CHAPTER EIGHT

INDIA AND THE OCCUPATION OF JAPAN

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There are three periods covered by my paper: the period of the British Raj; the period of the Interim Government of India from September 1946 to August 1947; and the period of the free and independent Indian Dominion thereafter, though my remarks will be confined to India's experience down to the end of 1948. It has to be said at the outset that in all three periods, the Government of India had more important issues on its agenda than relations with Japan: these were the many problems associated with the country gaining independence from Britain and consolidating that independence. Hence in the major source-book of documents, *The Transfer of Power*, at present covering the period down to July 1947, there is virtually no mention of Indo-Japanese relations.\(^1\) India was looking more to the west than the east during the purview of this paper.

But India is important for an understanding of the occupation of Japan; and the experience of the occupation of Japan was important for the story of the New India. The first significance is that, although India took no part in the occupation of Germany or other parts of Europe, she was a party to the occupation of Japan. The second is that this was the first occasion—and (so far as I am aware) the only occasion—on which India contributed to a British Commonwealth force and after September 1946 did so on a basis of complete equality. Apart from the question of military cooperation, there was the question of political cooperation over Japan within the Commonwealth and the extent to which India's views coincided with, and diverged from, the Commonwealth line. Certainly India's views came to diverge from those of the United States on east Asia after 1949, and this led ultimately to her refusing to attend the San Francisco peace conference in September 1951 and sign that treaty with Japan. This is not a simple story. All I can hope to offer are some of the main signposts along the route, since I was with the Indian army in Japan, but not of it.

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On 5 July 1945 Winston Churchill had communicated to the Dominion prime ministers and others the idea that it might he ‘possible to provide a British Commonwealth force of some three to five divisions. ... A joint Commonwealth force of British, Australian, New Zealand, British Indian and possibly Canadian divisions [could] share with the Americans the burden of the assault on Japan’.² A week or so later Lord Louis Mountbatten met General Douglas MacArthur in Manila and there exchanged details of the forthcoming operations. It was, however, at Potsdam at the end of the month that it became generally known that a British Commonwealth land force, together with naval units and a small tactical air force, would take part in the main operations against Japan in the spring of 1946. The provision of these forces was so urgent that they would have to be supplied from the land forces of SEAC and would have priority over all operations in south-east Asia. Selected persons at the meetings were informed of the intention to use atomic bombs against Japan at the beginning of August, though this was naturally secret and should not affect operational plans being prepared. Accordingly the Potsdam declaration was issued on 26 July. On 31 July this was passed on to the Dominion prime ministers.³

While MacArthur was originally reluctant to include Indian units because of administrative and linguistic difficulties – the same reason he gave for excluding the Free French – he eventually relented. On 13 August after the atomic bombs had been dropped and Japan had surrendered, the terms of the letter to the Dominion prime ministers was altered significantly. In place of the assault force against Japan, it was laid down that ‘a British Commonwealth force shall take part in the occupation of Japan. We suggest that it should be formed from one brigade group each of Australian, British, British-Indian, Canadian and New Zealand troops with a tactical air force contingent.’⁴ There was a strong expectation in India that the Indian force would be required to embark for Japan as soon as possible. But there were difficulties on both the American and Commonwealth sides. It was accepted in principle by the United States Chiefs of Staff on 7 September, though detailed arrangements had to be worked out.⁵

Meanwhile on the assumption that early embarkation would be required, British-Indian troops were assembled in Nasik in western India from September onwards. It had been laid down that units with maximum

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⁴ Ibid., No. 476, Attlee to Fraser, 13 August 1945.
⁵ Ibid., No. 492, Dominion Office to PM, NZ, 7 September 1945.