders Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan, it could be said that another, authoritarian, tendency of British rule had also left its mark on Commonwealth politics. Pakistani political shifts and reversals in the chaotic period after Liaquat Ali Khan's death in 1951 make it difficult to search for patterns in the leadership that followed. Consider, for example, the very different political and cultural backgrounds of the fourth Prime Minister, Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, who was not educated abroad and noted for being an administrator, and his successor, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, an Oxford graduate who Ayub described as loving 'the gay life of night-clubs'.[49] Pakistani elite politics was in flux throughout the middle of the 1950s until the behind-the-scenes partnership of Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan enacted the country's most significant shift in relation to the Commonwealth, by pulling Pakistan closer toward the

48 Ceylon HANSARD (Senate), 1964, Vol. 19, cols. 2397-8.

49 Ayub, *Friends not Masters*, 37.

American orbit. It was, ironically, British military training and martial values that would guide much of their thinking on these as well as other issues of governance.

Mirza's inclinations reflected those of the Raj's security apparatus: suspicion about participatory democracy and those who were considered to be outside of the norms of civilized life. A Bengali of nawab descent, he attended Elphinstone College and then the Royal Military College at Sandhurst before working as a British officer in the North-West Frontier Province. Ian Talbot notes that Mirza's attitudes were formed 'during his years as a political agent in the tribal areas of the NWFP during the Raj. He thereafter viewed the population as "half-subjects who had to be kept away from mischief" and treated their political leaders as "tribal maliks"'.[50] In 1957, as Pakistan's first president, he had claimed that democracy 'can easily err into extravagance when criticism becomes a licence and party politics lapses into conflicts and discords'.[51] Indeed, Mirza and Ayub had both made it clear to the American ambassador that 'only a dictatorship would work in Pakistan'.[52] Ayub, who was in control of the army, was the stronger and better-placed figure by then and drove Mirza to exile in London, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Ayub's own background was Pashtun, and like Mirza he eventually made his way to Sandhurst (on a scholarship), although he went via Aligarh, on his father's wishes, 'so that I could learn to feel like a Muslim'. Unlike the 'great feeling of equality, brotherhood, and cameraderie' he experienced there, however, at Sandhurst there was 'colour consciousness' and a 'sense of isolation'. While he had 'a lot of fun' with those of his own cohort, 'there was never

50 Talbot, *Pakistan*, 132.

51 Salim, *Iskander Mirza Speaks*, 162.

52 Talbot, *Pakistan*, 146.

any close understanding' and he described conflicts between British and Indian cadets over food and music that contributed to pre-war tensions.[53]

Ayub's military career included wartime service in Burma and the Khyber Pass, the British experience serving his view of the correct relationship between an officer and his men. The Pakistani officers that he observed after 1947 had 'spirit and intelligence' but were 'lacking in sympathy', so that 'their relationship with their men was governed by the rigid principle of command and obedience'.[54] He made wide-ranging changes and put his stamp on the army. Meanwhile, the British military past continued to retain a hold on his imagination: in the days leading up to his seizure of power he claimed to have been reading Philip Mason's *The Men who Ruled India*.[55] His own concern as a ruler was to establish 'a distinct national identity' for Pakistan, with 'the ideal' being 'to develop a rational approach to life'.[56] Democracy was useful 'if we can work the system'[57]; when it could not, then it could be held off until the people were sufficiently prepared. In the meantime, he stressed hard work and focus on the job, rather than freedom to challenge and to improvise solutions. He believed that 'Pakistan had not paused to think that she should have a democratic system understood by its people. They had instead taken a Western point of view first'.[58] It is hard to imagine Nehru, Liaquat, or Bandaranaike expressing the thought that 'our basic weapon was man', or that their definition

53 Ayub, *Friends not Masters*, 5, 6, 10, 13.

54 Ibid., 44.

55 Ibid., 63

56 Ibid., viii.

57 Ibid., 61.

58 Jafri, *Ayub*, 192.

of an intellectual would have been 'a man with too much knowledge who did not know how to use it'.[59] Once he had gained control, Ayub approached problems of governance in the post-colonial state from the perspective of his training as of an officer of the Raj. To his way of thinking, such an approach served to stabilize Pakistan and to harness its strengths, which were, principally, its armed forces and its bureaucracy. During his time in power, the final communiques of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers meetings began to emphasize 'peace and economic progress' rather than 'liberty and democracy'. There was less of that around now, both in word and deed.[60]

In January 1958, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan visited India with his wife on the first leg of their tour of the Commonwealth. He was received by Nehru in New Delhi and taken to see some of the places associated with India's recent history, including the Viceroy's former residence. Reflecting on the visit, he later wrote:

> It was strange indeed to return as a British Prime Minister to this huge Imperial Palace which had been the vital centre of undivided India under British rule. All the etiquette and ceremony were preserved according to the old style. The plate and china remained, with their arms and heraldic devices. The pictures of the Viceroys were on the walls. Indeed my wife sat exactly opposite a portrait of her grandfather, Lord Lansdowne,

59 Ayub, *Friends not Masters*, 43; Jafri, *Ayub*, 192.

60 *Commonwealth at the Summit*, 76. David McIntyre notes that 'Colonial experience, as opposed to English education, had not really attuned the new nationalists to living with liberal institutions'. McIntyre, *Commonwealth of Nations*, 453.

> who had been Viceroy more than half a century before. The military guards and the servants were in the old picturesque costume, dating from the days of the Moguls.[61]

The Asian leg of their trip was punctuated by such passages of imperial nostalgia. Macmillan also observed that after a decade of independence, 'now that the bitterness of the struggle is over', Congress men in India were 'beginning to remember' what they owed to the British in terms of the machinery of effective government that had been put in place by the colonial rulers.[62] In essence, he was claiming that the continuity of the Raj's administrative apparatus had enabled the Congress Party to function in power. Macmillan's comment also reveals how much the British set their store in a shared past in order to maintain relations with a changing South Asia.

An important element of this shared past, namely, South Asian leaders' British education and experiences, had produced complex results. The evidence suggests there was loyalty of varying shades, but also a professed desire for sovereignty. At times, and in some people, "British" liberalism had collided with nationalism or socialism. Solomon Bandaranaike and Jawaharlal Nehru, respectively, are examples who spring to mind. In others, such as Ayub Khan, there seemed to be no liberal imprint but rather an authoritarianism that owed something to a different, albeit related, kind of British experience. In addition, there were influences of personality and political expediency. The former could, in some cases, find pleasant British cultural and social parallels.[63] The overweening climate of Cold War politics could lead the

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61 Macmillan, *Riding the Storm,* 385.

62 Ibid., 388.

63 Note, for instance, Bandaranaike's appreciation of Walter Pater. Bandaranaike, *Speeches*

latter along different trajectories, as seen in Pakistan's contrasting Commonwealth fate under Liaquat and Ayub.

It is important to remember that all of these were also facets of South Asian politics, however, and cannot simply be reduced to the status of agents of British continuity. Instead, it might be more accurate to regard the figures in this study as having tried to redefine relationships with the British through their actions and also through the values that they refracted by way of the Commonwealth experience. Collectively, the New Commonwealth highlighted diverse elements of South Asian agency. British people, ideas, and traditions were a part of South Asians' political lives in a way that they could neither shake off entirely nor which bound them to a single vision of progress.

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and Writings, 43-4.