



## Compromising India

August 3, 2007

One of these books brings out the glamorous side of the most tragic event of the 20th century: The division of the sub-continent. In her memoirs entitled *India Remembered: A Personal Account of the Mountbattens During the Transfer of Power*, Pamela Mountbatten, the daughter of India's last Viceroy, writes about her mother Edwina's "deep emotional love" for India's first Prime Minister. It could be dismissed as another schmaltzy tale written to reap some money, but the book contains serious assertions. She admits that Lord Mountbatten did use Edwina to influence Jawaharlal Nehru on Jammu & Kashmir.

The day I was reading this story (which seems to shock nobody in India), I came across an article in *Outlook* in which Maj Gen VK Singh, author of *India's External Intelligence: Secrets of Research and Analysis Wing* had argued against the Kargil tapes being made public. The officer wanted to prove the relation between the tapes and the Official Secrets Act by taking the case of Brig Ujjal Dasgupta, Director, Computers, RAW who was arrested in July 2006. This officer was accused of having passed sensitive information to Rosanna Minchew, a CIA agent in the US Embassy. VK Singh argued, "Charges against Dasgupta have been framed under Official Secrets Act. As per the Act, if an Indian has any sort of communication with a foreign national, he's presumed to have passed on information useful to an enemy."

Though Maj Gen Singh's comparing the release of Kargil tapes and Brig Dasgupta's case is flimsy, one could ask: Can the special relations between Nehru and Edwina be seen from this angle? Nobody can deny today that the reference of Jammu & Kashmir to the UN has resulted in three wars for India and a lot of hardship for the people of that State.

Let us look into what happened. At the stroke of the midnight hour on August 14, India woke to freedom. Unfortunately, Maharaja Hari Singh could remember the events of the previous year when Nehru had tried to interfere in the State's affairs. While most Princes signed the Instrument of Accession of their states to the Dominion of India, Maharaja Hari Singh prevaricated. What would happen to him and his state under Nehru's rule?

Things came to a head by the end of October 1947 when raiders from North-West Frontier Province entered Jammu & Kashmir, killing, looting, and raping as they surged forward. By October 26, they had reached the outskirts of Srinagar. Maharaja Hari Singh had no choice but to sign the Instrument of Accession.

Nehru had probably not yet realised that a serious blunder had been made in asking Mountbatten to become the first Governor-General of independent India (Mohammed Ali Jinnah had intelligently kept the post for himself in Pakistan). Having a foreigner as the Head of the Dominion, avoided having to choose among Congress leaders!

Mountbatten manipulated the same leaders to become Chairman of a newly-created Defence Council. This was to have grave repercussions on India's Kashmir policy. Mountbatten, a British officer, was now at the helm of the Indian defence machinery. British Generals still serving in India reported to him.

Early November 1947 saw a strange situation: The formal head of the Indian state (a Britisher) decided to go to Karachi to "negotiate" with Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan a solution to the Jammu & Kashmir issue. He was at the same time a player, an employee and the referee; his employer (London) was clearly batting for Pakistan for 'strategic reasons'. Fortunately nothing came out of those negotiations. However, London's game was clear by then: India had to be restrained from chasing the raiders out of Jammu & Kashmir.

Events took a turn for the worse at the end of December 1947 when Mountbatten convinced Nehru that India must refer the Jammu & Kashmir issue to the UN. Though a great admirer of the Mountbattens, Nehru was deeply disturbed. He recorded in a note: "Are we to allow Pakistan to continue to train new armies for invasion and to allow its territory to be used as a base for these attacks? The obvious course of action is to strike at these concentrations and lines of communications in Pakistan territory. From a military point of view this would be the most effective step. We have refrained from taking it because of political considerations. We shall have to reconsider this position because a continuation of the present situation is intolerable ... We wish to avoid war, but it is merely deluding ourselves to imagine that we are avoiding war so long as the present operations are continuing on either side."

When he got to know of the note, Mountbatten cunningly decided to act fast. From the start, he had thought that the best way to derail an Indian offensive, which would have finished Pakistan, was to refer the case to the UN where the issue would be quickly buried. Mountbatten was not only a fine soldier, he was also a great manipulator. He knew that within Clement Attlee's Cabinet, there were enough people like

Noel Baker, the Commonwealth Secretary, who would immediately take Pakistan's side against India.

He then used his 'influence' on Nehru to convince him that taking the issue to the UN was the 'only solution': The world would immediately condemn Pakistan for supporting and assisting the raiders. On December 20, Nehru reluctantly accepted the idea of a reference to the UN. He thought that while appealing, India could at the same time prepare a contingency plan for attacking the raiders' sanctuaries in Pakistan.

But the Indian leadership was deeply divided on the reference to the UN. On December 22, Sardar Patel sent his resignation to Nehru (he was later convinced by Gandhi to withdraw it). Under pressure, Nehru sent an ultimatum to Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan: The raiders should be stopped immediately, failing which India would consider a counter-attack.

By then Mountbatten was riding high. He spent Christmas day writing a long missive to Nehru, highlighting the danger of a military escalation and plied Attlee with confidential information. It is during those days probably that Edwina managed to make it "appealing to his heart more than his mind". The events that followed are too well known. India's case was buried in the bureaucratic corridors of the UN; the raiders were allowed to remain on Indian soil.

What about the Official Secrets Act?