

# THE MAHATMA

*A Marxist Symposium*



This is a Marxist evaluation of Gandhiji and Gandhism.

S. A. Dange, Chairman of the Communist Party of India, deals with the question how far Gandhiji was influenced by the masses and how they in their turn influenced him and made him change his policies.

S. G. Sardesai, member of the Secretariat of the CPI, deals with the whole gamut of relations between the CPI and Gandhiji.

Mohit Sen, member of CPI National Council, touches on the very pertinent point—what is the fate of Gandhism today?

Prof Hiren Mukerjee, in his inimitable style, gives his reflections of Gandhiji's life and politics.

Manmathuath Gupta, the veteran revolutionary, throws light on the relations between Gandhiji and the revolutionary movement in the middle twenties.

Surendra Gopal, Reader, Department of History of Patna University, has taken up the question of Gandhiji's views on a national language.

Ven Anand Kausalyayan, world famous, Pali scholar and Buddhist monk, gives a few glimpses of life that Gandhiji led in the ashram.

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*A Marxist Symposium*

*Edited by*  
M. B. RAO

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#### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

MAHATMA GANDHI HAS ALWAYS been a controversial figure in Indian politics during his life time. Every stream of political opinion, including his own followers and 'inheritors', some time or other, on some issue or other, had come into conflict with his views and methods. Both the right (Vallabhbhai) and the left (Jawaharlal) inside the Congress itself had on more than one occasion violently disagreed with Gandhiji. That they still carried on together is a fact, but how far it was due to the powerful influence of Gandhiji on the masses or due to sheer opportunism it is hard to tell.

The extreme rightwing Hindu communalism gave its verdict on Gandhiji 21 years ago by getting him assassinated, while Muslim communalism had already half killed him a year before through the partition. Among the left elements in the country there has been a curious ambivalence towards the Gandhi phenomenon.

The Communist Party too had on occasions sharply clashed with Gandhiji. It could not accept his various theories, nor could it deny his role in the anti-imperialist movement. Between them there was a bitter struggle as to who would win the masses and for what ideology.



In these two decades since he left the scene, it has become clear to the people that whatever Gandhiji may have wanted, some of his theories and certainly the practice of his so-called followers have led our country to serious crises.

This volume in commemoration of the birth centenary of Gandhiji had been planned with a wider scope. But practical politics and the recent upheavals in the Congress since the Bangalore AICC session had kept many of those who had promised contributions too busy in various other ways.

Still we feel that some articles, especially that of S. A. Dange dealing with the question of Gandhiji and the masses as well as those of S. G. Sardesai, Mohit Sen and Prof Hiren Mukerjee will shed some new light on the events and incidents of Gandhiji's life time.

The publishers are grateful to Shri Manmathnath Gupta, veteran revolutionary, who has highlighted the extreme hostility of Gandhiji to the revolutionary movement; Shri Surendra Gopal who has dealt with Gandhiji's theory of Hindustani as the national language; and Ven. Anand Kausalyayan who has given a few glimpses of Gandhiji's life in his own inimitable style.

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#### ERRATA

Page 29, lines 8-11. Please read the sentence: *It would appear that in the context of that bitter experience, the Sixth Congress came to the conclusion that the national bourgeoisie in the colonial, dependent countries were just a deceitful and treacherous force.*

Page 36, before Section VI add the following para:  
*Thus, by the time the Seventh Congress of the Comintern met in 1935, the stage was set for a new orientation of the Indian freedom movement.*

## *Mahatma's Birth Centenary*

S. A. Dange

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THE PEOPLE OF OUR COUNTRY are celebrating in October this year the centenary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi.

At the time of his birth, India was still mourning the fallen heroes of the 1857 war of independence and the aftermath of India's defeat. Born twelve years after that great struggle, the child was brought up in a well-to-do, pious Hindu family which on one side was steeped in the atmosphere of princely part of India, subservient to the British empire, and on the other was surrounded by a poverty-stricken India where millions died of famines to build the opulence of the Victorian empire. Family fortune helped the young Gandhi to imbibe the best of education in London, the very heart of the British empire, and cast him forth as the loyal practitioner of British law.

But when he went to South Africa and practised that very law for the benefit of the oppressed Indians there, all the notions of equality and equity vanished into thin air before



the racial arrogance and batons of the white ruling class. There he learnt the first lessons of struggle for equality, of human dignity and opposition to racialism. And yet he remained loyal to the empire, which at that time, according to him, represented civilisation, justice and progress. So, when the first world war broke out, Gandhi was a loyal servant of the empire, recruiting India's young men to defend the empire and differing with Lokmanya Tilak, who refused to work for defence, unless his demand for Home Rule was granted.

At the end of the war, when the people began to clamour for freedom and national independence and the British rulers began to suppress the people's demands first with draconian laws like the Rowlatt Act and next with horrid massacres and mass murders as in the Jallianwala Bagh and the bombing of peaceful towns and villages in rebellious Punjab, the loyalist in Gandhi, the practitioner of British law and believer in British justice, was transformed into a determined angry rebel, who henceforth was to be the greatest organiser of the anti-imperialist movement and leader of the masses in revolt for freedom and independence.

With a mighty sweep of his imagination and a great overwhelming anger against the oppressors, he shot forth as a great commander of the mass movement. He said that the British government was a satanic government and called for its total destruction. There can be no compromise with satan and evil as he put it.

He wielded and used the weapon of all-India hartals, the forerunner of today's bandhs, to unify, discipline and move into action millions of men throughout the country. He brought millions on the streets with the slogans of boycott and picketing, which led to militant clashes with British authorities and their forces of law and order. From school-children to grown-ups, from rich men to the poor peasants, he called on them to noncooperate with the satanic government and topple it by the gigantic will and action of the unified people of India whom he called upon to refuse to work for it, pay for it, learn from it or obey it. And he built the Congress, as the platform and organ of the national front

of the Indian people, including all the classes that desired freedom and concrete action for freedom.

He also added to the armoury his personal fasts, sometimes risking his own life, in order to rouse the masses to action or sometimes to correct their wrong action (as in Hindu-Muslim riots) or to arrest the deviation of his followers. This personal weapon did work, though not always, because of his tremendous revolutionary prestige and integrity.

In his struggle in Champaran, his first one in India, he saw the Indian peasant at close quarters and also the British planters' oppression. There he made the British retreat by a determined stand against the indigo planters' terror and oppression. In leading the strikers of the Ahmedabad mills in the immediate postwar period, he had seen the workers, their capacity for sacrifice and sufferings and struggles, as well as the enormous avidity and selfishness of the millionaires, whom he hoped to mollify and soften by his own and the workers' suffering and "God's will".

But to pursue his main aim, he gave up these facets of his struggle and on the eve of his noncooperation battle he wrote the famous article. "The Lion Shakes the Mane", and marching to Bardoli, he called it "The Dance of Death".

The killing of a few policemen who had fired on an unarmed mass of peasants of Chauri-Chaura threw the Mahatma off his balance and he called off his "Dance of Death" and the "lion" walked into the British prison with a sentence of six years. He insisted that the evil of the empire must be killed only by nonviolence, even where the resistance of the people was just and right and the oppressor unjust and wrong.

Many of those, who claim to be inheritors of his philosophy and who have utilised the prestige of his name and the great struggles led by him to win power and riches, only harp on his nonviolence or his soft corner for the Birlas or his adherence to god, religion and charkha.

But it has to be remembered that while Mahatma Gandhi called off his movement in 1921 because the masses became violent, he never again committed that mistake when he initiated and led the struggles of 1930 and 1942 that ultimately brought India's independence.

Whenever the British oppressors met with violent or militant retaliation at the hands of the masses in this new period and the British called upon the Mahatma to condemn them, he refused to do so, even while adhering to his philosophy of nonviolence and squarely blamed the people's retaliation on the "leonine violence" of the British ruling class.

On his birth centenary, the outstanding quality of the Mahatma that all the oppressed masses must remember is his intense opposition to imperialism, his intense attachment to the organisation and active resistance of the masses, his intense hatred of all that is oppressive, degrading and inhuman. Evil must be actively resisted, not passively submitted to, he said.

As a far-seeing man, he made Hindu-Muslim unity as the key slogan of India's political and social unity to resist imperialism and foil its tactics of dividing the Indian people.

As a great humanist, he called for the abolition of untouchability, though as a pious Hindu he believed in the varna divisions of Hindu society, as many of the saints of Hindu humanism had done before him and suffered persecution at the hands of the exploiting classes and castes.

Though at the beginning he had a dream of putting India back into the ancient world of handicrafts and village life and do away with the world of modern machines, he soon gave up the idea of a return to the past and even helped to build modern industry, secure a good exchange rate and protection for the industrialists, if only they would help him to win independence.

Even when he was alive and led the Congress, there were many like the communists, the congress socialists and others, who differed with him, his philosophy, some of his class alliances and his methods. Yet they all worked in the great national front, then symbolised by the Congress, that the Mahatma had built mainly as the organ of mass action and leadership for achieving independence.

As differences grew on methods of struggle and question of tactics, the conservatives of those days demanded a ban on new schools of thought and new parties being allowed to remain in the Congress and the movement.

But Mahatma Gandhi refused to countenance the banning of parties or groups from the Congress on the ground of such differences. He not only fought conservatism but also combated the love for office and power among his followers and exposed their corruption wherever he found it.

Mahatma Gandhi's admiration for Tolstoy, the great humanist, democrat and anti-imperialist of Russia, led him to wish well of Russia when he heard of the 1905 revolution and though he did not like the atheism of the Bolsheviks, he did not join those who denounced, in company with the imperialists, the Great October Revolution of 1917.

Despite the look of obscurantism which many of his actions and ideas may have assumed, Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest anti-imperialist fighters that the world produced, one of the greatest humanists that mankind has raised in history, and, of course, one of the greatest leaders of the Indian revolution for freedom and independence.

It is these things which should rouse all of us to celebrate the centenary of his birth day in such a way as to revive revolutionary memories of those who fell in fighting for freedom, in fighting against racialism, against inequality and oppression, against untouchability, division and disunity of people and for purity in personal and public life.

It is necessary to revive his militant defiance of the octopus of the state power and wealth, his defence of the dignity of man, especially the poor, the daridranarayan and the oppressed. He stood for dignity of labour, above all, to symbolise which he "spun" every day.

Today, all of us, developing further the inheritance of independence, must fight for socialism, which alone will be the final negation of the power of millionaires and assertion of the power of the working millions, who live by labour of the hand and brain in the fields and factories of free India.

Mahatma Gandhi was born in 1869 when the forces of India's war of independence were in retreat, when the looming shadows of the Franco-German War were cast on Europe, from which imperialism blossomed forth and blighted the whole world.



But when he died in 1948, imperialism was in retreat, one-third of the world had become socialist, and the colonial empires were crumbling. He played a great part in the anti-imperialist revolution in a very vital theatre like India, until a foul assassin felled him with the evil intent of holding up India's further march to progress and the democratic revolution.

Let us pledge to carry forward all that was revolutionary and democratic, progressive and unifying, humane and selfless, defiant and courageous, in Mahatma Gandhi, in this centenary year.

## *Gandhi and the CPI*

S. G. Sardesai

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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN Mahatma Gandhi and Indian communists passed through a number of vicissitudes beginning with his leadership of the Indian National Congress and of the noncooperation movement after the first world war and ending with his tragic death in 1948.

I am using the word Indian communists because, though the Communist Party of India was founded in 1925, M. N. Roy started making a communist evaluation of Gandhi and the movement led by him, as also working out a communist approach to that movement, since 1920. Similarly, S. A. Dange started doing the same from 1921-22.

To be more correct, it was the Communist International that started the process in 1920. Roy was an active participant in the deliberations of the Comintern on the colonial question at its second congress held in that year. Except its last congress held in 1935 Indian communists, e.g., Abani

Mukherji, had participated in the Comintern deliberations and decisions regarding India.

We will come to the vicissitudes of the relationship in due course. But it will be helpful for the understanding of what is to follow if certain key facts and points are stated at the very outset.

## I

Firstly, through and despite all the vicissitudes, we communists did entertain a profound antipathy for Mahatma Gandhi's basic ideological tenets, not only because of their medievalism and mysticism, but also because in practical politics they involved innumerable compromises with imperialist, feudal and Indian bourgeois interests, thereby hampering the full development of the national-revolutionary forces in the country.

Similarly, though to his credit it must be frankly admitted that Gandhi never called for or justified repressive measures against communists or the Communist Party, and, in fact, always approached Indian communists as dedicated though erring youngsters, he fully 'reciprocated' our basic antipathy towards him by a similar antipathy towards Marxism, towards the very concept of class struggle and hence towards us.

Secondly, and once again, through and despite the vicissitudes, the CPI could never grasp Gandhi and Gandhism in their totality. They always eluded such a grasp, and in that sense remained an enigma for us, all our cocksureness notwithstanding.

After all, the fundamental purpose of our effort to understand Gandhi and his role in the national freedom movement was to establish such relations with the mass movement led by him as would enable us to shatter its ideological integument and carry forward the millions under Gandhi's influence to genuine revolutionary action.

Did we succeed in doing this? Well, very inadequately and partially. It is in this sense—in the fuller revolutionary, historical and scientific sense—that it has to be admitted that Gandhi always eluded our efforts to grapple with his ideas and policies.

Thirdly, does this mean that our evaluation of Gandhi and his role was 'all wrong'? Does it mean that the test of history proved him to be correct all along the line and proved us to be mistaken?

The reply to these questions has to be clearly in the negative. Our main contention throughout the period of Gandhi's unquestioned leadership of the national movement was that, in essence and in the final analysis, Gandhi and his leadership were a national bourgeois leadership, irrespective of Gandhi's sincerity and beliefs. This contention has been thoroughly borne out by experience and by the character of national freedom achieved under Gandhi's leadership, that is to say, the class character of the state power of independent India.

Further. We also contended throughout that period that a successful culmination of the national-democratic revolution in our country demanded the development of the Indian working class as an independent class force and its emergence as the leader, the hegemon, of the national revolution. This contention, too, has proved true, though unfortunately negatively, in the sense that our failure to forge the necessary working-class leadership in our freedom movement brought us a freedom which was bourgeois in character, and also based on various compromises with imperialist and Indian feudal interests.

The crux of the conflict between Gandhi and the CPI throughout was, and both were acutely and equally conscious of it, that the CPI was all along struggling to dislodge the national-bourgeois leadership from its leading position in the national movement and replace it by the leadership of the working class, in the interest of a thoroughgoing and successful national-democratic revolution.

The mistake of the CPI was not that it placed this objective before itself and the national movement. Its mistake was not that it fought to make the objective a reality, and that too with all the zeal and sacrifice that its members were capable of putting into the cause.

Had this effort itself been wrong, it is impossible to explain how the CPI grew into such a weighty force in



Indian politics by the time the country achieved independence, since it was all along in conflict with the British rulers as also Gandhi, though very much for different reasons. The CPI would not have become such an influential leader of the Indian working class and big sections of the Indian peasantry; and the cream of India's revolutionary youth would not have flocked to our party, had our understanding of Gandhi and our task in the national movement been basically wrong.

The mistake lay in the immature, lopsided and oversimplified understanding of its task by the CPI; the mistake lay in its failure to grasp the complexities of the task to which it had been called by history. And here lies the meaning and the explanation of Gandhi having proved an enigma for the CPI.

## II

While it is undoubtedly true that, even as an individual, Gandhi was an extremely complex personality, it should not be difficult to understand that our failure fully to grasp Gandhi's role lay in our broader failure fully to grasp the role of the Indian national bourgeoisie itself in the freedom movement.

The gravity of the mistake is enhanced by the fact that Lenin's writings and his famous *Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions* presented to the second congress of the Comintern in 1920 left no ground for doubt regarding his estimate of the national bourgeoisie in Asia, as also regarding the policy which communists should follow towards national-freedom movements led by bourgeois leaders in Asian countries.

In a famous article, *Backward Europe and Advanced Asia*, written in May 1913, Lenin had contrasted the role of the European bourgeoisie, gone over to reaction, with the Asian bourgeoisie. He said: "Everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining in strength. There the bourgeoisie is as yet siding with the people against reaction. Hundreds of millions of people are

awakening to life, light and freedom." (emphasis in the original—s.g.s.)

Lenin's tributes to Tilak and Sun Yat-sen are well known. Many similar references from his other writings can be cited which clearly establish that this estimate of his was by no means casual or ephemeral. And he continued to write in this vein even after the Russian revolution.

The clearest proof, of course, is the *Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions* presented by him to the second congress of the Comintern in 1920.

There, with reference to the backward states and nations where feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominated, Lenin stated: "It is particularly important to bear in mind: first: that all communist parties must assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries..."

Does this, in any way, mean that Lenin harboured any illusions about the national bourgeoisie, that he was advising communists in dependent countries to merge and lose their identity in the bourgeois-democratic freedom movements? Not in the least. For, in the same Theses, the following paragraph is also there:

"Fifth: the need for a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries: the Communist International should support the bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks, i.e., those of struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations. The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form."

There is no question, therefore, of Lenin overestimating the national bourgeoisie or underestimating the task of

fighting their compromising tendencies, of organising independent, communist, proletarian parties, of building the worker-peasant movement and so on.

The key point is that Lenin clearly saw and attached vital importance to the dual role of the national bourgeoisie—the role of rousing the people to mass, anti-imperialist action and also of restraining them; the role of resisting imperialist domination and also of compromising with it; the role of supporting popular demands and also of letting them down.

Lenin considered both these aspects of the role of the national bourgeoisie to be real, historically determined aspects. He did not reduce one or the other aspect to a nullity, either in theory or in matters of practical policy.

That is why, in one and the same Theses he spoke of the duty (must) of communist parties “to assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement”, and “the need for a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries”. That is why he spoke of “a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in colonial and backward countries” but not “merge with it”.

It needs also to be clarified that Lenin has nowhere stated that this dual role of the national bourgeoisie would continue right up to the completion of the national-democratic revolution in backward and dependent countries.

Confronted by the immediate, acute and menacing “danger” of the national-democratic revolution overwhelming the bourgeois leadership (which arises with the building of all-round worker-peasant alliance led by the communist party of the country concerned) the national bourgeoisie, in the main, goes over to counterrevolution.

But it is equally true that Lenin was in no hurry to equate every compromise between the national-bourgeois leadership and imperialism with the former going over to counterrevolution. He was in no hurry to stigmatise every such compromise as the end of the oppositional, anti-imperialist role of the national bourgeoisie. He was in no hurry to brand every compromise as the act of final betrayal and capitulation by the national bourgeoisie.

As applied to India and the post-first-world-war upsurge in our country, what did this analysis and estimate of Lenin mean?

I have not come across a direct reference by Lenin to Mahatma Gandhi or the movement led by him. But there is more than sufficient evidence (which I have given in my booklet *India and the Russian Revolution*) to show that he wanted the nascent Indian communists to take a positively critical attitude towards Gandhi and the movement led by him.

M. N. Roy's Memoirs—and Roy, as is well known, was very much a ‘leftist’ at the second congress of the Comintern—bring out this fact very clearly. And there is a lot of other evidence besides.

I think that Lenin's reluctance in rushing to any ‘formulations’ about Gandhi and his role was due to the fact that he was deeply conscious of the complex and dual nature of Gandhi and his policies. He wanted much more factual information about the peculiarities of the vast and complex Indian problem than what was available in a Russia completely blockaded by the imperialist powers. He was conscious that a single hasty formulation by him could derail the budding Indian revolutionaries either into sectarian or reformist channels.

And since he saw that M. N. Roy, the most prominent Indian communist at the second congress, was deviating towards a sectarian approach to the mass movement led by Gandhi, by shouting himself hoarse about Gandhi's antiquated social ideology, Lenin admonished him to think more about how to carry forward the masses under Gandhian leadership than about Gandhi's social philosophy. Lenin surely needed no lessons on the reactionary character of that philosophy.

### III

Even at the risk of some diversion, it is necessary here to deal with the question of how Lenin treated the problem of the relationship between the mass urge of protest against oppression and exploitation in the backward countries and

the ideological forms in which such feelings of protest generally expressed themselves.

I would really like to go as far back as Engels's *The Peasant War in Germany* where we get a brilliant exposition of how and why medieval peasant revolts in Europe burst out under a religious garb and under radical interpretations of biblical texts. Something similar happened in certain parts of India between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries.

How and why did Lenin call Tolstoy a mirror of the Russian revolution? In fact, in the very opening sentence of his famous article, Lenin poses the question and suggests the answer: "To identify the great artist with the revolution which he obviously did not understand, and from which he obviously stands apart, may at first sight seem strange and artificial. A mirror which does not reflect things correctly could hardly be called a mirror. Our revolution, however, is an extremely complicated thing."

Then Lenin passes on to characterise the contradictions in Tolstoy, one of which he described as: "On the one hand, the most sober realism, the tearing away of all and sundry masks; on the other hand, the preaching of one of the most odious things on earth, namely, religion..."

Then Lenin explains these contradictions: "But the contradictions in Tolstoy's views and doctrines are not accidental; they express the contradictory conditions of Russian life in the last third of the nineteenth century... the contradictions in Tolstoy's views must be appraised not from the standpoint of the present-day working-class movement and present-day socialism (such an appraisal, is, of course, needed, but it is not enough), but from the standpoint of protest against advancing capitalism, against the ruining of the masses, who are being dispossessed of their land—a protest which had to arise from the patriarchal Russian countryside."

Still further: "Tolstoy is great as the spokesman of the ideas and sentiments which emerged among the millions of Russian peasants at the time bourgeois revolution was approaching in Russia. Tolstoy is original, because the sum total of his views, taken as a whole, happens to express the

specific features of our revolution as a peasant bourgeois revolution. From this point of view, the contradictions in Tolstoy's views are indeed a mirror of those contradictory conditions in which the peasantry had to play their historical part in our revolution... undoubtedly, the message of Tolstoy's writings conforms to this peasant striving far more than it does the abstract 'Christian Anarchism', as his 'system' of views is sometimes appraised."

"On the other hand, the peasantry, striving towards a new way of life, had a very crude, patriarchal, semireligious idea of what kind of life this should be, by what struggle liberty could be won, what leaders it could have in this struggle... why a forcible overthrow of tsarist rule was needed in order to abolish landlordism."

And then Lenin says that the "glaring contradictions" of "Tolstoy's ideas" reflect "the shortcomings and weaknesses of our revolution", of the peasant uprising.

Here we see how Lenin, without making the slightest concession to the reactionary nature of Tolstoy's ideas, "harmful as a whole", also brings out the difference between their historical content and their conceptual content.

Gandhi was a Tolstoyan in many respects. In fact he recognised Tolstoy as one of his gurus. But in one vital respect the two were very, very different. Tolstoy never was, and never attempted to become, a mass political leader. Gandhi, with all his religious, mystical, spiritual, "God is love and love is God" lumber, was a mass political leader to his marrow.

And if Lenin found it so very necessary to distinguish between the historical and conceptual content of Tolstoy's ideas, who "obviously stood apart from the revolution"; if Lenin considered it correct to explain Tolstoy's contradictions "not as the ideological sophistry of a reactionary, unctuous landlord, but as the reflection of the shortcomings and weaknesses of our revolution"; how much more was it necessary for us to make a similar effort to understand Gandhi and his contradictions since we had to deal with a person who did not stand apart from the struggle but was always in the very thick of it? And as in the case of Tolstoy, in the case of



Gandhi also it was the peasantry that always stood at the centre of his thought and action.

Besides, ours too was, and in fact continues to be, essentially a peasant national-democratic revolution.

Let us take yet another instance, viz., the relation between democracy and narodism (populism) in China.

Ideologically speaking, there is no comparison between Dr Sun Yat-sen and Mahatma Gandhi. Sun Yat-sen's ideological outlook, as is known, was that of a militant, modern democrat.

Lenin himself described Sun Yat-sen as "this enlightened spokesman of militant and victorious Chinese democracy". (article entitled "Democracy and Narodism in China", published on 15 July 1912 in *Nevskaya Zvezda*).

The fact remained, however, that Sun Yat-sen combined the ideology of militant democracy with 'socialist' dreams, with hopes of China avoiding the capitalist path of development on the basis of radical agrarian reform which was the theory preached by the Russian narodniks.

Lenin's comment on the programme published by Dr Sun Yat-sen is very significant:

"From the point of view of the doctrine, this theory is that of a petty-bourgeois 'socialist' reactionary. For the idea that capitalism can be 'prevented' in China and that 'social revolution' there will be made easier by the country's backwardness, and so on, is altogether reactionary." (Ibid.)

And then Lenin explains how in the conditions of Asia the contradiction could be understood, how militant democracy in such conditions could march forward while at the same time subscribing to narodnik views.

The point, of course, is not that in the national freedom movement of a backward, subject country, the reactionary ideologies under whose flag such a movement may be developing should not be criticised and exposed. Their harmfulness has to be exposed because they definitely hamstring and even compromise the full revolutionary development of such movements.

But the criticism has to be historical, meaning thereby that while criticising such ideologies one must give consid-

eration, and appreciative consideration, to the actual, anti-imperialist, and often antifeudal mass movements which develop under the inspiration of such ideologies. The conceptual and historical content of such ideologies cannot, and must not, be confused or equated. For criticism based on such equation is unhistorical and mechanical and leads to a sectarian approach towards the mass movement in question.

#### IV

Naturally enough, the relations between Gandhi and the CPI were interwoven with the evaluation of the role of the national bourgeoisie by the CPI; with the efforts of the CPI to build itself and the worker-peasant movement in the country as an independent force; and with the approach of the CPI towards the Indian National Congress and the mass movement under its leadership. All these questions were inseparably interconnected, and that is how we will have to deal with them.

The problem came on the stage of history in the mighty popular upsurge that swept the country between 1918 and 1922.

I have already explained Lenin's positions on relevant questions at the second congress of the Comintern held in 1920.

In his Memoirs written more than twenty years later Roy described his differences with Lenin at the second congress in the following words: "Lenin argued that imperialism had held the colonial countries back in feudal social conditions, which hindered the development of capitalism and thwarted the ambition of the national bourgeoisie. Historically, the national-liberation movement had the significance of the bourgeois-democratic revolution... The communists, therefore, must help the colonial liberation movement under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie, regarding the latter as an objectively revolutionary force..."

"The role of Gandhi was the crucial point of difference. Lenin believed that as the inspirer and leader of a mass movement, he was a revolutionary. I maintained that as a religious and cultural revivalist, he was bound to be a reactionary socially, however revolutionary he might appear politically."



Roy fails to mention a vital part of Lenin's positions on the question, viz., that while Lenin surely wanted communists to support the bourgeois-democratic movement in backward countries, he was no less emphatic that they must, at the same time, build an independent worker-peasant movement and a genuinely proletarian, communist party.

Further, though Lenin certainly held that the national bourgeoisie in the oppressed Asian countries, including India, stood with the people against the forces of imperialism and reaction, there is no original evidence as regards the degree of difference he made between the national bourgeoisie in various Asian countries.

However, the main point on which Roy differed with Lenin clearly comes out from the abovementioned quotation. Roy was obsessed with Mahatma Gandhi's socially conservative ideology while Lenin, as explained in the previous section, must have made a serious difference between the conceptual content and historical role of Gandhi's ideological positions.

In his books, *The Aftermath of Noncooperation and India in Transition*, written after the withdrawal of the noncooperation movement in 1922, Roy attacked Gandhi even more bitterly. *India in Transition* characterised Gandhi as "the acutest and most desperate manifestation of the forces of reaction". (p. 205)

Thousands of Gandhi's active followers and cadres were furious with him, and very rightly so, for suspending the noncooperation movement after the Chauri-Chaura incidents. Jawaharlal and even his father, Motilal Nehru, protested against the withdrawal from prison. And the suspension was undoubtedly due to his philosophical concepts which, while they enabled him to rouse the masses for action, prevented him from transgressing the class interests of the bourgeoisie because of their compromising, class-collaborationist character.

What was not correct, however, was such sweeping conclusions as that Gandhi had completely surrendered to imperialism, gone over to counterrevolution, etc., which was the essential vein of Roy's writings, and was disproved by later history.

In fairness to Roy, he did not draw any such conclusions as that the Indian National Congress itself was a counter-revolutionary organisation or that the entire mass movement under its leadership deserved condemnation as a reactionary force.

In the name of the Communist Party of India, which Roy had attempted to form at Tashkent in 1920 together with some Indian emigres, an appeal was issued to the Indian National Congress, addressed to its session at Ahmedabad in 1921. It stated:

"If the Congress would lead the revolution which is shaking India to its very foundation, let it not put faith in mere demonstrations and enthusiasm. Let it make the demands of the trade unions its own demands; let it make the programme of the kisan sabhas its own demands; and the time will soon come when the Congress will not stop before any obstacles; and it will be backed by the irresistible strength of the entire people consciously fighting for their interest."

A similar appeal was issued to the Gaya session of the Congress a year later. It put forward a programme for the Congress which included:

"Complete national independence, universal franchise, abolition of landlordism, nationalisation of public utilities, full rights to labour to organise, minimum wages in all industries, an eight-hour day, profit sharing, free and compulsory education, and the arming of the entire people to defend national freedom."

Both these appeals were correct not only politically but from the point of view of a correct tactical approach to the Congress and the mass movement led by it.

Dange was barely twentytwo years of age when he wrote *Gandhi vs. Lenin* in 1921. Communist literature had just begun to trickle into India through the impregnable wall raised by the British rulers. *Gandhi vs. Lenin* is not, therefore, the product of a developed Marxist.

And yet the publication has great historical value. It reflects the struggle of the first generation of Indian youth, inspired and drawn into the mass movement by Gandhi, getting disillusioned with his religious and archaic ideas, with

his compromising policies, and struggling towards a genuinely scientific revolutionary philosophy.

Dange states that both Gandhi and Lenin wanted to destroy the social evils of the day, especially the misery of the poor, and to overthrow despotism. Then he points out how their analysis of history, of the causes, the nature and consequences of modern industrialisation, and of the social forces which are going to reorganise modern society, is different.

And he explains why the working class and its strike actions have a distinct role in the struggle for Indian independence. His point is that when the peasantry moves on to total non-payment of taxes, working-class strikes alone will be able to paralyse the movement of the repressive forces of government—the army and the police—and make the nonpayment of taxes successful.

It is very significant that Dange comes to the role of the working class, not yet from a general historical standpoint, but from the practical tasks of the noncooperation movement which was then at its height.

I think Dange was the first Indian, in India, to raise the question of the role of the working class in the actual struggle for national independence, and also to take up working-class organisation from that point of view. He certainly was one of the first pioneers in the field.

Broadly speaking, the Comintern and Indian communists continued this approach to Gandhi and the Congress till the sixth congress in 1928. But it was not uniform and one clearly discerns divergent notes even in this period.

For instance, Stalin, in his famous speech delivered at the meeting of the students of the University of the Toilers of the East (18 May 1925) characterised the situation and tasks in India as under:

“The situation is somewhat different in countries like India. The fundamental and new feature in the conditions of existence of such colonies as India is not only that the national bourgeoisie has split into a revolutionary party and a compromising party, but, primarily, that the compromising section of this bourgeoisie has already managed, in the main,

to come to an agreement with imperialism... this section of the bourgeoisie, the wealthiest and most influential section, is going over entirely to the camp of the irreconcilable enemies of the revolution, it is forming a bloc with imperialism against the workers and peasants of its own country. The victory of the revolution cannot be achieved unless this bloc is smashed. But in order to smash this bloc, fire must be concentrated on the compromising national bourgeoisie; its treachery exposed...”

Which section of the bourgeoisie was considered revolutionary by Stalin in this speech? On that point, too, he leaves us in no doubt. He clearly refers to “the petty-bourgeoisie” as the “revolutionary section of the national bourgeoisie”. Thus all except the petty-bourgeoisie “are completely going over to the camp of the irreconcilable enemies of the revolution”.

But Rajani Palme Dutt's *Modern India* (1927) gives us a different estimate.

Firstly, according to Palme Dutt, the big-bourgeois interests were represented by the liberals and moderates outside the Congress. It was also his position that the Congress leadership of Gandhi was not the direct leadership of the big bourgeoisie and that the noncooperation movement was one of petty-bourgeois intellectual elements.

Palme Dutt also dealt specifically with the role of Gandhi.

“The achievement of Gandhi consisted in that he, almost alone of all the leaders, sensed and reached out to the masses. This was the first great achievement of Gandhi—he did, at one point, reach the masses.

“This positive achievement of Gandhi is bigger than all the idiosyncrasies and weaknesses which may be brought against him, and constitutes his real contribution to Indian nationalism.” (pp. 72-73)

Gandhi's second achievement, according to Palme Dutt, was his “policy of action, of action of the masses, noncooperation to win swaraj and at the height of his agitation, mass civil disobedience.” He also stated that “nonviolence and the spiritual content are not so important.” (pp. 72-73)

Palme Dutt then proceeds to explain the Chauri-Chaura retreat.

"Gandhi failed as the leader of the national struggle because he could not cut himself loose from the upper-class interests and prejudices in which he had been brought up... The 'spirituality' of Gandhi is only the expression of this class interest. All parasitic and propertied classes have to weave around themselves a fog of confused language, superstition, tradition, religion, revivalism, etc. in order to hide from the masses the fact of their exploitation." (p. 80)

Palme Dutt's was undoubtedly a deeper analysis of the entire phenomenon of Gandhi's ideas and practical leadership, bringing out his dual role in a richer and more living manner.

The visit of Shapurji Saklatwala—the famous Com. 'Sak'—to India in 1927 was an important episode in the relations between Gandhi and the communists in that period, though it led to no further developments after Saklatwala's return to England. The correspondence between the two relates to labour organisation, but it was also politically significant.

Saklatwala wrote to Gandhi in his own characteristic fashion. In the most comprehensive of his letters he says:

"Let me say in my usual blunt way that I am returning to my 'attack' upon you. Of course, you understand the meaning and nature of my 'attacks' upon you, namely, that recognising in you a man of indomitable spirit, with a real propagandist's heart and qualities, I want you to deal with the various Indian movements in the way in which success is made for such movements in other parts of the world."

The letter then passes on to explain why the growth of modern industry in India was inevitable; how that served as the most powerful factor for uniting the workers and overcoming their division based on caste and religion; how the Indian working class had a great role to play in the freedom movement despite its small numbers; how Gandhi's Ahmedabad Majur Mahajan was not based on real trade-union principles; how Gandhi's theories about "the due share of labour" were reactionary; etc., and makes a powerful appeal to Gandhi to affiliate the Majur Mahajan to the

AITUC and join his forces with the broad stream of the Indian trade-union movement.

And then again, Saklatwala pays a glowing tribute to Gandhi's crusading and organising capacities:

"Despite your failing health you are an active and all-India propagandist capable of covering enormous areas in a short time. Your popularity and charm enable you to capture the mass psychology and would render easier the otherwise stupendous task of organising an illiterate, overawed and semistarved population of millions; your inspiring cooperation would give zest to the other voluntary workers in labour's cause; and I may even frankly say that your own new activity would give a suitable opening for practical work to the thousands of our youth who once enlisted in your movement and then cooled down in the absence of a practical and convincing programme."

Gandhi's replies, though much briefer, are very typical and interesting. In one letter we have:

"So far as our ideals are concerned we stand apart..."

"One word as to policy. It (my policy) is not anticapitalistic. The idea is to take from capital labour's due share and no more, and this not by paralysing capital, but by reform among labourers from within and by their own self-consciousness; not, again through the cleverness and manoeuvring of nonlabour leaders, but by educating labour to evolve its own leadership and its own selfreliant, selfexisting organisation. Its direct aim is internal reform and evolution of internal strength. The indirect result of this evolution when, if ever it becomes complete, will naturally be tremendously political.

"... Labour, in my opinion, must not become a pawn in the hands of the politician on the political chessboard. It must, by its sheer strength, dominate the chessboard... This is my dream.

"... I regard you as a fellow seeker after truth... It is not given to all of us to agree with one another in all our opinions; but it is given to every one of us to tender the same respect for the opinions and actions of our fellows as we expect for our own."



In his last letter to Saklatwala Gandhi repeats that he remains unconvinced about the utility of the Major Mahajan joining the AITUC but "I give you my assurance that the moment I feel that I can usefully come in I shall not hesitate to offer my services to the all-India organisation."

Of course, the nascent communist movement in India was not carrying on only a verbal and ideological debate with Gandhi. It was not attempting only to analyse and evaluate the man and his policies.

The Communist Party of India was founded in 1925. Much before that, in 1920, 1921 and 1924, the British government in India launched a series of what were then called bolshevik conspiracy trials against young communists. For, disillusioned with Gandhi's philosophy and compromising political policies, they started preaching Marxism-Leninism, distributing agitational communist literature among workers and peasants, and also organising militant, class trade unions, kisan sabhas, youth leagues, and so on. Punjab, Bengal and Bombay were the first centres of such activities in the country. Communists also continued to work in the Indian National Congress despite their sharp differences with Gandhi's policies.

The year 1928 witnessed a mighty upsurge of working-class struggles, mainly in Bombay and Bengal, which were dominantly led by communists. The mighty Girmi Kamgar Union, considered at that time the biggest trade union in Asia, was born out of a six-month-long general strike of the Bombay textile workers. We achieved a powerful position in the All-India Trade Union Congress.

It was because of these fast growing communist activities that the British government launched the then world-famous Meerut Communist Conspiracy Trial early in 1929.

So far we have referred to the communist evaluation of and approach towards Gandhi. It is obviously necessary to refer to Gandhi's attitude towards communism, bolshevism, and so on.

Naturally Gandhi had to refer to communism and the communists much more after 1926-27 than in the preceding

period, since we were hardly on the stage of Indian politics as an organised and influential force up to that time.

A statement made by Gandhi as early as 1919 is very significant. The third Afghan War, brought about by British aggressive policies beyond the northwestern frontiers of India, took place between April and August 1919.

The then viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, attributed the war to bolshevik intrigues against India and appealed to Gandhi to suspend the noncooperation movement in the name of the bolshevik menace.

Gandhi's reactions to the appeal were quick and sharp. He brushed aside the appeal, stating, "I have never believed in a bolshevik menace and why should any Indian government fear Russian, bolshevik or any menace?" And he refused to suspend the mass movement in the name of that bogey.

Gandhi also wrote, though rarely, about bolshevism. In an article in *Young India* (his famous weekly organ) on 11 December 1924 he commented, "I am yet ignorant of what exactly bolshevism is. I have not been able to study it. I do not know if it is for the good of Russia in the long run. But I do know that in so far as it is based on violence and denial of God, it repels me."

Another reference in *Young India* (15 November 1928) is more significant and characteristic of the contradictory nature of Gandhi's views:

"It is my firm conviction that nothing enduring can be built on violence. But, be that as it may, there is no questioning the fact that the bolshevik ideal has behind it the purest sacrifice of countless men and women who have given up their all for its sake, and an ideal that is sanctioned by the sacrifices of such master spirits as Lenin cannot go in vain; the noble example of their renunciation will be emblazoned for ever and quicken and purify the ideal as time passes."

The general role and significance of Gandhi and Gandhism were thus fairly clear by the time the sixth congress of the Comintern was held in 1928.



On the one hand, Gandhi's theistic ideology and tenets expressed through his creed to truth, nonviolence, love, renunciation, selfpurification, the inner voice, change of heart, trusteeship, etc. were the expression of India's socioeconomic backwardness, and more particularly the backwardness and superstition of the Indian peasant masses. Hence, they were antiquated and unscientific. Inevitably they were inadequate from the standpoint of the ideological demands of a full development of India's revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle. In the ultimate analysis, they were harmful, as all superstition and faith in divine guidance are harmful for an uncompromising revolutionary struggle.

On the other hand, in the given historical conditions, the same social, ethical and philosophical ideas expressed the yearnings and aspirations of tens of millions of the Indian people awakened to new life and struggle against the domination and miseries of foreign rule (e.g. such declarations and writings of Gandhi as, "This satanic government cannot be mended, it must be ended"; "God dare not appear before the poor except in the form of bread", etc.).

And what is even more important, in practice the ideas took the form of hartals, mass noncooperation, satyagraha, civil disobedience and so on, i.e., mass protest actions against imperialism. These surely were not revolutionary forms of struggle, but history has proved that, nonetheless, they were powerful and effective forms of struggle in our freedom movement.

And for that reason even the antiquated ideological digests of Gandhi were invested with an anti-imperialist, progressive role in the Indian freedom movement. They did help to release, to unleash the forces of the national-freedom movement.

It is a travesty, indeed, a slander of Gandhi and Gandhism to say that they ever preached the christian virtue of 'non-resistance to evil'. From the beginning of his public life in South Africa in the nineties of the last century till his death, what he preached and practised was 'nonviolent resistance to evil', never 'nonresistance to evil'.

In fact, time and again, he went down on record to state that with all his abhorrence of violence he would any day prefer violent resistance to evil to a cowardly surrender before it. Not the worst critic of Gandhi can deny that throughout his life he was and remained a fighter of grit, a fighter against greed, oppression and injustice, all his compromises and all his spiritual cobwebs notwithstanding.

But, of course, Gandhi's views were not altogether due to the backwardness of the Indian peasant and of the political consciousness of our masses, drawn for the first time in the freedom movement.

In his outlook, there was certainly the element of his upperclass prejudices. This was seen most of all in his application of the 'principles' of nonviolence, trusteeship and change of heart to the concrete problems of the economic and political struggles of the Indian people, in his class-collaborationist policies towards the vested interests.

It was both these roots, both these elements, of his ideological make-up, together with his incomparable capacities for agitation, organisation and negotiation, that made him par excellence the ideologue and leader of India's bourgeois-democratic freedom movement.

For these qualities enabled the rising Indian national bourgeoisie to organise a mass, national movement for independence that would secure them the substance of power while preventing the movement from getting out of control; enabled them to secure national independence together with such compromises with imperialist and feudal interests as they deemed necessary in their class interest.

In this ultimate sense, it cannot be denied that Gandhi was a bourgeois national leader. But that does not and cannot detract an iota from the vital fact that under conditions when the key, historical task before India was to achieve freedom from British rule, Gandhi, with all his ideological and political limitations, did inspire and lead the national movement to independence.

It is this fact which entitled him to the honour of becoming the Father of the Nation.

## V

The sixth congress of the Comintern held in 1928 was a distinct landmark in the attitude and policies of the CPI towards Gandhi and the Congress-led national movement.

The congress adopted the theses on the national-liberation movement in the subject and dependent countries entitled *The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-colonies*.

The theses remain to this day a classical document on the character and analysis of the economy of the countries under imperialist domination. In that respect, it is difficult to improve on its treatment of the subject.

Besides, it goes to the credit of the Programme of the Communist International and the Colonial Theses adopted by the sixth congress that they made a great contribution to rearing a generation of Indian communists with a sharp understanding of basic class digits and the role of the working class in the freedom movement.

But the political line of the Colonial Theses in relation to the national bourgeoisie in the dependent countries was clearly sectarian.

Why the sixth congress made such a sharp, sectarian turn from the earlier policies of the Comintern on the question is a matter on which full light has not been thrown to this day.

The surprise is still further heightened by a particular circumstance. Prior to the sixth congress, Roy had given a theoretical garb to his estimate that the Indian national bourgeoisie had gone counterrevolutionary. According to him, imperialism alarmed by the revolutionary movement in India, had given important economic concessions to the Indian bourgeoisie in order to win them over as collaborators, allies, junior partners, etc. in the counterrevolutionary struggle against the masses. This was then called the theory of decolonisation. The sixth congress rejected Roy's theses of decolonisation, asserted that imperialism continued to shackle Indian economic development, and yet for all practical purposes, came to the same political estimate of the

national bourgeoisie, viz., that they were played out as a force in the anti-imperialist struggle. There was a clear contradiction in these two positions.

The most plausible explanation seems to be the betrayal of the Chinese revolution by the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek in 1926 in which tens of thousands of communists and other democrats were simply butchered by the onslaught of counterrevolution led by Chiang Kai-shek. It would appear that in the conclusion that the national bourgeoisie in the colonial, dependent countries were just a deceitful and treacherous force. Probably it was a case of once bitten, twice shy.

The theses open with the statement that Lenin's Theses on the National and Colonial Questions adopted by the second congress remained valid. But the content of the theses does not correspond to this assertion.

It is not necessary to go into the details of the theses. They contain a number of such characterisations as, "The national bourgeoisie has not the significance of a force in the struggle against imperialism"; "Its chief feature is that it exerts a *braking, retarding* (emphasis original) influence on the development of the revolutionary movement"; "In India and Egypt we still observe, for the time being, the typical bourgeois-nationalist movement—an opportunist movement, subject to great vacillations, *balancing between imperialism and revolution* (emphasis original)"; "It is necessary to reject the formation of any kind of bloc between the Communist Party and the nationalist reformist opposition"; "It is no less important to mercilessly expose before the toiling masses the *national reformist* (emphasis original) character of the swarajist, wafdist and other nationalist parties, and *in particular, of their leaders* (emphasis mine—s.c.s.)"; "It is necessary to expose their *half-heartedness and vacillation in the national struggle* (emphasis original)...their previous capitulations and counterrevolutionary advances...their empty nationalist phraseology...".

Specifically about India, we have, "The communists must unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress and oppose all the phrases of the swarajists,

Gandhists, etc. about passive resistance, with the irreconcilable slogan of struggle for the emancipation of the country and the expulsion of the imperialists." (emphasis mine—S.G.S.)

It is not that the sixth congress theses gave no warnings against sectarian and adventurist tactics. It did. It warned communists in colonial countries that "noisy phrases, however radical" could not expose the national bourgeoisie, and that repeated betrayals by the bourgeois leadership did not necessarily mean a permanent crossing over to imperialism. Kuusinen, the main draftsman of the theses, stressed at the sixth congress that the Indian nationalists, unlike the Kuomintang in China, had not joined the camp of imperialism, they were not a bourgeois counterrevolutionary party.

But these warnings and precautions could not alter the main direction of the theses. Once you say that the national bourgeoisie balance between imperialism and revolution, that they are not a force in the anti-imperialist struggle, that the task is to expose their leaders mercilessly, that communists must oppose the Indian National Congress and its non-violent mass movement—when all these positions are taken, there could naturally be no link between the communists and the congressed mass movement except one of collision.

It cannot be denied that the sixth congress theses left little room for Indian communists to develop the national movement in India from within the Congress, and that was the crux of the matter. There never was any doubt that the movement had also to be developed from outside.

It is significant that the sixth congress theses nowhere ask Indian communists to work inside the Congress and its movement. And this omission was not accidental. Such a suggestion could not go hand in hand with the general tenor and line of the theses.

This was the crucial point on which the sixth congress line departed radically from the preceding international communist line in respect of the Indian freedom movement pursued since the second congress on the basis of Lenin's understanding and guidance.

It is extremely significant that though the sixth congress line began to percolate to India from the summer of 1929, Gandhi visited the Meerut jail late in 1929 to meet the communist accused in the Meerut conspiracy trial.

He told the Meerut comrades that the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress due to meet within a month or two was going to adopt a resolution declaring complete independence as the goal of the Congress. He further asked them whether in the light of this proposal communists would now join hands with him in the struggle to be launched after the Lahore Congress.

The Meerut comrades, in reply, asked Mahatma Gandhi a very pertinent question. They wanted to know whether, as on the occasion of the Chauri-Chaura incident, he would again suspend his movement in the event of the people being provoked to violence by the police.

He pondered for a while, and replied, "No."

These are corroborated and checked up facts.

It is also significant that with all the differences between communists and the Congress, prominent leaders of the Congress like Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru associated themselves with and assisted the legal defence of the Meerut accused. Motilal, one of the topmost Indian lawyers of the time, personally appeared in the Meerut court for the defence.

Motilal also denounced the Meerut arrests in the Indian Legislative Assembly, of which he was a member. He declared that the times were gone when the British rulers could erect barbed wire entanglements to keep new ideas out of India.

In the light of all these facts, it was a tragedy that in 1930, we contraposed ourselves against Gandhi, against the Indian National Congress, and practically against the mass civil disobedience movement launched by it though, of course, with the sincere desire to liberate the Indian masses from reformist, compromising, Gandhian influence and unleash a genuinely revolutionary national-freedom movement under the leadership of the working class.



It must be recorded that in pursuit of that objective, we did organise some militant working-class actions under our own leadership, with clear anti-imperialist slogans. But they could not serve as a bridge between us and the masses participating in the civil disobedience movement.

If the Meerut arrests had not taken place in 1929 it is likely that we would have adopted less sectarian tactics towards the congressed movement and the picture would have been somewhat different.

The Draft Platform of Action of the Communist Party of India was first published in the *International Press Correspondence* (*Imprecorr*) in November-December 1930. Obviously, it was drafted in the thick of the 1930 civil disobedience movement, in which tens of thousands went to jail, thousands were beaten up by the police, and hundreds were martyred by police bullets.

The Draft Platform unfortunately carried the sixth congress line "much further".

It stated that the Indian "capitalist class has long ago betrayed the struggle for the independence of the country;... its present 'opposition' (quotation marks original) represents merely manoeuvres with British imperialists, calculated to swindle the mass of the toilers;... the assistance granted to British imperialism by the capitalist class and its political organisation, the National Congress, takes the shape at the present time of a consistent policy of compromise with British imperialism; it takes the form of the disorganisation of the revolutionary struggle of the masses and the preservation of the system of imperialism... the policy of Gandhism, on which the programme of the Congress is founded, uses the cloak of vague phrases... the most harmful and dangerous obstacle to the victory of the Indian revolution is the agitation carried on by the 'left' (quotes original) elements of the National Congress, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, Bose and others;... the exposure of the 'left' (quotes original) Congress leaders is the primary task of our party;... against the bourgeois front of compromise established by the national reformists, communists must create the united front of the toilers from below;..."

Comment is needless.

The eleventh plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (March-April 1931) adopted a resolution which includes such references as "The anti-imperialist struggle of the masses is more and more breaking through the framework of counterrevolutionary Gandhism;" "In India the revolutionary mass movement against British imperialism is becoming wider and deeper as a consequence of the growth of the labour and peasant movements and simultaneous, treacherous transactions and counterrevolutionary alliance concluded between the national reformist bourgeoisie and British imperialism. The task that now confronts the working class is to organise the revolutionary action of the oppressed classes against British imperialism and the National Congress."

While stating all this, and precisely because I have candidly assessed our policies, it is necessary to state that the typical bourgeois slander that communists were unpatriotic in the period can hold no water. That the charges were baseless is proved by the fact that the communists all the time continued to be persecuted by the British rulers and that the CPI was declared illegal in 1934, and also by the fact that the main fear voiced by us, viz., that Gandhi would once again withdraw the mass movement as it rose to white-heat was actually borne out by history when he suspended the movement early in 1931. Thus, if he roused the masses, he also compromised the movement and failed to carry it to its maximum striking power. He lost the opportunity in 1922 and he lost it again in 1931.

So the question was not of any lack of patriotism on our part. If anything, we were impatient and struggling to break the Gandhian leash. The question was of immaturity and inadequate understanding of the complexities of the situation.

And what were the complexities? The complexity lay in this that while there certainly was a gigantic nationwide anti-imperialist upsurge in the country, while Gandhi's policy was surely to keep the upsurge under control, it was also true that Gandhi was both unleashing and curbing the mass discontent,



that he was playing an anti-imperialist role, that he commanded the confidence and trust of the overwhelming majority of the politically awakened masses in the country, and that, in the circumstances, it was necessary for us to take due cognisance of his positive role, join the movement under his leadership, radicalise it, and also unleash the worker-peasant forces which were directly and more fully under our influence.

It is not contended that this was an easy task. But given a correct understanding of it, there is no doubt that we would have made considerable headway in carrying forward the freedom movement on the revolutionary rails we so keenly desired.

A very interesting—in fact, instructive—incident took place early in 1931. Gandhi addressed a workers' meeting at Parel, in Bombay, to which we led a demonstration and in which B. T. Ranadive was called upon to speak by the organisers of the meeting. Gandhi spoke after Ranadive. A gist of his speech (translated into English) appeared in *Young India* (26 March 1931). Here I will quote a few sentences from the *Young India* text:

"I made the working man's cause my own long before any of the young communists here were born. I spent the best part of my time in South Africa working for them. I used to live with them and shared their joys and sorrows. You must therefore understand why I claim to speak for labour... I invite you to come to me and discuss things with me as frankly as you can.

"...If you want to carry the country with you, you ought to be able to react to it by reasoning with it... Today you are no more than a handful... I want you to convert the Congress if you can and take charge of it... It is open to you to give the fullest vent to your views.

"...If the Congress sends its representatives to the conference (the reference is to the Second Round Table Conference in London which Gandhi was due to attend—s.c.s.) they will press for no swaraj other than the swaraj for workers and peasants.

"...I do not want to deceive you. I must warn you that I do not bear any ill will to the capitalists. But I want, by means of suffering, to awaken them to their sense of duty.

"...God has given you intellect and talent. Turn them to proper account. I beseech you not to lay an embargo on your reason. God help you."

A typically Gandhian speech, but by no means a counter-revolutionary denunciation of communism. Besides, Gandhi here invites communists to an open discussion and clearly conveys his confidence that he was in a position to carry far vaster masses with him through open discussion than the young communists.

Gandhi proceeded to London very soon after the meeting. There he had a discussion with some young, budding communists, including the son of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. Here are some of the questions put to Gandhi and his replies:

"How exactly do you think are the Indian princes, landlords, millowners, moneylenders and other proprietors enriched?"

"At the present moment, by exploiting the masses."

"If you will benefit the workers and peasants can you avoid class war?"

"I can, most decidedly, if only the people will follow the nonviolent method. By the nonviolent method we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the retention and the increase of his capital. If capital is power, so is work."

"Have these (the exploiting) classes any social justification to live more comfortably than the ordinary worker or peasant who does the work which provides the wealth?"

"No justification."

"How will you bring about trusteeship? Is it by persuasion?"

"Not merely by verbal persuasion. I will concentrate on my means... I believe myself to be a revolutionary—a non-violent revolutionary. My means are noncooperation."

"What is your concrete programme to put the peasant and worker in absolute power to decide his destiny?"

“My programme is the programme I am working out through the Congress. I am convinced that as a result of it their position today is infinitely superior to what they had occupied in living memory. I don't now refer to their material condition. I refer to the immense awakening that has come among them and the consequent ability to resist injustice and exploitation.” (*Young India*, 26 November 1931.)

Once again, this entire dialogue brings out both the strength and the limitations, the positive and negative side of Gandhi, his ideas and his policies.

There is little to record about CPI-Gandhi relations between 1933 to 1936 which was again a period of the ebbing and disintegration of the mass movement following upon the third suspension of civil disobedience by Gandhi in 1934.

However, it was also a period of rethinking and the germination of new ideas in the national movement.

The British, German and Chinese communist parties wrote open letters to the CPI which started the process of our party struggling out of the sectarian rut which had isolated it from the broad stream of the national movement.

From the other end, i.e., from inside the Congress, Nehru began coming out more and more boldly in support of Marxism, the only scientific philosophy of history, in support of a radical agrarian programme for the Congress, in support of the political significance of the working-class movement, and above all, in support of India joining the common anti-fascist struggle all over the world, hand in hand with the Soviet Union and the new revolutionary upsurge in China, Spain and so on.

For the first time, a conscious socialist group began to emerge in the Indian National Congress, called the Congress Socialist Party.

## VI

The seventh congress of the Comintern held in 1935 brought about a new orientation in the entire international communist movement, including India.

The call given by the congress for international popular unity against the growing menace of war, against the rise of fascism, against growing imperialist aggression which menaced all the backward countries and for a broad national front for freedom in all colonial and semicolonial countries, had an impact not only on the CPI but also on the left elements within the Indian National Congress. The Dutt-Bradley thesis, following on the seventh congress, also gave an impetus to the process.

Steadily our party worked out a new line, called the national-front line, which yielded very positive results in the period between the seventh congress and the beginning of the second world war.

We built powerful trade unions, kisan sabhas, student and youth organisations, expanded the party in most of the provinces in the country, built a party centre functioning effectively on a nationwide plane, organised innumerable militant mass struggles all over the country, established and popularised party journals in most of the Indian languages.

Naturally, this was not all. We reentered the Indian National Congress, certainly as a communist force, the most consistent left force, but also from the angle of striving to unite all the anti-imperialist forces within the Congress.

We recognised the positive, anti-imperialist role of the national bourgeoisie, of the Indian National Congress, and combined it with our critical, radicalising role.

With regard to Gandhi himself, our criticism became more objective and balanced. The ideological and political struggle against his ideas and policies was necessary and it was conducted. But we also found points of agreement with him and, in general, took the position that, with all our differences with him, we wanted and expected him to play the role of the leader of a united, anti-imperialist freedom movement. We took the position that the question of violence and nonviolence would not be a barrier in the path of our being a disciplined force in such a movement provided its programme and policies were commonly agreed upon by the Congress as a whole of which the left forces were a vital and integral part.

In a broad way, and not without friction, a kind of co-ordination developed in the Congress between our party, the Congress Socialist Party, Nehru and Subhas Bose. Taken together, this was quite a formidable force in the Congress though by no means the leading force.

Gandhi's development in this period, and in fact till he was criminally removed from the scene in 1948, needs a more thorough and careful study than what has been attempted till now.

What I mean is that during this entire period, he shifted to more radical positions on a number of questions than what he had held till 1936. At the same time, where the question of leadership was concerned he came out more consciously and firmly against the forces of the left than before 1936.

From the point of view of "pure" logic this may appear strange and contradictory. But historically, I think it is perfectly explicable. Throughout his life Gandhi conducted a struggle against the left forces on programmatic questions, and on the question of methods and forms of struggle. But he was shrewd and competent enough to understand that whereas he would, according to the development of the movement, accept certain programmatic demands of the left, compromise also on the question of nonviolence, he would in no circumstances surrender the leadership of the movement to the forces of the left. This, in my opinion, is what he did between 1936 and 1948, and 'successfully', too, in the sense that he never allowed the leadership of the movement as a whole to slip out of his hands and pass into the hands of the left.

For instance, there is no question that he did shift to the left on the agrarian question.

When he withdrew the noncooperation movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident in 1922, he came out bluntly not against violence only. With equal bluntness he came out against the agricultural tenants refusing to pay rent to the landlords, a movement which had begun to spread like wildfire in Uttar Pradesh prior to Chauri-Chaura. In fact, his categorical position was that nonpayment of rent to the

landlords, however nonviolently conducted, was also violence.

So nonviolence, according to him, was not just a physical question. Everything that accentuated the class struggle within the country, however nonviolent physically it may be, was also violence! And on this position he never budged till his death.

But in 1932, he sanctioned the nonpayment of rent by agricultural tenants to the landlords to the extent of the landlords' dues to the government. A very intelligent adjustment because, on the one hand, it enabled him to give an opening to the tenants' discontent against the landlords while still keeping their movement under control.

In 1934, in reply to a number of questions put to him on the programme of the Congress Socialist Party which had been recently formed, he replied, "I am not for elimination but for just regulation of the relation between landlords and tenants." (*My Socialism*, M. K. Gandhi, p. 9)

By 1937, however, on the theory that "All land belongs to Gopal", he started making such statements as "Land and all property is his who will work it. Unfortunately, the workers are or have been kept ignorant of this simple fact." (*Harijan*, 20 February 1937)

Again, while supporting a resolution prepared by Jaya Prakash Narayan in 1940, he wrote, "No man should have more land than he needs for dignified sustenance. Who can dispute the fact that the grinding poverty of the masses is due to their having no land that they call their own?" (*Harijan*, 20 April 1940)

Then again, we have, "The kisan or the peasant, whether as a landless labourer or a labouring proprietor, comes first. He is the salt of the earth which rightly belongs or should belong to him, not to the absentee landlord or zamindar. But in the nonviolent way the labourer cannot forcibly eject the absentee landlord. He has so to work as to make it impossible for the landlord to exploit him. Closest cooperation among the peasants is absolutely necessary. To this end special organising bodies or committees should be formed... where they are landless labourers their wages should be brought to a level that would ensure a decent living, which



should mean balanced food, dwelling houses and clothing, which should satisfy healthy requirements." (*Bombay Chronicle*, 28 October 1944)

In one of the interviews of his last years, given to Louis Fischer in 1946, he went as far as to state that he wanted the peasants to take physical possession of the landlords' lands. Louis Fischer did not relish the statement and asked him how he could expect the landlords to cooperate with such a policy. Gandhi replied, quite bitterly, "May be, by running away".

Of course he never ceased speaking of trusteeship, changing the property owners by persuasion and love, etc. till the end. But, to say the least, it would be difficult to identify the "persuasion" visualised by him in his last years with his earlier views on the matter.

In a general way, too, Gandhi's references to the problem of riches and poverty, the rich and the poor, developed a sharp, unfamiliar, new ring.

Here are a few references. "Economic equality is the master key to nonviolent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and a levelling up of the semistarved, naked millions on the other... The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land. A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give, and sharing them for the common good." (*My Socialism*, pp. 25-26)

Further, "Today there is gross economic inequality. The basis of socialism is economic equality. There can be no Ramarajya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat." (*Harijan*, 1 June 1947)

Again, "Without having to enumerate key industries, I

would have state ownership where a large number of people have to work together. The ownership of the products of their labour, whether skilled or unskilled, will rest in them through the state." (*Harijan*, 1 September 1946)

Even as regards the method of bringing about the socio-economic changes visualised by him, we find that Gandhi started visualising the use of the satyagraha weapon against the rich property owners in the country.

We have, "What does communism mean in the last analysis? It means a classless society—an ideal that is worth striving for. Only I part company with it when force is called to aid for achieving it." (*Harijan*, 13 March 1937)

The following is very interesting: "If the legislature proves itself to be incapable of safeguarding the kisans' interest, they will, of course, always have the sovereign remedy of civil disobedience and noncooperation. For... ultimately it is not paper legislation nor brave words or fiery speeches, but the power of nonviolent organisation, discipline and sacrifice that constitutes the real bulwark of the people against injustice and oppression." (*Bombay Chronicle*, 12 January 1945)

On being asked the question, "What is the place of satyagraha in making the rich realise their duty towards the poor?", Gandhi replied, "The same as against the foreign power. Satyagraha is a law of universal application." (*Harijan*, 31 March 1946)

Anyone can see that the spirit and content of these positions are clearly different from Gandhi's positions up to the midthirties.

Take the question of the goal of the Indian National Congress—complete independence. Years after it was adopted by the Congress at its Lahore session in 1929, Gandhi used to describe it as "the substance of independence", "purification of the soul", and what not. But when he launched his final battle for independence in August 1942, he simply stated, "Independence means Quit India", which was direct notice to the ruling British power.

Even on the question of nonviolence, it is a clearly proved fact that he practically defended the violent methods of his



followers in the 1942 struggle, which he had never done in the previous movements led by him.

Not, of course, in so many words. But when the Viceroy wrote to him in jail giving evidence of the violent acts of sabotage, etc. of his followers outside, he bluntly replied that the rulers who were suppressing the whole movement by blood and iron had better stop their own leonine violence before they talked of the violence resorted to by the freedom fighters.

I do not want to go into too much evidence for want of space. But I do hold that there is weighty evidence to show that under the impact of the growing strength and the new consciousness of the mass movement (to which, of course, our party made the greatest contribution), and under the impact of Nehru's ideas, Gandhi did shift his positions to the left from the midthirties onwards. He took over from the left what he considered proper from his point of view.

Identically the same Gandhi, however, came out with growing firmness and sharpness against the challenge to his leadership posed by the growing left forces in the country and from within the Congress.

Really speaking, this was the first occasion on which he received such a serious challenge. Though in 1922, 1931 and 1932, he was surely confronted with the masses going out of his control because of their spontaneous, revolutionary fervour, no conscious and organised left leadership held out any such threat to him on those three occasions. The simple fact was that the left was too weak to do so at that time.

This is precisely where the situation changed rapidly after the midthirties. The communists and the noncommunist left in the Congress, the new worker-peasant and student upsurge under their leadership, broadly shielded by Nehru's role, were now clearly putting forward not only radical socio-economic and political demands, but also shaping an alternative, national, anti-imperialist leadership.

How instinctively and quickly Gandhi reacted to this qualitatively new development in the freedom movement

can be seen from his reactions as early as in 1934, very soon after the Congress Socialist Party was formed.

On 17 September 1934, he issued a statement declaring: "If the congress-socialists gain ascendancy in the Congress, as they well may, I cannot remain in the Congress."

Such statements, together with almost a cruelly frank correspondence with Nehru in which he stated that, with all his love for Nehru, he would have to part company with him if he persisted in his views and agitation, continued through 1935, 1936, 1937 and so on.

A severe test came in 1938. Gandhi proposed Pattabhi Sitaramayya for the presidentship of the ensuing session of the Congress to be held at Tripuri. The left forces in the Congress combined to put forth Subhas Bose as their candidate who was elected by the congress delegates in opposition to Sitaramayya.

Gandhi reacted very sharply, declared that it was not Sitaramayya's but his own defeat, and absented himself (for the first time after assuming congress leadership in 1920) from the Tripuri congress session.

The story of how the entire rightwing leadership of the Congress drove out Subhas from the congress presidentship (very 'nonviolently', of course) in the subsequent months, and got Mrs. Naidu elected in his place is too well known to need narration.

Innumerable such instances of how Gandhi put his foot down with relentless firmness whenever and wherever the issue of leadership was involved, during the subsequent years, can be cited. It was generally done in the name of the Congress needing a 'homogeneous' leadership and in the name of 'purifying' the Congress.

Such was Gandhi, capable of various adjustments with the growing mass awakening and demands with the passage of time, capable of adjustments even on methods of struggle, but literally merciless where the question of holding the strings of the movement in his hands was concerned.

This again, I think, brings out his dual role: working up and unleashing mass pressure with a view to securing national

independence, while keeping the movement and its guidance under his control which, in the historical analysis, meant the guidance and control of the national bourgeoisie.

A treatise on Gandhism was issued by the CPI early in 1940, very soon after the beginning of the second world war. It was written by G. Adhikari and remains, to date, the most comprehensive treatment of Gandhism and its role in the Indian freedom movement produced by the CPI. (*The Mahatma and the Ism*, written by E. M. S. Namboodiripad in 1959 was a personal effort.)

The running thread of the treatise is that Gandhi and Gandhism did play a progressive, even a militant, petty-bourgeois role in their first phase, i.e., the noncooperation movement after the first world war. In 1930-33, Gandhism rose to the highest point of its career but, at the same time, fused with the national bourgeoisie. In subsequent years (i.e. by 1940) Gandhism became utterly decadent and just an instrument of surrender and disruption in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

The treatise is written with great effort at a scientific, objective treatment of the subject and still remains valuable. But clearly, Gandhi's policies and actions from 1940 to 1948 did not bear out its evaluation that Gandhism had become a purely negative force by 1940. So again, he eluded our grasp.

Our characterisation of the war as a people's war subsequent to the nazi attack on the Soviet Union and the consequent conflict between our party line and the August 1942 struggle launched by the Congress inevitably put new strains on our relations with Gandhi and the Congress. And then came the postwar period with its entirely new, complicated and unexpected developments which led to the division of the country and the creation of the two independent states of India and Pakistan.

During this period, the main episode in Gandhi-CPI relations was the Gandhi-Joshi correspondence (P. C. Joshi, then General Secretary of the CPI).

At this distance of time the correspondence makes extremely weird reading.

Gandhi, of course, found our people's war line, as also our position that Pakistan was the democratic, national demand of Indian Muslims, totally ununderstandable and offensive.

But even before the two could come to any discussion on these political subjects, Gandhi submitted to Joshi certain questions regarding the morality (!) and bona fides (!) of the CPI, including even such silly questions as to whether the Communist Party compelled its members to eat beef.

If Gandhi found our political positions offensive, Joshi, very correctly and rightly found Gandhi's questions even more offensive. All that they showed was the deep and unbecoming prejudices which Gandhi developed about communists in his last years.

So the correspondence is really on questions of the morality (!) of communists and the CPI. It deals with no political issue.

It should and must be recorded that on the moral issues raised by Gandhi Joshi's replies are thoroughly convincing from any independent and unbiased standpoint. Gandhi himself conceded in one of his letters that, at least, on the finances of the CPI he was thoroughly satisfied. He also wrote, "If I was free from prejudices I would have no hesitation in accepting your answers. But my difficulty is real and I ask for your sympathy... I make the admission that I have prejudices."

Joshi made innumerable proposals about the appointment of independent judges enjoying the trust of Gandhi and the CPI to go into the questions raised by him. It was Gandhi who did not accept the offer.

There is no doubt that it was the CPI that emerged morally unscathed in this rather painful correspondence, not Mahatma Gandhi.

But in terms of the burning political issues of the day, the correspondence had little significance.

## VII

We have covered, till now, the broad question of Gandhi-CPI relations in connection with the national freedom movement. There is yet another aspect of the question which also needs treatment.

Our party held, and correctly, that the problem of forging the unity of the Indian people in their struggle for national freedom was basically a question of forging the unity of the anti-imperialist classes in India against imperialism, feudalism and other social elements within the country which supported imperialism.

As applied to Indian conditions our position was that our task, the task of the national movement, was to forge a firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry, led by the working class, carrying with it the petty bourgeoisie and the anti-imperialist sections of the national bourgeoisie (I will not again refer to the point regarding our confusion as to which elements of the national bourgeoisie were or were not anti-imperialist, what were the degree and measure of their anti-imperialism, etc.). For the point I am making is that our conception of national unity was basically a conception of the alliance of classes, of the anti-imperialist, antifeudal classes. And this alliance, we held, had to confront imperialism and its feudal allies in India.

Was this understanding, this posing of the problem, correct? It was absolutely correct.

But the fact remains that when one goes about the job of forging the unity of the fighting classes in a backward country, one finds that ages of past history have divided them into innumerable social groupings, categories and affinities that cut through the class alliance that we seek to build. And these social divisions and affinities are extremely tough, deep-rooted and tenacious.

To come from the general to the particular, the India that had to be carried forward to freedom was already divided by religion (mainly Hindu and Muslim), it was divided by caste, it was divided by touchability and untouchability, it

was divided into tribal and nontribal people, it was divided by innumerable languages, etc.

The situation was still further complicated by the fact that imperialism in general, and British imperialism in particular, always utilised (as it does even now) such divisions in the backward countries for pitting one section of the people against another, for inciting and fomenting conflicts among them, to disrupt and defeat the forces fighting for national freedom. British imperialism has always been famous for "divide et impera".

How far did we take concrete cognisance of this reality? How far did we strive to work out concrete, transitional solutions of such problems (full solutions are possible only under socialism, and that too after prolonged effort) in our country's march to freedom?

I am afraid, very little indeed.

Not that we did not mention some of them in our writings. We did. The draft platform of action of the CPI (1930) has a section on 'pariahs' which demanded the "complete abolition of the caste system and caste inequalities in all forms". It demanded "the full equality of all citizens irrespective of sex, religion and race". The draft platform even spoke of "national minorities and their right to self-determination including that of complete separation", without explaining what it meant by "national minorities" who were to exercise the right of selfdetermination.

But what did we do in practice to overcome these divisions for the purpose of unifying the classes that we struggled to bring into the national-democratic, anti-imperialist front?

Let us be frank and selfcritical. Except during the post-1940 period (when we did take up the question of nationalities, and that in a manner which did not prove helpful) we paid no serious attention to these problems.

We have to judge ourselves by our practice which extended over no less than two and a half decades prior to the attainment of Indian independence.

And our practice reflected the understanding that if we organised and led the workers and peasants to fight militantly



for their class demands (which, of course, we did and for which we have every right to take credit), the divisions based on religion, caste, untouchability, language, etc. would somehow be eliminated in course of time. This, to use the correct word, was militant economism.

We never said so in so many words, but that is what an independent judge would have to say about us if he were to judge us by the entirety of our activity and agitation.

In this respect, was not Gandhi's understanding of the task of building Indian unity, for which he also worked with every ounce of his energy, far richer than ours? Did he not understand the complications and complexities of the task far better than we did?

He campaigned and fought for Hindu-Muslim unity all his life to the point of being ultimately martyred for the cause.

Were all these efforts of his 'religious revivalism', to use the words of Roy when he was a fire-eating 'left' communist?

Well, fortunately for us, an indirect reply to this question has been given by Lenin himself.

In a message to Indian revolutionaries dated 20 May 1920, Lenin said, "We welcome the close alliance of Moslem and non-Moslem elements. We sincerely want to see this alliance extended to all the toilers of the East." (*National Liberation Movement in the East*, p. 248).

There can be no doubt that the Hindu-Muslim unity welcomed by Lenin in this message referred to the unity of the Indian people based on swaraj and the khilafat. And Lenin considered this unity, not as something that would strengthen religious superstition and mysticism in India but as something that was conducive to the unity of all the toilers of the East.

Lenin saw and welcomed the positive link between the two, he did not contrapose one against the other.

Gandhi struggled with the same zeal and tenacity for the abolition of untouchability. He founded a special organisation for the purpose, the Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Why did we not organise a league for the abolition of untouchability? In cooperation with the agricultural labour

unions and kisan sabhas in the countryside, and the trade unions in the cities, such a league would have immensely helped to tackle thousand and one problems of social inequality and injustice heaped on the untouchables. Not all these problems were, or are even today, directly connected with the position of the mass of untouchables as urban and rural proletarians.

While our draft platform of 1930 spoke vaguely of the right of national minorities to selfdetermination, Gandhi concretely took up the language problem in India.

He consistently campaigned for three decades for the full development of the regional languages of India; for the propagation of Hindustani (again, not Hindi; for in Hindustani, based on Hindi and Urdu, he saw one of the instruments of achieving Hindu-Muslim unity) as the 'rashtra-bhasha', on the basis of the willing consent of the people speaking the different languages of the country; and for the use of English as the medium of international intercourse. He founded universities for imparting patriotic education to Indian youth in the regional languages. He anticipated and worked for a linguistic reorganisation of Indian states by, first of all, putting the Indian National Congress organisation on a linguistic basis.

On all these aspects of the language problem, he worked out policies which today we recognise as democratic and a necessary requisite of Indian democracy and unity. What did we do in the matter?

Gandhi started working among the tribals from 1920. He set up an organisation for the work called the Adivasi Seva Sangh. He deputed some of his best followers for doing life-time work among the adivasis. We have awakened to the problem (apart from its economic aspect which we did take up earlier) in very recent years.

Under conditions in which cheap products of British industry were ruining the village industries and handicrafts of India, Gandhi's emphasis on protecting and nurturing village industries was surely not just reactionary. It had a certain ameliorative aspect which had positive value.

And so on and on I can refer to innumerable socioeconomic and cultural problems of the most complicated social organism in the world, i.e.—Mother India, which Gandhi took up in all earnestness. For instance, more credit goes to Gandhi than any other Indian, alive or dead, for enabling our women to come out of the kitchen into active political life.

This is surely not to say that Gandhi's theories and solutions in regard to these problems were scientific, and all that we had to do was to line up behind him and follow him. That would be a sheer caricature of the point I am making. The limitations of his philosophical-ideological outlook, the limitations of nonclass humanism, applied to his solutions of these problems as well. And so they still remain unsolved despite all his missionary zeal and organising ability.

But the point is that we ignored these problems. The point is that he faced them and tackled them, some (like the language problem) correctly, others, not so very correctly but still in a manner that helped the democratic, anti-imperialist unification of the Indian people. And without such unification, swaraj was impossible.

The point is that we should have formulated and worked out our own class solutions, transitional solutions, of these problems, and implemented them zealously, which we did not.

With all his medieval social theories which, in the contemporary context, were theories of class collaboration, Gandhi knew and understood India better than we did in many vital respects.

Neither Marx nor Lenin ever said that a communist party understands the conditions in its country better than a non-communist just because it accepts Marxism. Marxism-Leninism is the most scientific, the most revolutionary weapon for understanding and changing social reality. Its acceptance equips us with the best weapon for the execution of our tasks. But actual success in execution depends on our mastery of the facts of life and their proper analysis on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. It is conscious or unconscious egoism to believe that such mastery comes automatically by

declaring from the housetops that we are Marxists-Leninists.

Indeed, such an outlook is a departure from the humility and rigorous selfcritical attitude which are vital and indispensable elements of Marxism-Leninism. There is no Marxism that is not based on the profoundest, minutest and most assiduous study of the realities of life and their multifold, constantly changing interrelations.

One of the greatest mistakes a communist party can make in its activity is to ignore the problems of the superstructure while fighting for the basic changes in property relations. The latter problem is fundamental, but Marx and Lenin never identified the fundamental with the whole, nor did they ever say that superstructural problems are just mechanical offshoots of basic relations of productions. To forget this leads to a crude vulgarisation of Marxism. In the revolutionary activity of a communist party, it leads to a failure to understand and execute the tasks of the class struggle in the entirety of its spheres—economic, political, social, cultural and ideological. This implies failure to understand the meaning of the leading role of the working class in all its richness and ramifications.

The world knows that the Mahatma died a sad and disillusioned man. A great optimist and an indefatigable worker all his life, when he saw the face of the independence for which he had toiled and suffered for over half a century, he said he had hardly any desire to live much longer.

On assuming office in independent India, when his closest colleagues including Nehru asked him for a message on the occasion, he said he had no message to give and sent none.

That, indeed, was the most tragic and last contradiction in his life.

Where did it come from? What was its nature?

It came mainly from two factors, both very highly significant for understanding the man and his mission.

Firstly, independence came to a divided India, it came in pools of fratricidal blood spilt in Hindu-Muslim carnage, it came in wake of arson and pillage by Hindus and Muslims.

One of the greatest dreams of his life, Hindu-Muslim

unity, was in ruins, in ashes. And swaraj was meaningless for Gandhi without Hindu-Muslim unity.

But that was not all. No sooner they got into the seats of power, he found that most of his colleagues and juniors began to use their power for a cynical and often criminal accumulation of wealth and riches for themselves and their friends.

The relentless laws of capitalism expounded by Marx and Lenin could not be reversed. They asserted themselves. Bourgeois independence was followed by bourgeois accumulation, which never has been anything but venal and sordid.

But precisely because he was extremely sincere and in dead earnest about his utopias, despite the objective limitations and implications of his ideology and policies, he had never expected, much less wanted, such a development to follow as a result of, and in the wake of, the independence for which he always thought he was fighting.

That also made him aghast. For he had really believed in 'his' theory of trusteeship which surely involved the division of society into property-owners and nonproperty-owners (and he never made any secret of it), but which also demanded a certain sense of duty, of fairness, of justice on the part of the haves towards the have-nots, which he called 'trusteeship'. He had seriously believed earlier that his followers had accepted not only the property aspect of his idealised 'trusteeship', but its duty aspect as well.

That, of course, was not to be. The hardboiled bourgeois that they were, they coldbloodedly jettisoned the 'duties' of trusteeship the moment they found themselves secure in positions of power in independent India.

It is to the credit of Gandhi that despite this dual disillusionment, he stuck of his guns to the last breath of his life.

It was in his last days that he started issuing more and more clear statements to the effect that if the rich failed to carry out their obligations to the poor according to his expectations, he would not hesitate to use the weapon of satyagraha, and would not fail to call on the masses to use it, against them as he had done against foreign rule.

It was in this context that one of the last statements he made was to the effect that he wanted the Indian National Congress not to be used as an instrument of power but to dissolve itself and then to transform itself into an organisation serving the people. He did not want 'his' Congress to be sullied by selfseeking, power politicians. He wanted to give it a rebirth for the daridranarayana of the country.

I will end by re quoting a statement of his to which I have already referred earlier, which he issued on the eve of the transfer of power by the British to Indian hands.

"Question: What is the place of satyagraha in making the rich realise their duty towards the poor?

"Gandhi's reply: The same as against the foreign power. Satyagraha is a law of universal application." (*Harijan*, 31 March 1946)

Such was Gandhi. Not only a man born once in an epoch, not only a man of granite courage and convictions, but because of his passionate sense of identity with the lowly and the oppressed, a man capable of unpredictable adaptation and change.

What would he have done had he not fallen to an assassin's bullet? This question no one can answer. But of one thing I feel certain. With all his belief in love, persuasion and nonviolence, he would never have reconciled himself to the cynical and greedy exploitation of the poor by the rich, he would have always continued to stand by the poor against the rich, not the way we would, but in his own way.



## Gandhism After Freedom

Mohit Sen

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INDIA HAS BEEN RULED FOR over two decades by those who were either the direct disciples of Gandhiji or who accept the title of followers of the Mahatma. While it would not be fair to saddle Gandhiji with all their sins it would be unscientific not to attempt to evaluate his message in terms of their accomplishment, Gandhism after Gandhiji would teach us a great deal about Gandhiji himself. After all, this is the same test which the followers of Marx and Lenin would willingly accept.

It may be argued that Gandhiji had refused to give a message to the All-India Radio on the eve of Independence Day, August 1947, declaring that "it was all darkness within". It may be said that he had stated that the partition of India would take place over his dead body—a fulfilled prophecy one can say even if the death came after the partition. It may also be stated that Gandhiji had advised both Nehru and Patel not to accept the award of the British imperialists

but to go in for another and still more extensive civil disobedience movement—a suggestion that was turned down by both these leaders. Finally, it may be recalled that Gandhiji had advocated the disbanding of the Congress and the conversion of it to some kind of Lok Sevak Sangh.

All this is true. And it certainly stands as testimony to the greatness of Gandhiji as an individual and his intense idealism. It demonstrates anew the complexity of personality as well as the nuances that have to be taken note of when one is engaged in a concrete analysis of the role of particular makers of history. It also knocks the ground from under the feet of those who seek to utilise the Gandhi legend to bolster their narrow selfseeking regime.

Nevertheless, one has to examine what there was in the teachings of the Mahatma that led some of the best of his followers (followers, moreover, for over two decades) to push India on the path they did, i.e., the capitalist path.

Here we come upon a crucial paradox, a truly dialectical contradiction. Innumerable quotations can be culled from the writings of Gandhiji (almost all of which have been gathered by Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose) to make the point that he was against the capitalist system. Indeed, quite a convincing case can be made that he was against modern civilisation as such. His *Hind Swaraj*, which he upheld as his credo to the very end, condemned railways, hospitals and the whole apparatus of modern western civilisation as the inventions of satan. He was fanatically opposed to what he termed the mad rush of industrialism. He specifically spelt out rapid industrialisation as one of the cardinal differences he had with Jawaharlal Nehru. It is also well known that he was very far from being enamoured of the parliamentary system and its pyramidal structure, holding as he did to what can be termed the oceanic concept with the village as the focus and the source of political power which would spread out in concentric circles. He advocated austerity as the only means to equality in poverty-stricken India. Limitation of wants was his ideal as against the galloping consumption standards postulated by modern, capitalist civilisation.

The whole ideology of Gandhism can be represented as the ideological reflex of the ruined but rising rich peasant and his longing for the revival of the village community. One has here the coming to the surface of that "peculiar melancholy of the Hindoo" about which Marx wrote so poignantly. The prayer meetings, the selfsufficient ashrams, the nai talim with its craft-centred outlook, even the message of nonviolent noncooperation expressed the peasant's anguish and aspiration—the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of a spiritless situation, the opium of the peasantry.

Simultaneously with the expression of the material condition of the peasants in its purest possible ideological form, Gandhiji did something else. He substituted for and vehemently opposed the independent action of the peasants. Indeed his whole approach to the question of mass action—and much else besides—qualifies him as a substitutionist, though not of the traditional type. His fasts, his public assumption of dictatorial powers at the time of mass action, his go-stop method of leadership, his fairly consistent opposition to the actions as well as the organisation of the peasantry along antifeudal, antilandlord lines, his insistence on the need for stringent training for action (leading to the concept of elitist action)—all point in this direction.

At the same time Gandhiji steadfastly opposed the independent role, the ideology and the possibility of leadership of the national movement by the working class, the other inevitable product of the introduction of capitalism into India. His hartals were the precursors of the contemporary bandhs but with a crucial difference—the working class was to follow the action of the shopkeepers and the general strike was always regarded as unwelcome, if at times unavoidable. If Gandhiji was opposed to the mad rush of capitalist industrialisation he was no less opposed to its real negation—working-class socialism. From the earliest days of his activity in India to the last cry of horror against "red ruin" and "unity at the barricades" during the RIN revolt in 1946, he never flagged in decrying bolshevism. He admired the personality of Lenin but never Leninism which his prejudices

never allowed him to even understand.

Expressing an impossible dream, opposing independent action by the peasants and thwarting the possibility of working-class leadership, Gandhism inevitably handed over India to the capitalist class, to those who grew in the shadow of the Mahatma, as Birla lovingly puts it.

It is, of course, necessary to remember the achievements of Gandhiji. There is no doubt that he was the foremost anti-imperialist leader produced by our mass struggle for freedom. It was he who accomplished the mass turn of the peasantry to the national movement and who built the Congress into the anti-imperialist, organised front extending into every village and town. It was he who strove for Hindu-Muslim unity, for the realisation of Indian unity based on the recognition of its diversity. It was he who brought daridranarayana, the harijan, to the centre of the national conscience.

It is not these accomplishments that one is doubting when one critically examines the source and the consequence of his ideology. After all, as was stated at the outset, one has to explain how and why the legatees of Gandhi have brought India to where she is, with light and shade and the darkening menace of neocolonialist subversion.

There are three Gandhian streams continuing after the death of the Mahatma. The first, at its best, was represented by Jawaharlal Nehru. The second manifests itself as the sarvodaya movement of Vinoba Bhave. The third takes shape with the specific swatantra philosophy of Rajaji.

Jawaharlal Nehru, undoubtedly, had elements of an outlook which owed very little to Gandhiji. He had been influenced by both Marxism and Fabianism in his formative years. He had a vision of the potentiality of the scientific-technological revolution much earlier than anybody else in the country, though from a technocratic point of view. He had a grasp of the realities of the international situation which led to his pioneering the nonaligned trend, to making friendship with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries one of the main planks of this policy while at the same

time, maintaining and reinforcing links with the imperialists. Planning, emphasis on heavy industry, the setting up of the public sector, the inauguration of the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy were all very specific contributions. Much of all this would have been quite beyond the intellectual grasp and horizon of the Mahatma. But there was a spirit or an outlook animating these strategic policies which represented the best that was in the Congress in the days of the freedom struggle and in that best, certainly, the decisive contribution was that of Gandhiji. This was the ideal of anti-imperialism, of swadeshi, selfreliance and a broad internationalism. It was the quest for the realisation of this ideal that formed the basis for the progressive aspects of Nehru's philosophy and policy.

Another, and more concretely, Gandhian contribution was the concept of a secular democracy. This was an ideal from which Nehru never deviated and here he was following directly in the footsteps of the Mahatma. Nehru's approach to the problem was that of modern rationalism and humanism, more akin to that of Rabindranath Tagore than Gandhiji. Yet the ideal was the same. It can be said that by adopting religious symbolism—the prayer meetings and the ram-dhun chant—and attempting to make it a part of the congressed movement, Gandhiji aided the process of the alienation of the Muslim middle class from the mainstream of the freedom struggle. And this middle class acquired a powerful hold over the Muslim peasant masses and urban poor due to a particular historical conjuncture into which one cannot go here. But, it can also be said that far more than the modern rational and humanist approach, the idiom and style of the Gandhian approach brought the message of secularism and communal unity to the vast Hindu masses.

It far from succeeded wholly as the tragic events during partition proved. Yet the message did reach out to enormous numbers and left a heritage and a tradition to build upon. Huge numbers of cadres were trained in vast areas of the country to whom the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity became an axiom, because it seemed to spring from the deepest wells

of Indian history and Hinduism itself. Not all the masses by far were converted to the idea of secularism but there was a conversion of massive proportions. With Gandhiji living and preaching in the way he did it became enormously difficult for the Hindu communalists to propagate that anti-Muslim ideas were basic to the outlook and tradition of Hinduism.

Mere ideological preaching did not suffice, neither that of Gandhiji nor of Nehru. Unless the masses were released from material conditions that engendered communalism it would emerge again and again. This has happened in post-independence India on a far more extensive scale than in the days of the freedom struggle. Yet it is something to be thankful for and something to build upon that for decades now there has been the powerful current of secularism, peculiarly adapted to the Indian conditions, released by Gandhiji and furthered by Nehru.

Yet it has to be remembered that these progressive aspects are far from the whole of Nehru, just as they are far from being the whole of his mentor. One need not question the subjective sincerity of Nehru. He did want to make India a modern, socialist society. But in his own way, as he used to put it, avoiding the obsolete dogmas of the communists. But what was the result? Not even an independent economy was achieved but capitalism advanced, crowned with monopolistic monstrosities. Why? Precisely because of 'his own way', the Gandhian way.

What was that way? The way of trusteeship, of class collaboration, of attempting to debilitate and destroy the forces of the working class and its allies. The phraseology was suave, the method, often enough, was mass political campaigning but not always. The objective, however, was relentlessly pursued—no independent initiative and action of the toiling masses was to be tolerated and, above all, no alternative force of communist and working-class leadership was to be permitted. Nothing else so clearly illustrates this as the action of dismissing the communist-led ministry in Kerala in 1959. At that time E. M. S. Namboodiripad



succinctly stated the communist objective as being the implementation of all that the Congress had preached. But, of course, in their own way, the plebeian way, to borrow a phrase of Marx. It was precisely this that was thwarted by Nehru, acting in the Gandhian tradition. If socialism was to come it was to come along with a submissive working class and with the toiling people behaving properly as loyal retainers should. Of course, no socialism was achieved nor were the workers and toilers obliging enough to remain cowed.

Trusteeship was not only an economic concept—the capitalists or landlords acting as custodians while the workers and peasants toiled. It embodied a whole philosophy, an entire system of views with regard to the working of the historical process. The masses were regarded as preadults who had to be guided, controlled, curbed and the good life brought to them as charity from some messiah on high. Not leadership, not the vanguard organisation but substitution and where there was rebellion against it wholesale repression. Nehru, in the early days of his acquaintance with Marxism, had written and spoken eloquently against the concept of trusteeship. He had even ridiculed it as being opposed to common sense and historical experience, let alone scientific analysis. But the criticism was restricted to the economic sphere, it was never carried through to its philosophical roots. And from the time of the conflict between Gandhiji and Subhas Bose prior to the 1939 Tripuri congress, Nehru abdicated his independent position vis-a-vis the Gandhian outlook and carried this surrender through to the logical end of accepting the philosophy of trusteeship.

Nor did the matter end there. Gandhiji had a concept of the anti-imperialist united front. This concept had a progressive aspect to it insofar as it sought to maintain the unity of all who could be united in the struggle to oust the British colonialists. But contradictions within this front could not be avoided since they sprang from the objective conflict of the interests of the different classes composing it. And when such conflicts did arise invariably it was the toiling sections

who were called upon to sacrifice and exercise restraint. If on occasions compromises were effected that involved some concessions to them this was the result of dogged struggle and resistance on their part.

This, too, was a heritage carried forward by Nehru. It began, again, in the period prior to the Tripuri congress and Subhas Bose correctly made trenchant criticism of his proclivity to advocate leftist ideas but practise compromise with the right at the expense of the left. He was not alone in his criticism. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai said the same thing only a few years later. After independence this trend came to the fore following the holocaust that accompanied partition. During the debates in the Constituent Assembly Nehru opposed nationalisation and all other measures of expropriation of the expropriators despite quotations from his own writings being flung in his face. Throughout the fifteen years or so of his undivided leadership of the Congress not only did he do nothing to encourage the growth of a leftwing within it but at crucial moments when sacrificial goats were demanded, he delivered them to the executioners, even though they were from the left.

This, too, was only to be expected. If Gandhism was the ideological reflex of the ruined but rising rich peasant, Nehru could express its continuity in the new postindependence period (it was not rhetorically that Gandhiji said Jawaharlal and not Rajaji would be his heir) because his outlook was the ideological reflex of the upper stratum of the urban petty bourgeoisie. Neither the rich peasant nor the upper stratum of the urban petty bourgeoisie could play an independent role for a protracted period in the Indian social situation where the Indian industrial national bourgeoisie had acquired a greater degree of power and cohesion than any other class and where the working class was strong enough to act on its own but not strong enough to bring others in tow. In such a situation where the interests of the Indian industrial national bourgeoisie coincided more than clashed with the interests of the rich peasant and the upper urban petty bourgeoisie and where in the interests of both the

struggle against and compromise with imperialism required the mobilisation of the masses in the very interests of the development of Indian capitalism, these two leaders (or the continuation of the old leader in a new form in a new situation) admirably fitted the bill. Despite the divergences, occasioned by the differing psychological makeup of the class interests reflected as well as the changed situation, there is a basic continuity about the Gandhi-Nehru era and leadership. Both reflected the outlook of a particular class but served the interests, in the ultimate analysis, of another class. Nobody benefited from the Gandhi-Nehru leadership than the Indian industrial national bourgeoisie.

It does not happen often but it does happen that the ideological representatives of the petty bourgeoisie serve the interests not so much of that class but of the bourgeoisie. This depends on a particular balance of class forces and the exigencies of the situation. Relative independence for a shorter or longer period of this class gives way to the direct class rule of the bourgeoisie which has gathered strength in the interregnum. This is possible only when there is a coincidence (alongside conflict) of class interests and when a confrontation is on against a powerful class enemy.

This first stream of the continuation of Gandhism after Gandhi was the most powerful but the most representative or 'purer' stream is that of the sarvodaya movement of Vinoba Bhave. It was no accident that Vinobaji came into the limelight only when he took up the challenge of the communist-led armed struggle of the Telengana peasantry for land and democracy. It was at Pochampalli that the bhoodan movement was born as a conscious alternative to the struggle of the peasantry who had not benefited from the spurious land reforms of the congress government.

In many ways the sarvodaya movement represented the efforts of the Gandhians to break loose from the capitalist class while simultaneously combating the working class. It represented the effort of the peasantry to play an independent role in the conditions of where the state of the national bourgeoisie was developing capitalism in compromise with

imperialism and in alliance with the landlords.

Vinobaji also represented an effort to implement the idea of the Mahatma that the Congress should be dissolved and replaced by the Lok Sevak Sangh. His followers were urged to accept the approach of lokniti in place of rajniti, to evoke the power of loksakti in place of rajsakti in order to solve the problems of the nation, especially the land problem. The attitude was to eschew the violence of both the communists who advocated revolutionary seizure of the land as well as the violence or coercion of state action through legislative acts. The conversion of the hearts of the property-owners was the method to be adopted.

Vinobaji began with the slogan "every man to part with one-sixth of his or her land for the landless" but went on to advocate gramdan in place of this bhoodan. This scheme entailed the abolition of private property (to begin with, private ownership of land); the common cultivation of the common lands along with equitable distribution of the produce and the organisation of village handicrafts on a cooperative basis. Here we have a return to the old village community which formed the basis of the Asiatic mode of production. And, significantly enough, there is no worked-out scheme for the industrial sector, though some of the sarvodayaites sometimes also speak of sampattidan.

Another significant change in the outlook of Vinobaji occurred when he advocated dialogue with the communists and called for an alliance of all who agreed with the need for radical change, first of all, in the sphere of the rural structures. He and his followers joined in the controversy conducted by the *New Age Monthly*, the political monthly of the Communist Party of India, and a meeting of different political parties, including the Communist Party, was organised by the Sarva Seva Sangh at Mysore in 1958. Subsequently, he publicly praised the policies and attempted new practices of the first communist-led ministry in Kerala. His public pronouncements on one or two controversial public issues, e.g., the way to solve the conflict with China, were marked by a catholic and progressive attitude.

In more recent times, Jaya Prakash Narayan, the most prominent among the converts to sarvodaya, has not only made political statements but political statements that are on the side of the left and democratic forces—a far cry from the time when attachment to sarvodaya was accompanied by crusading anticommunism, including the inauguration of the notorious Congress for Cultural Freedom. He has gone so far as to say that he has despaired so much of the peasants achieving anything through constitutional and legal means that while he would not join the 'Naxalbari' or violent revolutionary way of securing land he would not oppose it either.

This brings us to an important consideration concerning the nongovernmental Gandhian trend in postindependence India. Gandhiji did, indeed, stress the importance of 'heart conversion' but he did not believe in achieving this only through preaching and appeals. He followed these up by fasts, noncooperation, hartals and various forms of civil disobedience. He believed in setting the masses in motion to 'convince' the opponent of the need to change his heart and yield! The tragedy of the sarvodaya movement is not only the utopia it pursues. Certainly, their objective is utopian especially as the entire problem of the pattern of ownership of the industrialisation process and of its interrelationship with the development of rural areas is bypassed. Their real tragedy is that while eschewing all forms of governmental action they have also abandoned any form of mass action.

It would be understandable if Jaya Prakash had expressed his sympathy for the so-called Naxalbari path after he had embarked upon various forms of Gandhian nonviolent forms of action. Unfortunately, both Vinobaji and Jaya Prakash have eschewed all other forms of activity than propaganda and agitation through the padayatra and prayer meetings. This, too, is no accident. It is one thing to use mass action, even in nonviolent forms, against a foreign imperialist power. It is quite another matter to employ it against the capitalist state manned by fellow-Gandhians. One would submit that this is a truncated and distorted form of Gandhism. It is admitted by the sarvodayaites that there are evils and injus-

tices abounding in independent India. It is also agreed to by them that the masses are getting ever more restive and even aggressive. Why can they not embark upon some form of action, even individual action, some kind of satyagraha even on a limited scale and for limited objectives. To take only one example. In recent months the whole country has been shocked at the atrocities perpetrated against the harijans in various parts of India. Why could not the sarvodayites either launch on their own or join others in launching a nationwide satyagraha on the issue even culminating in a nationwide hartal, if the word bandh does not appeal to them? Eschewing all forms of mass action and at the same time turning in despair to a kind of passive sympathy for the so-called Naxalbari path is not, it would seem, a very Gandhian way of going about settling deeprooted social problems.

It has to be said, moreover, that the despair and sense of failure should not be directed only against peaceful activities of the so-called constitutional or governmental variety. It is much more to the point and pertinent as far as the sarvodaya movement itself is concerned. Any unbiased observer would be forced to come to the conclusion that the bhoodan and gramdan movements have been colossal failures. The land 'donated' has often enough turned out to be unfit for cultivation or encumbered with litigation. Some even say that the donors very often are small peasants who have despaired of eking out a living on their utterly paltry plots. Other 'donors' feel relieved not of their land but litigation about it. In any event, these movements had as their aim not only the securing of land but a veritable revolution in the psychology of the landlords which, in turn, would lead to a revolution in the power relationships at the village level. And this would be the basis for a Gandhian reconstruction of the whole of the Indian polity and society. As far as this objective is concerned the achievements of the sarvodaya movement are worse than negative.

Still, the sarvodaya movement attracted some idealists who refused to be lured by the possibility of portfolios. It has within it some ardent spirits who have been disgusted with



the capitalist path and who genuinely desire a revolutionary reconstruction of Indian society. To them it might be suggested that the Gandhian techniques of mass struggle should be employed to accomplish this end. And if they make efforts in this direction they would not find themselves alone.

The third attempt at the continuation of Gandhism is represented by the swatantra sage, Rajaji. His endeavour is to use the undoubted distaste Gandhiji had for communism, the dislike he felt for the increase in the power of the state and the distrust he had for interference in the spontaneous working of economic forces. In other words, his attempt is to use all that was prejudiced, naive and ignorant in the makeup of the Mahatma. And with characteristic cold-bloodedness all this was to be used in favour of the forces of Indian monopoly capital, the most powerful of the feudal landlords and the neocolonialists.

Utilising the disgust that large sections of the people felt for the increasing bureaucratisation of the public sector, the proliferating corruption in connection with permits and licences, the failure of limited planning to deliver the goods and the discrediting of the congress brand of pseudosocialism, Rajaji hoped to attach Gandhiji to the swatantra star. He hoped that this would act as a bridge between the monopoly capitalists and the masses, just as Gandhism had brought them into action to realise the transfer of state power to the Indian bourgeoisie as a whole.

The failure here has been complete and crashing. Whatever else the Mahatma may or may not have been he was inextricably linked with daridranarayana, with wiping every tear from every eye of the downtrodden. He just did not fit in with the maharanis, the avowed servitors of the tycoons and the retired ics bureaucrats and a sprinkling of generals. Least of all, could he, the greatest anti-imperialist organiser of India's freedom struggle, be brought in to justify subservience to the dollar. The conspicuous failure of the Swatantra Party to sink any specific mass roots—the traditional influence of the princelings has little to do with the swatantra

outlook as such—except in pockets of Andhra (where Sri Ranga capitalised upon his previous work and the persistence of Kamma caste loyalties) is testimony to this fact. The swatantra challenge has petered out. It functions increasingly as a pressure group for the rightwing inside the Congress and is increasingly on the lookout for a larger entity in which to merge itself and even this is proving more than a little difficult. Rajaji was said, at one time, to be the conscience-keeper of the Mahatma but this is a long discarded role. One has to have a conscience to be somebody else's conscience-keeper, much more so of a person like Gandhiji or even of his legacy. It was, it would appear, unerring instinct that made the Mahatma disclaim Rajaji as his successor, he chose Jawaharlal for whom the latter came to entertain a pathological hatred. Monopoly capital could not claim the Mahatma. The third stream dried up before it could make much of a start.

The outcome could not have been otherwise. The aspirations of the ruined but rising rich peasant or of the upper stratum of the urban petty bourgeoisie could be reconciled with and even made to serve the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie led to the emergence of a definite monopolist stratum which sought to corner all the further gains of development and when it sought to do this by increasingly entering into partnership with the neocolonialists, this reconciliation and this service could not be extended to it. The contradiction between the interests of Indian monopoly expansion and the whole of the nation is glaringly expressed in its utter failure to take over the Gandhian legacy.

What of the left? Here we come across one of the paradoxes with which historical development is replete. Gandhiji had always sought to control and curb the left. He was great enough to appreciate the personal honesty, capacity for sacrifice and intellectual calibre of the leaders and cadres of the left. He was shrewd enough to realise that the left was making a big impact, especially among the youth and students. He was anxious that their dedication and their influence should be utilised for the cause for which he worked and

that, in the course of such utilisation, they should be tamed. His greatest success was with Jawaharlal Nehru and this was not a matter of winning over one individual. It was a success with a powerful, perhaps the most powerful, trend of the left. Where he could not succeed, as with Subhas Chandra Bose, he was ruthless enough to ensure that the Congress, at least, was rid of its influence. As for the communists, Gandhiji had respect for them but he was determined to keep them at arm's length. His correspondence in 1944 with P. C. Joshi, the then general secretary of the Communist Party of India, showed how very prone he was to believe in the most fantastic rumours and slanders against the communists. His opposition to organising the class struggle and to the independent class organisations of the toiling people was as vehement at the end as it had been in the beginning.

The left, especially the communists, were not free of defects in their approach to Gandhiji. For a long time they failed to appreciate his role as the greatest organiser of the anti-imperialist struggle in India. They failed to realise the great service he had done in bringing the peasantry into the anti-imperialist movement. They onesidedly stressed the aspect of his compromises with imperialism and reconciliation with the vested interests and tended to overlook the aspect of struggle and of identification with the poorest in the land. They were correct to criticise but along with criticism, along with retaining the fullest independence of programme, organisation and action, they should have sought more persistently than they did for points of contact and cooperation. Mistaken ideas of how to win the position of hegemon of the freedom struggle played a considerable role in such a negative attitude, at least as far as the communists were concerned. In their case, the mistake was reinforced by the sectarian analysis of the likely course of the national bourgeoisie as the movement developed, depicting it as inevitably going over to counterrevolution. And it was compounded by regarding Gandhiji as some kind of captive mouthpiece of the national bourgeoisie.

Yet which is the force in India that carries forward today

all that is positive in the heritage of Gandhism? It is none other than the left, and in the first place, the communists. Here we have an example of sublation, to use a Hegelian term. It is a case of a carry-forward by negation. Does it mean that the left and the communists have become converts to the creed of nonviolence? Very far from it. Indeed, one would like to ask who believed in nonviolence as a creed, except for Gandhiji and a handful? Time and again, the other congress leaders made it abundantly clear that they regarded nonviolence as a tactical expedient. How else is one to explain the fact that the entire congress leadership was prepared to shoulder the responsibility of waging war in alliance with the allied powers, provided a provisional national government was conceded? How else is one to explain the tremendous propaganda advantage taken of the formation of the INA, scarcely a nonviolent organisation? Gandhiji himself declared on many occasions that while nonviolence was his faith he would not insist upon its acceptance by the Congress. Thus, the violence-nonviolence controversy is a red herring drawn across the trail. It is the masses through their action who evolve the most suitable forms of struggle in order to achieve their emancipation.

In the course of over two decades of leadership, Gandhiji generalised the experience of the movement of the Indian masses and added to the armoury of forms of mass action. Hungerstrikes, boycott, satyagraha and hartals and other forms of civil disobedience, while not invented by him and while existing in embryonic forms in earlier phases of the freedom struggle as well as in other countries, were sharpened and perfected. These, too, are a precious part of the progressive aspects of the Gandhian legacy. For some time, due to the persistence of dogmatic understanding, the left, especially the communists, disdained to adopt these forms of action. But in the past fifteen years they have been taken up, used very effectively, infused with new content, leading to the evolution of a new form of mass action—the bandh.

In the specific conditions of independent India and against the background of the experience of the freedom struggle,

the left, especially the communists, have added a new content to these traditional forms. For example, the hungerstrike is not used as a substitute for mass action nor even merely as a means of mass mobilisation. It is often clearly the prelude to militant mass action and on other occasions the masses themselves participate in the hungerstrike. The same is the case with the use of the weapon of satyagraha. The masses are brought into the centre of the stage of action. This often leads to protests from congress quarters that the hungerstrike and satyagraha are being misused, that only those who accept the entire Gandhian philosophy and who have trained themselves through some purification process can wield these weapons. This is only to be expected since the last thing that the present rulers want is a merger of the masses with the militant aspects of Gandhism. Yet it is precisely this mass participation that lifts Gandhism on to a higher level and transforms it.

Some may protest that Gandhiji himself visualised and practised such a concept of mass action and, hence, there is no point of suggesting that Gandhism is being raised to a higher level. In actual fact this is not so. The actual satyagraha and hungerstrike were always sought to be confined to a select few. The masses did, of course, also move into action but much more in a spontaneous than in an organised manner. Quite often they were disowned and movements were called off on the ground that various satyagraha rules had been broken. Now, the endeavour is to organise the mass struggle in these forms, to make the masses participate actively in a conscious and organised manner through these forms. The whole idea is not to subscribe to the concept that forms of struggle should be so 'difficult' and 'pure' as to make us able only by a select few. Terms of mass struggle must be such as to make them accessible to the broadest possible number of people. And forms of struggle must again help the organisation of the masses to the greatest extent possible. Both the 'official' congressmen who feel that the masses are 'desecrating' satyagraha and the 'left' who feel that these forms of struggle are 'debilitating' the masses

overlook precisely this aspect of the question.

But the left, particularly the communists, have done more than utilising Gandhian techniques of struggle and infusing them with a new content. They have linked them with traditional forms of working-class action—the general strike—to produce a novel form called the bandh. The difference can be put schematically thus: in the hartals of the Gandhiled movement, the shops would close and then, generally speaking, the workers would respond with a strike, in the bandhs it is the working class which strikes and the shops close in response to this. A change seemingly in form but in reality a change in class leadership. It is significant and natural that the word bandh has now acquired well-high universal popularity and has, indeed, become a part of the national, even international, vocabulary. This is creativity of the highest order and a sign of the new times.

As for the positive aspects of Gandhiji's political programme, especially his stress on Hindu-Muslim unity and the eradication of untouchability, it is again the left, particularly the communists, who are the heirs. Indeed, it should be pointed out that right from their birth the left and communist movements had advanced their own programmes on these themes with roughly the same objectives. They were far more clearcut in their understanding and formulation of the problem than Gandhiji, guided as they were by a far more rational and scientific outlook. Above all, they were able to advance the concept of class solidarity which provided the soundest basis on which efforts could be made to build the unity of the people. This has continued in the post-independence period. The new in the situation is the realisation that the problems have deeper roots than one had realised, that mere economic class struggles and economic class organisations do not suffice to solve the problems. The realisation has dawned that the communalists and the casteists have also to be fought by taking over the Indian heritage. Gandhiji attempted this in his own way. The Indian left, particularly the communists, has also to do it but in its own way. It can never surrender the concept of class solidarity



for spurious 'theories' about caste being class in India, nor can they attempt to outdo the chauvinists in seeking 'national heroes'.

Yet the task of critically evaluating the past of our country, of picturing up all that is noble and forwardlooking, all that is humanistic and elevating, even if falling short by modern standards, is an inescapable one. National nihilism only plays into the hands of the chauvinists and reactionaries. The latter can be thwarted and then defeated only if the left and communist movements are as rooted in the very thick of India as Gandhiji was. One can, perhaps, best put it in this provocative and exaggerated manner: he who wins the battle over the *Gita* wins the battle for the future of the Indian mind. It is no accident that every important Indian movement had its own *Gita Rahasya*.

In this context, one can conclude by stating that the same critical but nonnihilistic approach had also to be adopted towards Gandhiji who is now as much a part of India as the Himalayas or the Ganga.

## A Unique Leader

Hiren Mukerjee

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THESE LINES ARE BEING WRITTEN by one who, in early youth, was very nearly a Gandhi devotee, but broke away when he came to be convinced that in communism alone could be found, to the extent possible in an imperfect world, the only real answer to the ills of society.

The personal equation cannot be entirely discounted, and there must be a difference in the response to Gandhi's life and work as between those in the Communist Party (or for that matter, in other political organisations) who have experienced the exhilarations and disillusionments of the Gandhi era and those who have not. Even so, Gandhi spanned so magnificently a whole historical epoch that, at a time of acute political controversy, Indian communists in the early forties did not hesitate to hail him as 'Father of the Nation'. The same expression, significantly, was used in regard to him also by Subhas Chandra Bose, then operating from abroad for Indian freedom by methods diametrically opposed to

Gandhi's. It needs, therefore, to be stressed that in spite of basic disagreements, we study him critically but with reverence, and while we cannot accept much of the solema claptrap often uttered about him and his achievement, we cherish him as the man who, more than any other, rooted himself, so to speak, in the life of his people and changed, in so far as one man could do it, the very air of Indian politics.

## I

Even before there was a properly organised and functioning Communist Party in India, Gandhi had come to be the leader and the symbol of India's struggle for freedom. The Soviet Revolution of 1917, however, had been a world-shaking event, and in spite of Britain's policemen and India's always plentiful reactionaries the ideas of communism were, like an elemental force, growing inevitably out of conditions in the country. This could not have been unknown to Gandhi; a communist document distributed at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress (December 1921), when the movement of noncooperation was at its height, called for an upsurge "backed by the irresistible strength of the entire population consciously fighting for their material interests".<sup>1</sup> Like the character in Moliere who wanted to embrace his rival in order to be the better able to crush him, Gandhi often in his career spoke of being a better socialist or communist than those who wore the label. It will perhaps be fairer to say that Gandhi did make an effort, first with his heart and later—when, in jail, at an advanced age he tried to tackle Marx's *Capital*—also with his head, to find out the truth about this, to him, new-fangled but world-shattering idea. He met and talked to communists, and found in them and their notions some attractive traits but more that repelled him. He even sometimes thought of communism in terms of "red ruin".<sup>2</sup> This was not, of course, all that he thought and saw of com-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in R. Palme Dutt, *India Today* (Bombay, 1947), pp. 285-86.

<sup>2</sup> *Harijan*, January 1940.

munist, but the observation was not untypical of his kind of mind. Indeed, this aspect has been somewhat gleefully pounced upon by some of that truly motley crowd of apparent Gandhiphils like Homer A. Jack who has assiduously pieced together a "Gandhi Reader".

There should, thus, be no surprise that from time to time Indian communists have reacted sharply and very critically to Gandhi's thought and, even more, to his action. It needs to be recalled that even Jawaharlal Nehru is on record as having wondered at the "extraordinary paradox" of Gandhi, "with all his passion for nonviolence", favouring "a political and social structure which is wholly based on violence and coercion".<sup>3</sup>

## II

In the case at any rate of many of us, our respect for Gandhi is deeper than most Gandhians can imagine, but in spite of all that respect there are chasms that separate us from the great man—chasms that are sheer dishonesty to hide. It is neither a peculiar perversity nor an immoral (or amoral) predilection for strife and violence that makes us see in social history the conflict of classes—a fact of life which we did not invent and do not relish. Gandhi's thought presupposes, however, on the basis of no known evidence or tenable social hypothesis, the possibility of a *Ram Rajya* where there is, by some miracle, an "automatic equilibrium"<sup>4</sup> of all discordant interests. In spite of all that has happened in recent decades we are often yet stigmatised as "un-Indian" because we hold, not as a faith but on analysis of facts, that industrialisation is now, as it has always been, the one hope of the masses who everywhere in the wide world are still poor. This is not by any means to say that everything is right with industrial society as we know it; on the contrary, much of it is wrong and must be set right. This is not by any means to allow

<sup>3</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Towards Freedom* (New York, 1941), pp. 318-19.

<sup>4</sup> T. K. Unnithan, *Gandhi and Free India* (Bombay, 1956), p. 230.

ourselves to be lured by the meretricious attractions of so-called affluence; our fundamental objective is not so much the affluent as the nonacquisitive society. But we aver—and this is as absolute an averment as can be—that it is wrong and selfdefeating to dream ourselves into the myth of a *Rama Rajya* which never existed. Except in lucky pockets, so to speak, the living conditions of the human race down to our own times have been nearly unspeakable; they are still so with well nigh two-thirds of the world.

Gandhi, however, thought that a lower level of material well-being was a necessary prerequisite for a higher standard of spiritual living. "Every time I get into a railway train or use a motor", he wrote in *Hind Swaraj*, whose formulations, now over sixty years old, were never repudiated or even intelligibly modified, "I know I am doing violence to my sense of what is right." And so he came to speak of 'cottage industries', 'bread labour' (which everyone must practise) and 'nature cure' as essential items in his programme for the people. Sometimes, of course, in his conduct he seemed to relent in his view, but he never agreed that the merits of machine civilisation far outweighed its defects and that it was neither right nor feasible to have a throwback to the preindustrial age, not even if India imagined herself to be an anchorite peninsula out of the stream of world events and ardently wished for that consummation. And so Vinoba Bhave and Jaya Prakash Narayan, generally presumed to be legatees of his thought, speak sometimes of a higher standard of living as a new fetish and recall, as Narayan did some ten years ago before an international audience in Rangoon, that our aim is "deliverance—whether we call it nirvana or moksha—deliverance from the limitations of time and space, from the limitations of life and death, from bondage."<sup>5</sup> It sounds, no doubt, vaguely magnificent, and to an Indian almost poignantly appealing, but in terms of our people's problems, which no mere glimpses of a higher morality can resolve, rather hollow and deceptive.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hiren Mukerjee, *Gandhiji: A Study* (Calcutta, 1959), p. 206.

Gandhi, however, was no mere thinker who dreamt dreams and saw visions. In that case there would have been no reason for us to join issue with his ideas. He would then have been remembered with love and respect as another of those beautiful and ineffectual angels who are fallen from time to time amongst men. But he was a maker of men *and* of events—a stupendous individual, of the Indian earth, earthy, and with extraordinary reserves of strength and character. Even so, he could not be above class and indifferent to class interests in society; even as the protagonist of the moral concept of nonviolence he was not operating in a social vacuum. He had his class links and an outlook which could not transcend the class limitations he had taken for granted. Thus, while it would be folly to assert (as communists sometimes in an excess of zeal perhaps did) that Gandhi was the conscious and willing tool of the bourgeoisie, it would be fatuous to ignore the vital fact that over and over again in his career, what Gandhi with his stress on "the beauty of compromise" wanted—namely, an acceptable settlement in the struggle with British imperialism, which would satisfy some of the country's hopes and keep off intemperate popular outbursts—coincided with the desire of the bourgeoisie for a limited effort, for limited economic and political gains, and even more, avoidance of all possibility of revolution with its incalculable socioeconomic consequences. Over and over again, it was seen that the bourgeoisie, including its 'moderate' sections who fought shy even of the Congress, knew that Gandhi alone could ride the storm of popular convulsion which they themselves were pitifully incapable of controlling. From Chauri Chaura (February 1922) when he reined back a massive movement that was maturing into militancy, to the mutiny in the 'Royal Indian Navy' (February 1946) which was the acme, as it were, of a tremendous countrywide upsurge, it was found, over and over again, that Gandhi alone, with his incomparable standing with the masses, the known selflessness and grandeur of his character, his uncanny possession of the key which timorous politicians never had to the people's heart, who could avert revolution and yet,



basing himself on the strength derived from the masses, drive a more or less plausible bargain with imperialism.

### III

The 19th-century French thinker, Renan, once said that when fate could not destroy a great man it sent him disciples in revenge. Thus, Gandhi's disciples repeat by rote words like 'truth' and 'nonviolence', to which they claim they are wedded though, alas, like many married couples they often live apart. They seek generally to capitalise for their own gain Gandhi's credit for having, in their view, achieved, virtually alone and by his own patented methods, the independence of India. This ascription to Gandhi and his entourage of credit for Indian freedom is, if the truth is to be told, nearly unmitigated mendacity. In India's hoary house there are many mansions, and in our national movement there have been many strands. No one man in the history of India struggling to be free has played as large a part as Mahatma Gandhi, but he did not work on virgin soil and he did not work alone. One need not and cannot recount here the landmarks of that struggle, a struggle in which, at one end, people who never swore by nonviolence, like revolutionary 'terrorists' and the war-time 'Indian National Army' led by 'Netaji' Subhas Chandra Bose, and at the other end the working people in factories and fields, have played a powerful and generally independent (of Gandhi and Gandhism) role. Indeed, it might quite plausibly be argued that the history of our struggle for freedom repeatedly shows that the people's angry deviations from the rigid rails of satyagraha, rather than satyagraha itself, put fear in the heart of imperialism and, at a certain stage, made its continuance impossible. This is not to deny or to pooh-pooh the proved role of satyagraha (and this is Gandhi's unique contribution) as a massive mobilising factor in patriotic endeavour; but to claim satyagraha's exclusive potency in the fight for India's freedom is unhistorical and untrue.

It is no accident, but a significant phenomenon that independence, as and when it came in August 1947, brought

no glow in Gandhi's heart but a new agony that sapped even his will to live. His disciples, choosing to be content with having reached some kind of a port, gloated over the achievement "with such little bloodshed and violence". But there was no fooling Gandhi with the fib that India had not had to pay much of a price for her freedom. The process of the transfer of power by imperialism to a deliberately divided India implied, before and after the event, and as an inevitable concomitant thereof, an amount of human suffering which, in quantity and in poignancy, is hardly less than the suffering involved in perhaps any of the great revolutions of history. Moreover, unlike in such revolutions, the suffering borne by the people of India and Pakistan, before and after the constitution of the two states, was at bottom senseless and no spur at all to great endeavour. It was a form of suffering, unrelieved by the light of an ideal, which numbs body and soul and does not release, in the very process of pain, heightening qualities of character. It was as if we purchased our freedom with coin that was morally counterfeit and its sequel has been a sort of demoralisation which has remained with us since. The manner in which we won—if that is the word—our freedom has left an unwanted stamp on all that has followed so far, and most of all it saddened the great Gandhi.

To say all this is no preface to belittling Gandhi's work, both in regard to the country's freedom and to tasks of social reconstruction. Our problems are enormous and complicated. It is dangerous to be an heir, and we are heirs to five thousand years of variegated history. Social and religious complexes constitute a backlog that cannot easily be cleared, and certainly not by wish-fulfilling theories. And Gandhi was at the same time conservative as well as revolutionary. With singular insight Lenin once spoke of him—"Tolstoy's Indian disciple"—as hovering in between two contending worlds. Gandhi's glory was that if the mood took him, and if conditions helped, he could move multitudes along with him. His failing was that often he stopped short, to the detriment of the struggle, because he had certain peculiar fixations or, to put it more kindly, because he was supremely preoccupied with

the unending issue of "ends and means" and with the problem of avoiding violence.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV

Perhaps, however, Gandhi's greatest contribution to Indian life was *abhaya* or fearlessness rather than the more celebrated notion of *ahimsa* or nonviolence. In the early days of his public life, Gandhi went through experiences in South Africa which were loaded with bitterness and it was in the crucible of that experience and the meditation to which he was driven that his character was fashioned.

"I observed on the very first day that the Europeans meted out most insulting treatment to the Indians... I was pushed out of the train by a police constable at Maritzburg and the train having left, was sitting in the waiting room, shivering in the bitter cold. I did not know where my luggage was nor did I dare to inquire of anybody lest I might be insulted and assaulted once again. Sleep was out of the question. Doubt took possession of my mind. Late at night, I came to the conclusion that to run back to India would be cowardly. I must accomplish what I had undertaken."<sup>7</sup>

These are Gandhi's own words, quietly spoken but with a storm of meaning in them. Ejection from the train and assault by the coach-driver may seem trivial incidents, for such indignity and pain were being inflicted on many as a matter of course. But a shrinking and sensitive young man endured it with a fortitude that came to him as he realised he must do it for the sake not only of himself but of other people. It was the dawn in his mind of the conviction which grew as he toiled on in South Africa that suffering can be used creatively for the emancipation of people other than oneself. Years later, Gandhi would say: "I must involve in my experiment the whole of mankind". At Maritzburg, his discovery was not complete, but it was there that he was

<sup>6</sup> Unnithan, *op. cit.* discusses this point ably, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Ahmedabad, 1928), p. 42.

born again, as it were, into a life that was to be lived on a different plane.

This traumatic experience gave Gandhi a great shake-up and the first release from the bonds of fear—*abhaya*, as our ancients called it, not merely physical courage but the positive absence of fear from the mind. And in the dynamic phases of his many-splendoured life Gandhi helped more than any one man to awaken his people to fearlessness—fearlessness of state repression and social obloquy, fearlessness in respect not only of the coercive apparatus of the state but of all vested interests, fearlessness even in the face of starvation and sorrow. Fear's black pall could not, of course, be removed in a trice by the magic of one's precept—but, let it be repeated, *abhaya* rather than *ahimsa* was Gandhi's best legacy to his people.

#### V

Our so-called 'terrorists', ready to defy death if only to prove that we were unreconciled to foreign domination, are people whom India will never cease to honour for they gave us back the pride of our manhood. Between them and Gandhi, the apostle of nonviolence, there is a wide gulf, but the twain do meet on the plane of *abhaya*. "Do not resist, do not in any case answer violence with violence", Gandhi would say, but at the same time his adjuration was: "Be brave, do not fear"—for, to him, as he never hesitated to aver, violence was preferable always to cowardice. His nonviolence was of the brave, not of the meekly acquiescent. If Gandhi hated anything, it was the bated breath and whispering humbleness of the pusillanimous. And somewhat like Jesus lashing money-changers out of the temple, he cleansed our public life of whining supplicants before Britain's throne. He could not follow it up consistently, but that is part of our human tragedy.

Even before he was hailed as *Mahatma* ('Great Soul') he often showed the kind of courage which thinks nothing of risking one's reputation with one's fellows. He was asked to speak at the inauguration of Banaras Hindu University

in February 1916, where the then British Viceroy was to lay the foundation-stone and there was a whole concourse of princes and potentates, apart from celebrities in academic and political life. Appearing in his usual coarse rig-out, he scandalised the elite by his polite but superbly blunt attack on the luxury and ostentation he saw all around. He asked the assembled "noblemen" if it was "necessary for us to ransack our jewellery boxes and appear bedecked from top to toe"; and warned that there was "no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of the jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen". Referring to the swarm of police and plainclothesmen all over the place, he exclaimed: "Why this distrust? Is it not better that Lord Hardinge [the viceroy] should die than live a living death? . . . Why was it necessary to impose these detectives on us? We may foam, we may fret, we may resent, but let us not forget that India of today in her impatience has produced an army of anarchists. I myself am an anarchist, but of a different type. . ."

It was magnificent. Mrs Annie Besant, in the chair, fairly writhed. . . "Please stop it", she said, but relented when Gandhi told her: "If you consider that by speaking as I am, I am not serving the country and the empire, I shall certainly stop." But then, "thinking aloud", as he said he was doing, he warmed up: "If we have to receive selfgovernment we shall have to take it. We shall never be granted selfgovernment. Look at the history of the British empire and the British people; freedom-loving as it is, it will not be a party to give freedom to a people who will not take it themselves. Learn your lesson if you wish from the Boer War. . ." It was too much and the long-suffering president stamped out. This unfinished speech should be one of the classics of eloquence—without frills, honest-to-goodness, a lashing of India's massive degradation, a cathartic masterpiece.<sup>8</sup>

About the same time he spoke in Madras on swadeshi, the need of selfsufficiency and the poverty of the masses:

"This may all seem nonsensical. Well, India is a country of

<sup>8</sup> D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. I, pp. 219ff; see also Homer A. Jack (ed.), *The Gandhi Reader*, pp. 128ff.

nonsense. It is nonsensical to parch one's throat with thirst when a kindly Mussalman is ready to offer pure water to drink. And yet thousands of Hindus would rather die of thirst than drink water from a Muslim household. These nonsensical men can also, once convinced that their religion demands that they should wear garments manufactured in India only and eat food grown only in India, decline to wear any other clothing or eat any other food."

It was altogether a brave new voice in India's public life, the voice of a man who had risen, as it were, out of India's very earth, a man who said queer, contradictory, impossible things and yet with courage, with urgency and a compulsion of conviction never encountered before.

For such a man it was second nature to notice people's grievances, big and small, and seek to redress them. And so, in spite of his predilection for moderation, he was drawn into the vortex of the stormy politics that followed World War I (1914-18), and became its head and centre. The official publication *India in 1919* notes his constant readiness "to take up the cudgels on behalf of any individual or class whom he regards as being oppressed". In the sphere of work, to which he limited himself deliberately, he would be prepared for a "fight to the finish" and to seek to enforce minimum demands "at all costs". He was different from the other Indian leaders and fundamentally superior, for he had his roots among the common people, tried to live their life and improve conditions, whether of the third-class railway passenger or of the indentured labourer in plantations or of the rack-rented peasant or of the factory worker or of the ruined artisan. From the poor and the lowly he drew his sustenance, and soon his superiority was established over the able and astute politicians of national stature who wooed him for a while, imagining him to be an ingenuous 'do-gooder' but then had to leave him to his own devices and take a back seat.

## VI

Gandhi's doctrinal vagaries, springing to the surface when least desired, repeatedly inhibited the magnificent popular



upsurges that he alone could lead. This happened in 1922, in 1931-32, in 1940-41, in 1945-46. It was this trait which evoked angry reproof from a very eminent Marxist. In his classic study, *India Today* (London, 1939), R. Palme Dutt, usually patient and gentle with Gandhi and his like, used blazing words of condemnation: "this Jonah of revolution, this general of unmitigated disasters, this mascot of the bourgeoisie". The imprecation is not entirely unjustified, but life's logic has its vagaries and one cannot have a take-him-or-leave-him attitude towards a phenomenon (for he was nothing less) like Gandhi. Let it be noted, however, that when he had genuine expectations, as in 1920-21—he was promising swaraj before 1921 was out—he was not unready to relax his rigour in matters of principle. This was courage of a high order, particularly when Gandhi was the kind of person he was. He knew that Muslim divines and their followers did not share his faith in nonviolence, but when the people were so deeply astir he was ready not to be finicky. So, on 19 March 1920, he said:

"Muslims have special Koranic obligations in which Hindus may or may not join. They therefore reserve to themselves the right, in the event of the failure of noncooperation-cum-nonviolence, to resort to all such methods as may be enjoined by the Islamic scriptures."<sup>9</sup>

This was something of a moral gamble but with real heroism he wrestled with himself and took the risk. He did not also hesitate, at the height of the noncooperation struggle, to defend the Mopla rebels as "brave, God-fearing" people driven by unendurable provocation into acts that respectable citizens were denouncing. Years later, in 1942, he spoke words this country will never forget—words which did not, alas, produce commensurate results but were nevertheless superbly evocative of courage and character.

For a while in 1942, Gandhi's envisagement of a mass movement was free of his fixations about nonviolence. "In the villages", he explained to the journalist Louis Fischer, "pea-

<sup>9</sup> Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

sants will stop paying tax... their next step will be to seize the land". When Fischer asked in surprise, "With violence?", the reply was: "There may be violence, but then again landlords may cooperate!" Twitted for his optimism, Gandhi joked: "They might cooperate by fleeing!" Fischer brought up again the bogey of "violent resistance", and Gandhi made, for him, the stupendous answer: "There may be fifteen days of chaos, but I think we would soon bring that under control." On 8 August 1942, he told an Associated Press interviewer: "If a general strike becomes necessary, I will not flinch." A little earlier, he had said: "Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: 'Do or die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt."<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi was too big a man not to know that moral suasion by itself was not a strong enough instrument for basic social change which called for action by masses of the people. "I have no influence", he once wrote, "to direct people's energy in a channel in which they have no interest." This nearly Marxist-sounding proposition can be matched by his knowledge that his movement had props that were not the right sort. As early as 1 April 1928, he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru: "I am quite of your opinion that some day we shall have to start an intensive movement without the rich people and without the vocal educated class. But the time is not yet."<sup>11</sup> Such a movement, unhappily, he never could bring himself to start, not even in 1945-46 when, with no more than a slight risk to his preconceptions about nonviolence he could have summoned and led a stupendous upsurge.

## VII

It is permissible to say that if only Gandhi had a certain detachment and could appreciate the problems of his people in the setting of a world society, whose social and economic

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. VI, p. 135; H. Alexander, *India Since Cripps*, pp. 37-41.

<sup>11</sup> Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII, pp. 351-52.

imperatives were to him unfamiliar and unpleasant, he could have shown the country the way it should traverse. This was a task which Sun Yat-sen did better in China, but Gandhi, a more seminal figure, did not.

Who is there in history, however, who has fulfilled every expectation? And from Gandhi we have got so much that, for all our grouses, we must be grateful. This, in spite of the fact that the man to whose name India has resounded more than to any other in a thousand years loved the toiling masses, no doubt, but never really thought them adult enough for purposes of social struggle.

Thus, Gandhian replies to our problems—of poverty, of the land, of industrial advance—command respect but are not, except in isolation, effective. All the gifts evoked by the sarvodaya spirit—of land, of whole villages, of property, of life itself—illustrate an estimable idealism but solve no real problems and do not obviate the need of seizure of political power by the people for socioeconomic transformation. Such qualities as tolerance and compassion and desistance from evil can really come into their own after the ground is cleared by the people's own action. In creating the atmosphere for such action, Gandhi made a unique contribution, but to such action itself he was indifferent and often even hostile.

### VIII

Even so, who in India will not glory in the recollection even of the flame of abhaya he had lit in our land in 1920-22 and several times since? Who but this magnificent man could say, as he did during his "great trial" on 18 March 1922:

"I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk and if I was set free I would still do the same... Nonviolence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed. But I had to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which had done irreparable harm to my country or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 129-33.

Who will not thrill, howsoever revolutionary his bent, to words that came out of the mouth of this gentlest of men when he was appearing in the aforesaid trial:

"... Little do town-dwellers know how the semistarved masses of Indians are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realise that the government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers in India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unparalleled in history."<sup>13</sup>

It may be that except in beautiful flashes of stress on right conduct, he could not show India the way ahead in an uncommonly complicated world. He roused our people, however, from the torpor of ages and gave them a new spirit and the courage, all together, to fight the *satanic* imperialism. It is no wonder that President Ho Chi Minh, leader of Vietnam whose heroism has cast a new radiance on history, said in Delhi some years ago that it was "a wrong question" when pressmen asked him to compare his role in Vietnam with that of Gandhi in India, which he thought would be "foolish", but added: "I and others may be revolutionaries but we are disciples of Mahatma Gandhi, directly or indirectly: nothing more, nothing less."<sup>14</sup> Too much meaning need not be read into this obvious extempore statement, but it remains significant. Communists differ from him drastically, but our salute to him is sincere. He did not fulfil all our expectations, but he was unique, representing uniquely this India of ours which stands, as it were, between an immense past and an even more immense future.

<sup>13</sup> *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 23, pp. 110-20.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Times of India* (Delhi edition), 7 April 1968.

## *Gandhi and the Revolutionaries during 1925*

Manmathnath Gupta

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GANDHI DID NOT BURST LIKE A BOMB. Gandhi had to bide his time and wait for the right stars i.e. proper objective conditions. Jawaharlal Nehru tries hard to explain away "Bhagat Singh's amazing popularity" in these words:

"He (Lala Lajpat Rai) felt angry and bitter, not so much at the personal humiliation, as at the national humiliation involved in the assault on him. It was this sense of national humiliation that weighed on the mind of India and when Lalaji's death came soon after, inevitably it was connected with the assault and sorrow itself gave pride of place to anger and indignation. It is well to appreciate this, for only so can we have some understanding of subsequent events, of the phenomenon of Bhagat Singh, and of his sudden and amazing popularity in north India. It is very easy and very fatuous to condemn persons or acts without seeking to understand the springs of

This is a chapter from a forthcoming PPH publication by the author: **They Lived Dangerously.**

action, the causes that underlie them. Bhagat Singh was not previously well known, he did not become popular because of an act of violence, an act of terrorism. Terrorists have flourished in India, off and on, for nearly thirty years (Nehru wrote this in 1936) and at no time except in the early days in Bengal, did any of them attain a fraction of that popularity which came to Bhagat Singh."

This is no doubt a very correct and apt analysis of Bhagat Singh's popularity. But why does Nehru and following him our hired historians stop short and forget to apply the same rigorous scientific standard to the analysis of Gandhi's popularity. Or are we asked to believe that in the case of Bhagat Singh one standard prevailed and in the case of people, whom the Indian oligarchy favours, altogether different scientific standards were in force. Let us now see the facts.

Gandhi, inspired by Tolstoy, had made certain experiments in Africa where he had gone to practise law. He was almost forced into politics. This had given him some fame, but not world fame as our dear historians would like us to believe. Gandhi had said final goodbye to Africa and was trying to get on his wings in India. But he was cold shouldered by Tilak. Gokhale, the moderate leader, met him in a cordial manner. In spite of this he could scarcely make any headway. Sitaramayya (Gandhi's defeated candidate against Subhas Bose for the presidentship of the Tripuri congress) writes:

"An interesting feature of the Congress of 1915 was that Gandhi could not be elected to the subjects committee and therefore he was nominated to the committee by the president under the powers vested in him under the constitution."

Thus Gandhi was literally smuggled into the higher echelons of the Congress. But this also did not help him much. He could not make himself felt and remained more or less an obscure person like Bhagat Singh before he threw a bomb along with B. K. Dutt and declared that the ultimate goal of the revolutionaries was to establish socialism. Gandhi had to wait full four years. The first world war was on the point of ending in the victory of the British and its allies.



Naturally India that had bled herself white to ensure the victory was expecting some reforms, if not selfgovernment. But the British government exasperated by the revolutionary movement inside India and also their activities overseas was thinking in a very different line.

The British Indian government appointed a high-powered committee under the chairmanship of Mr Justice S. A. T. Rowlatt on 10 December 1917:

“(1) To investigate and report on the nature and extent of the criminal conspiracies connected with the revolutionary movement in India.

“(2) To examine and consider the difficulties that have arisen in dealing with such conspiracies and to advise as to the legislation, if any, necessary to enable government to deal effectively with them.”

This committee consisted of four members, out of whom two were tried Indians. It is to be noted that the government was not at all worried by the activities of the Congress. This committee submitted its report on 15 April 1918, in which it inter alia advised the government to acquire two grades of powers.

“The first group of powers should be of the following nature:

- (i) to demand security with or without sureties;
- (ii) to restrict residence or to require notification of change of residence;
- (iii) to require abstention from certain acts, such as engaging in journalism, distribution leaflets or attending meetings;
- (iv) to require that the person should periodically report to the police.

“The second group of powers should be:

- (i) to arrest
- (ii) to search under warrant
- (iii) to confine in nonpenal custody.”<sup>1</sup>

The committee also sought to restrict and even prohibit interprovincial movement of undesirable persons. It said,

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Committee, p. 206-7.

“Considerations somewhat analogous to those that apply to India in relation to other countries apply to each province in relation to others. It will be regrettable if revolutionary crime breaks out anew in any province, but if it does it will be disastrous that it should run from province to province, necessitating the proclamation of emergency measures. Further in a province like the Punjab it may be absolutely necessary, in order to avert the gravest danger, to prevent the entry of certain persons coming even from peaceable provinces.”<sup>2</sup>

The suggestions of the committee were embodied in a draft bill, which threatened to curb what little civil liberty the Indians still had. India was going to be reduced into a vast prisonhouse and every Indian was going to have the not very enviable status of a suspect or a potential criminal. People were expecting some sort of dominion status because of the loyal war-services. And here was a bill that threatened ruination. The bill went through various stages and the furore in the country went on mounting. This made helplessness look more pathetic.

This was a challenge and before any other party or man could take up this challenge, Gandhi stepped in this vacuum and he became the leader of India, so much so that the revolutionaries who had been waging a relentless struggle against British imperialism stopped their movement to give this experiment a good chance. Of course the hardliners among them glumly remained aloof from the movement.

At that time I was a student. I actively joined the movement when the Congress gave a call to students in 1921 and I was jailed for three months. By the time I was out of jail in 1922 Gandhi had stopped the movement without consulting even his closest associates, on the pretext of events at Chauri Chaura in the district of Gorakhpur. In short what had happened at Chauri Chaura was this. A peaceful procession of villagers was ordered to disperse. When they refused the policemen opened fire and went on shooting till there was no ammunition left. Then the constables ran and took shelter inside the police station and they barred and

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

bolted its doors. The mob asked the constables to come out and see what they had done. Of course the constables refused. Then the mob set fire to the police station and some twenty constables were burnt alive. As soon as Gandhi heard of this, he stopped the movement.

Gandhi had brought politics down to the masses, but he recoiled at the first glow of revolution. He was from the beginning opposed to revolutionary methods. Earlier he had declared his theories about nonviolence and other things. Yet it is an enigma how he supported the British during the Boer war. He issued a statement supporting the British. This shocked all the freedom fighters specially the Irish, who had been waging an unequal struggle against mighty England. The Indian revolutionary leader Shyamji Krishna Verma, who was for some time a professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University and was living in Europe as an exile, issued a statement contradicting Gandhi and supporting the Boers. Then in the first world war Gandhi in spite of professions of non-violence was recruiting soldiers for the British and was given a Kaiser-i-Hind medal (second class) for this service. On the other hand the revolutionaries considered the first world war a great opportunity and they wanted to change the imperialist world war into a patriotic war for freedom. Thus Gandhi again and again acted against his professed beliefs and even judging him from other standards he always backed the wrong horse. On these two historic occasions Gandhi's meddling in international affairs brought ridicule on Indians. His sole object was to please our rulers.

It was not therefore strange that the revolutionaries had again and again head-on collisions with Gandhi on the ideological plane. When I entered the revolutionary party, thoroughly disgusted with Gandhi who had made a fetish of nonviolence, it had a printed constitution in which it was declared that the object of the party was to establish a society in which the exploitation of man by man was to be rendered impossible. I was very much impressed by the constitution. The writer of this constitution and all other such leaflets in northern India during our time was Sachindranath Sanyal.

During the first world war and before it he was supposed to be the right-hand man of Rashbehari Bose, who during the second world war, organised the INA. Sanyal was the chief accused in the Benares conspiracy case. As such he was sentenced to transportation for life and he was sent to the Andamans. He was released in the amnesty after British victory. He married and apparently settled down in life. But after the Chauri Chaura bungling, he could no longer sit idle. He organised the revolutionary party along with Bismil, Ashfaq, Jogesh Chatterjee and Suresh Chakrabarti. One of his main contributions was that he wrote the constitution of the party and its leaflets.

Some time after the constitution a four-page leaflet entitled "The Revolutionary" was published and secretly distributed all over India from Peshawar to Rangoon. This wide distribution was meant to give the police and the public the impression that the party had a big organisation. Thus the leaflet was a tremendous success. It revealed to a very wide public that the revolutionary party had certain very lofty social ideals. It was not fumbling and knew what it was after. The leaflet began with the quotation "Chaos is necessary to the birth of a new star". Following the line of the constitution it mentioned Soviet Russia as well as the seers of ancient India. The manifesto refused to countenance the charge that it was a terrorist party. It said, it had no faith in terrorism, but in case the party was forced, it would enter into a desperate campaign of terrorism in which the life of every Englishman and his Indian lackey in India would be made impossible.

It was followed by a Bengali leaflet written by Sanyal under his signature styled as "Deshbashir Prati Nivedan" i.e. an appeal to my countrymen. All these together reveal that the HRA wanted to cut itself asunder from the old revolutionary ideology of religious nationalism, but even under a leader of Sanyal's eminence and calibre, it could not make much progress. At the same time Sanyal was not so blind as not to see the possibilities of the new ideas that were coming from Russia and fast infecting the younger revolutionaries, but in

a selfcomplacent manner he fondly liked to believe that these new values and ideas and much more were included in the ideas of the seers. He was nearer to Vivekananda and Aurobindo than to Marx and Lenin.

Gandhi swore by spiritual values and so did Sanyal, but they were poles apart in theory as well as in practice. This was revealed by the correspondence they had some time in 1925, when Gandhi after release had taken up the editorship of *Young India*. Indeed the revived revolutionary party henceforth was forced to fight a battle on two fronts all the time. Gandhi, in order to show that he made no common cause with the revolutionaries, condemned them in season and out of season. Whenever there was an overt act, he took the opportunity to bitterly condemn them. In this his lieutenants did not always see eye to eye with him and there was open controversy between him and C.R. Das on Gopimohan Saha. Saha shot a European. He wanted to shoot Charles Tegart, the notorious police chief, instead he shot one Mr Dey. He expressed his sorrow that he had shot the wrong man. He was hanged. He took his sentence bravely and went to the gallows laughing. C. R. Das extolled the bravery of Saha. Not only that, he went to the extent of getting a resolution passed in the Sirajgunj Bengal provincial conference praising Saha. In reality C. R. Das became the vehicle of public opinion in Bengal. Bengal had never taken non-violence seriously, although Bengal sent more people to prison during the noncooperation movement than probably the rest of India put together.

The Sirajgunj resolution was too much for Gandhi. He came out with an open denunciation. A bitter controversy followed. Ultimately Gandhi was able to scotch the resolution by getting another resolution passed in an all-India get-together of the Congress modifying it. But the modification also was praise to a certain extent. This did not win over the Bengal youth, it only aroused their ire.

Sanyal wrote the first letter anonymously to Gandhi. Rajendra Lahiri, later on hanged, brought the letter from Allahabad. I was allowed to read it and I was asked to post

it. My handwriting appeared on the envelope. The idea was perhaps that in case there was a police enquiry Sanyal should not be arrested. Gandhi published the letter as well as his reply. Sanyal did not give his real name in the letter, but I do not remember the name he used on this occasion. Here is the whole text of the article as published in *Young India* dated 12 February 1925:

#### A REVOLUTIONARY'S DEFENCE

A correspondent, who has given his name but not his address, has sent me what he calls "an open letter". It is a letter in reply to my remarks on the revolutionary movement in my address to the Belgaum congress. The letter breathes love of the country, fervour and a spirit of self-sacrifice. It is moreover written under a sense of wrong, said to have been done by me to the revolutionaries. I therefore gladly print the letter without the name. The address of the writer is not given. The following is the unchanged full text of the letter:

\* \* \*

"I think it my duty to remind you of the promise you made some time back that you would retire from the political field at the time when the revolutionaries will once more emerge from their silence and enter into the Indian political arena. The experiment with the nonviolent, noncooperation movement is now over. You wanted one complete year for your experiment, but the experiment lasted at least four complete years, if not five, and still do you mean to say that the experiment was not tried long enough?

"You are one of the greatest of personalities in the present age and under your direct guidance and inspiration, your programme was actually taken up for some reason or other, by the best men in the land. Thousands of young men, the flower of the youth of our country, embraced your cult with all the enthusiasm they could gather. Practically the whole nation responded to your call. We can safely say that the response was phenomenal if not miraculous. What more could you want? Sacrifice and sincerity on the part of your followers were not wanting; the most selfish of professional men gave up their professions, young men of the country renounced all their worldly prospects and joined the forces under your banner;



hundreds of families were rendered destitute for want of pecuniary income. Money was not wanting. You wanted one crore of rupees and you got more than you wanted. In fact I shall perhaps be not far from the truth if I say that the response to your call was more than you yourself expected. I venture to say that India followed your lead to the best of her ability and this I think can hardly be denied, and still do you mean to say that the experiment was not tried far enough?

"In fact, your programme failed for no fault of the Indians. You gave only a programme to the country, but you could not lead the nation to a victorious end. To say that nonviolent non-cooperation failed because the people were not sufficiently non-violent is to argue like a lawyer and not like a prophet. The people could not be more nonviolent than they were during the last few years. I would like to say that they were non-violent to a degree which smelt of cowardice. You would perhaps say that it was not this nonviolence, the nonviolence of the cowards—that you wanted. But your programme did not contain that item which could transform cowards into heroes or which could detect and ultimately reject the cowards from the bands of heroes. This was no fault of the people. And to say that the majority of noncooperators were cowards and not heroes is to shirk responsibilities. To say this is rather to commit an outrage on the manliness of the nation. Indians are not cowards. Their heroism can always be compared with that of the best heroes of the world. To deny this is to deny history. When I speak of India's heroism I mean not only the heroism which sparkled in the annals of the glorious past, but I include the heroism that is manifesting itself in the present, because India is still not dead.

"What India wants is a true leader, a leader like Guru Gobind Singh or Guru Ramdas and Shivaji. India wants a Krishna who can give a worthy ideal, to be followed not by India alone, but by all humanity, by all the members of this humanity with diverse temperaments and capacities.

"Nonviolent noncooperation movement failed not because there was sporadic outburst of suppressed feelings here and there but because the movement was lacking in a worthy ideal. The ideal that you preached was not in keeping with Indian culture and traditions. It savoured of imitation. Your philosophy of nonviolence, at least the philosophy that you gave to

the people for their acceptance, was a philosophy arising out of despair. It was not the spirit of kshama of the Indian rishis, it was not the spirit of ahimsa of the great Indian yogins. It was an imperfect physical mixture of Tolstoyism and Buddhism and not a chemical mixture of East and West. You adopted the western method of congresses and conferences and tried to persuade the whole nation to accept the spirit of ahimsa, irrespective of desh, kal and patra like Tolstoy, but which was a matter of individual sadhana with the Indians. And above all, you were and are still vague as regards India's ultimate political goal. This is miserable. Your idea of independence is not in consistence with Indian ideals. India stands for 'sarvam paravasham dukkham sarvamatmavasham sukham' and for the ideal that individual existence is solely for the purpose of humanity and through humanity serving god. 'Jagathitaya cha krishnaya cha'. The nonviolence that India preaches is not nonviolence for the sake of nonviolence, but nonviolence for the good of humanity, and when this good for humanity will demand violence and bloodshed, India will not hesitate to shed blood just in the same way as a surgical operation necessitates the shedding of blood. To an ideal Indian, violence or nonviolence has the same significance provided they ultimately do good to humanity. 'Vinashay cha dushkritam' was not spoken in vain.

"To my mind, therefore, the ideal that you gave to the nation or the programme of action that you laid before it is neither consistent with Indian culture nor practicable as a political programme.

"It is simply inconceivable and incomprehensible to think that you still dare to entertain the slightest hope that England can be just and generous out of her free will—this England 'which believes in Jallianwalabagh massacres as a legitimate means of selfdefence', this England which tried the O'Dwyer-Nair case and gave judgement in favour of barbarism. If you have an iota of faith left in you in the good sense of the British government, then according to you where is the necessity of any programme at all? If there is any necessity of any movement in order to bring the British government to their senses, then why speak of the honesty and good intentions of the British government? It seems that the prophet in you is gone and you are once more a lawyer defending a weak case; or perhaps you are always an exponent—a mighty exponent—of half-truths only.

A sovereign independent Indian Republic in alliance or in federation with the other independent nations of the earth is one thing, and selfgoverning India within this imperialistic British empire is perfectly another thing. Your sentiment of remaining within the British empire reminds one of the many Himalayan miscalculations that you have compromised a worthy ideal with the present needs of a false expediency and this is the reason that you have failed to capture the imagination of the youth of the country—the youth who could dare and who are still daring to go against your wishes although they unhesitatingly recognise you as one of the greatest of personalities of the modern age. These are the Indian revolutionaries. They have now decided to remain silent no more and therefore they request you to retire from the political field or else to direct the political movement in a way so that it may be a help and not a hindrance to the revolutionary movement. They suspended their activities so long simply to comply to your requests direct and indirect, and they went further. They actually helped you in the carrying out of your programme to the best of their abilities. But now the experiment is over and therefore the revolutionaries are free from their promise, or, as a matter of fact, they promised to remain silent only for a year and no more.

“Further, I would like to point out that you have misjudged the revolutionaries in many respects when you blamed them in your recent presidential address in the 39th congress. You said that the revolutionaries are retarding India’s progress. I do not know what you mean by this word ‘progress’. If you mean political progress, then can you deny that every political progress that India has already made, however little that might be, has been made chiefly by the sacrifices and the efforts of the revolutionary party? Can you deny that the Bengal partition was annulled through the efforts of the Bengal revolutionaries? Can you doubt that the Morley-Minto reform was the outcome of the Indian revolutionary movement which was mainly though not wholly instrumental in bringing about the Montford reform? I shall not be very much surprised if you will answer these queries in the affirmative but I can assure you that the British government realises the potentiality of this movement. Even the late Mr Montagu expressed to an Indian of position and rank that he took the trouble of coming to India and risked his life

simply due to the activities of the young Indian revolutionaries.

“If you mean that these reforms are no index to true progress, then I would venture to say that this revolutionary movement has achieved no mean progress in the moral advancement of India. Indians were miserably afraid of death and this revolutionary party once more made the Indians realise the grandeur and the beauty that lie in dying for a noble cause. The revolutionaries have once again demonstrated that death has a certain charm and is not always a dreadful thing. To die for one’s own beliefs and convictions, to die in the consciousness that by so dying one is serving god and the nation, to accept death or to risk one’s life when there is every probability of death, for a cause which one honestly believes to be just and legitimate—is this no moral progress?

“To cling to one’s cherished ideal even in adversity and temporary failures—not to be swayed away by temporary excitements and by the seemingly noble doctrines of an alluring personality, not to be daunted by long, long terms of imprisonment with hard labour, to be true to one’s own self for years together—is this tenacity of purpose, this sturdiness in the character no index to true moral progress that India has made? And is this not the manifest outcome of the revolutionary ideal?

“You have said to the revolutionaries, ‘You may not care for your own lives, but you dare not disregard those of your countrymen who have no desire to die a martyr’s death’. But the revolutionaries are at a sad loss to understand the meaning of this sentence. Do you mean to say that the revolutionaries are responsible for the deaths of 70 men who were condemned in the Chauri Chaura trial? Do you mean to say that the revolutionaries are responsible for the bombing and killing of innocent people at Jallianwalabagh and Gujranwalla? Did the revolutionaries during their struggle for the last twenty years, in the past or in the present, ever ask the starving millions to take part in the revolutionary struggle? The revolutionaries have perhaps a better knowledge of the mass psychology than most of the present leaders. And this was the reason that they never wanted to deal with the masses until they become sure of their own strength. They always believed that the masses of northern India were ready for any emergency and they were also right in thinking that the masses of northern India as a dense matter of high explosive, dangerous to be handled carelessly. It was

you and your lieutenants who misjudged the sentiments of the masses and dragged them into the satyagraha movement, people who were groaning under a thousand oppressions from within and without, where the lightning of anger lay unperceived and you had to pay the penalty for it. But can you give any instance where the revolutionaries dragged unwilling souls into the valley of death?

“But if you mean by the sentence that innocent people are being harassed, imprisoned and put to death due to the activities of the revolutionaries, then I would unhesitatingly and honestly admit, as far as my knowledge goes, that not a single individual was hanged who was innocent of any revolutionary activity; and about imprisonments and tortures, I may say that many innocent men were actually harassed and put to torture. But can the revolutionary party be made responsible for the atrocities committed by a foreign government? The foreign government is determined to crush any manifestation of manhood in the nation, in any form whatsoever; but in so crushing the government is very liable to commit blunders and harass and imprison and put to torture cowards along with the heroes; but are the brave people to be blamed for the sufferings of the cowards? Moreover these sufferings cannot be termed as martyrs’ death.

“Lastly, I would like to say something about the remarks you have made in connection with the strength of the British empire. You have said to the revolutionaries ‘Those whom you seek to depose, are better armed and infinitely better organised than you are’. But is it not shameful that a handful of Englishmen are able to rule India, not by the free consent of the Indian people but by the force of the sword? And if the English can be well-armed and well-organised why cannot the Indians be better armed and better organised still—Indians who are saturated with the high principles of spirituality? Indians are men in the same sense as the Englishmen are. Then, what on earth makes the Indians so helpless as to think that they can never be better organised than their English masters? By what argument and logic of fact can you disprove the possibilities in which the revolutionaries have immense faith? And the spirit of nonviolence that arise out of this sense of helplessness and despair can never be the nonviolence of the strong, the nonviolence of the Indian rishis. This is *tamas*, pure and simple.

“Excuse me Mahatmaji, if I am severe in criticising your philosophy and principles. You have criticised the revolutionaries most unsympathetically and even you went so far as to describe them as the enemies of the country, simply because they differ from your views and methods. You preach tolerance but you have been violently intolerant in your criticism of the revolutionaries. The revolutionaries have risked their everything to serve their motherland, and if you cannot help them, at least be not intolerant towards them.”

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I never made any promise to anybody as to when and how I should retire from the political life of the country. But I did say and now repeat that I would certainly retire if I find that India does not imbibe my message and that India wants a bloody revolution. I should have no part in that movement because I do not believe in its utility either for India, or, which is the same thing, for the world.

I do believe that there was a wonderful response to the call of noncooperation, but I do also believe the success was more than proportionate to the measure of noncooperation. The wonderful awakening of the masses is a standing demonstration of the fact.

I do believe too, that the country exercised great selfrestraint; but I must reiterate my opinion that the observance of nonviolence was far below the required standard.

I do not believe that “my philosophy” is an indifferent mixture of Tolstoy and Buddha. I do not know what it is except that it is what I feel to be true. It sustains me. I owe much to Tolstoy and much to Buddha. I still somehow or other fancy that “my philosophy” represents the true meaning of the teachings of the *Gita*. I may be totally mistaken. Such a mistake can do no harm either to me or to anybody. For the source of my inspiration is of no consequence if what I stand for be unadulterated truth.

Let the philosophy I represent be tested on its own merits. I hold that the world is sick of armed rebellions. I hold too that whatever may be true of other countries, a bloody revolution will not succeed in India. The masses will not respond. A movement in which masses have no active part can do no good to



them. A successful bloody revolution can only mean further misery for the masses. For it would be still foreign rule for them. The nonviolence I teach is active nonviolence of the strongest. But the weakest can partake in it without becoming weaker. They can only be the stronger for having been in it. The masses are far bolder today than they ever were. A non-violent struggle necessarily involves construction on a mass scale. It cannot therefore lead to *tamas* or darkness or inertia. It means a quickening of the national life. That movement is still going on silently almost imperceptibly but none the less surely.

I do not deny the revolutionary's the heroism and sacrifice. But heroism and sacrifice in a bad cause are so much waste of splendid energy and hurt the good cause by drawing away attention from it by the glamour of the misused heroism and sacrifice in a bad cause.

I am not ashamed to stand erect before the heroic and self-sacrificing revolutionary, because I am able to pit an equal measure of nonviolent man's heroism and sacrifice untarnished by the blood of the innocent. Self-sacrifice of one innocent man is a million times more potent than the sacrifice of million men who die in the act of killing others. The willing sacrifice of the innocent is the most powerful retort to insolent tyranny that has yet been conceived by god or man.

I invite the attention of the revolutionaries to the three great hindrances to *swaraj*—the incomplete spread of the spinning wheel, the discord between Hindus and Musalmans and the inhuman ban upon the suppressed classes. I ask them patiently to take their due share in this work of patient construction. It may not be spectacular enough. But on that very account it requires all the heroic patience, silent and sustained effort and selfeffacement of which the tallest among the revolutionaries is capable. Impatience will blur the revolutionary's vision and lead him astray. Slow and inglorious selfimposed starvation among the starving masses is every time more heroic than the death on the scaffold under false exaltation.

All criticism is not intolerance. I have criticised the revolutionary because I have felt for him. He has the same right to hold me to be in error as I believe him to be in error.

There are other points that are covered by the "open letter". But I have omitted to refer to them because I think that they

can be easily answered by the reader and in no case do they touch the vital issue.

M. K. GANDHI.

As Sachindranath Sanyal was arrested about this time, he was not there to carry on the controversy. I waited for some time, then I took up the gauntlet. I wrote a letter and signed it the same way "A Revolutionary". It was published in *Young India* on 9 April 1925 with Gandhi's reply.

#### MY FRIEND THE REVOLUTIONARY

The Revolutionary whom I endeavoured to answer some time ago has returned to the charge and challenges me to answer certain questions that arise out of my previous answers to him. I gladly do so. He seems to me to be seeking light even as I am and argues fairly, and without much passion. So long as he continues to reason calmly I promise to continue the discussion. His first question is:

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"Do you really believe that the revolutionaries of India are less sacrificing, less noble or less lovers of their country than the *swarajists*, moderates and the nationalists? May I challenge you to keep before the public the names of some *swarajists*, moderates or nationalists who have embraced the death of a martyr for the sake of the motherland? Can you be bold, nay, arrogant enough to deny it in the face of historical facts that the revolutionaries have sacrificed more for their country than any other party which professes to serve India? You are ready to make compromises with other parties, while you abhor our party and describe the sentiments as poison. Will you not tremble to use the same word of intolerance for the sentiments of any other party which is decidedly inferior in the eyes of god and man to us? What makes you shrink from calling them misguided patriots or venomous reptiles?"

\* \* \*

I do not regard the revolutionaries of India to be less sacrificing, less noble or less lovers of their country than the rest.

But I respectfully contend that their sacrifice, nobility and love are not only a waste of effort, but being ignorant and misguided, do and have done more harm to the country than any other activity. For, the revolutionaries have retarded the progress of the country. Their reckless disregard of the lives of their opponents has brought on repression that has made those that do not take part in their warfare more cowardly than they were before. Repression does good only to those who are prepared for it. The masses are not prepared for the repression that follows in the trail of revolutionary activities and unwittingly strengthen the hands of the very government which the revolutionaries are seeking to destroy. It is my certain conviction that had the Chauri Chaura murders not taken place the movement attempted at Bardoli would have resulted in the establishment of swaraj. Is it, therefore, any wonder that with such opinion I call the revolutionary a misguided and therefore dangerous patriot? I would call my son a misguided and dangerous nurse, who because of his ignorance and blind love fought at the cost of his own life the physicians whose system of medicine no doubt did me harm but which I could not escape for want of will or ability. The result would be that I would lose a noble son and bring down upon my head the wrath of the physicians who suspecting my complicity in the son's activities might seek to punish me in addition to continuing their harmful course of treatment. If the son had attempted to convince the physicians of the error or me of my weakness in submitting to the treatment, the physicians might have mended their way or I might have rejected the treatment or would at least have escaped the wrath of the physicians. I do make certain compromises with the other parties because, though I disagree with them, I do not regard their activities as positively harmful and dangerous as I regard the revolutionaries. I have never called the revolutionaries "venomous reptiles". But I must refuse to fall into hysterics over their sacrifices, however great they may be, even as I must refuse to give praise to the sacrifice of my misguided son for his sacrifice in the illustration supposed by me. I feel sure that those who through sufficient reasoning or false sentiment secretly or openly give praise to the revolutionaries for their sacrifices do harm to them and the cause they have at heart. The writer has asked me to quote instances of nonrevolutionary patriots who gave their lives for the country.

Well, two complete cases occur to me as I write these notes. Gokhale and Tilak died for their country. They worked in almost total disregard of their health and died much earlier than they need have. There is no necessary charm about death on the gallows; often such death is easier than a life of drudgery and toil in malarious tracts. I am quite satisfied that among the swarajists and others there are men who will any day lay down their lives if they felt convinced that their death would bring deliverance to the country. I suggest to my friend the revolutionary that death on the gallows serves the country only when the victim is a "spotless lamb".

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"'India's path is not Europe's.' Do you really believe it? Do you mean to say that warfare and organisation of army were not in existence in India before she came in contact with Europe? Warfare for fair cause—is it against the spirit of India? 'Vinashaya cha dushkritam'—is it something imported from Europe? Granted that it is, will you be fanatic enough not to take from Europe what is good? Do you believe that nothing good is possible in Europe? If conspiracy, bloodshed and sacrifice for fair cause are bad for India, will they not be bad as well for Europe?"

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I do not deny that India had armies, warfare etc., before she came in contact with Europe. But I do say that it never was the normal course of Indian life. The masses unlike those of Europe were untouched by the warlike spirit. I have already said in these pages that I ascribe to the *Gita*, from which the writer had quoted the celebrated verse, a totally different meaning from that ordinarily given. I do not regard it as a description of, or an exhortation to, physical warfare. And in any case according to the verse quoted it is god the all-knowing who descends to the earth to punish the wicked. I must be pardoned if I refuse to regard every revolutionary as an all-knowing god or an avatar. I do not condemn everything European. But I condemn for all climes and for all times secret murders and unfair methods even for a fair cause.

\* \* \*

"'India is not Calcutta and Bombay.' May I most respectfully put it before your Mahatmaship that the revolutionaries

know the geography of India enough to be able to know this geographical fact easily. We hold this fact as much as we hold that a few spinners do not form the Indian nation. We are entering villages and have been successful everywhere. Can you not believe that they, the sons of Shivaji, Pratap and Ranjit, can appreciate our sentiments with more readiness and depth than anything else? Don't you think that armed and conspired resistance against something satanic and ignoble is infinitely more befitting for any nation, especially India, than the prevalence of effortlessness and philosophical cowardice? I mean the cowardice which is pervading the length and breadth of India owing to the preaching of your theory of nonviolence or more correctly the wrong interpretation and misuse of it. Nonviolence is not the theory of the weak and helpless, it is the theory of the strong. We want to produce such men in India, who will not shrink from death whenever it may come and in whatever form—will do the good and die. This is the spirit with which we are entering the villages. We are not entering the villages to extort votes for councils and district boards, but our object is to secure co-martyrs for the country who will die and stone will not tell where his poor corpse lies. Do you believe like Mazzini that ideas ripen quickly, when nourished by the blood of martyrs?"

\* \* \*

It is not enough to know the geographical difference between Calcutta and the villages outside the railways. If the revolutionaries knew the organic difference between these, they would, like me, become spinners. I own that the few spinners we have do not make India. But I claim that it is possible to make all India spin as it did before, and so far as sympathy is concerned millions are even now in sympathy with the movement, but they never will be with the revolutionary. I dispute the claim that the revolutionaries are succeeding with the villagers. But if they are, I am sorry. I shall spare no pains to frustrate their effort. Armed conspiracies against something satanic is like matching satans against satan. But since one satan is one too many for me, I would not multiply him. Whether my activity is effortlessness or all efforts remain perhaps to be seen. Meanwhile, if it has resulted in making two yards of yarn spin where only one was spinning, it is so much to the

good. Cowardice, whether philosophical or otherwise, I abhor. And if I could be persuaded that revolutionary activity has dispelled cowardice, it will go a long way to soften my abhorrence of the method, however much I may still oppose it on principle. But he who runs may see that owing to the non-violent movement, the villagers have assumed a boldness to which only a few years ago they were strangers. I admit that nonviolence is a weapon essentially of the strong. I also admit that often cowardice is mistaken for nonviolence.

My friend begs the question when he says a revolutionary is one who "does the good and dies". That is precisely what I question. In my opinion he does the evil and dies. I do not regard killing or assassination or terrorism as good in any circumstances whatsoever. I do believe that ideas ripen quickly when nourished by the blood of martyrs. But a man who dies slowly of jungle fever in service bleeds as certainly as the one on the gallows. And if the one who dies on the gallows is not innocent of another's blood, he never had ideas that deserved to ripen.

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"One of your objections against the revolutionaries is that their movement is not mass movement, consequently the mass at large will be very little benefited by the revolution for which we are preparing. That is indirectly saying that we shall be most benefited by it. Is it really what you mean to say? Do you believe that those persons who are ever ready to die for their country, those mad lovers of their country, I mean the revolutionaries of India in whom the spirit of nishkama karma reigns, will betray their motherland and secure privileges for a life—this trifling life? It is true that we will not drag the mass just now in the field of action, because we know that it is weak, but when the preparation is complete we shall call them in the open field. We profess to understand the present Indian psychology full well, because we daily get the chance of weighing our brethren along with ourselves. We know that the mass of India is after all Indian, it is not weak by itself but there is want of efficient leaders; so when we have begot the number of leaders required by constant propaganda and preaching, and the arms, we shall not shrink from calling, and if necessary, dragging the mass in the open field to prove that they are the descendants of Shivaji, Ranjit, Pratap and Gobind



Singh. Besides we have been constantly preaching that the masses are not for the revolution but the revolution is for the masses. Is it sufficient to remove your prejudice in this connection?"

\* \* \*

I neither say nor imply that the revolutionary benefits if the masses do not. On the contrary, and as a rule, the revolutionary never benefits in the ordinary sense of the word. If the revolutionaries succeed in attracting, not "dragging" the masses to them, they will find that the murderous campaign is totally unnecessary. It sounds very pleasant and exciting to talk of "the descendants of Shivaji, Ranjit, Pratap and Gobind Singh". But is it true? Are we all descendants of these heroes in the sense in which the writer understands it? We are their countrymen, but their descendants are the military classes. We may in future be able to obliterate caste, but today it persists and therefore the claim put up by the writer cannot in my opinion be sustained.

\* \* \*

"Last of all, I shall ask you to answer these questions: Was Guru Gobind Singh a misguided patriot because he believed in warfare for noble cause? What will you like to say about Washington, Garibaldi and Lenin? What do you think of Kamal Pasha and De Valera? Would you like to call Shivaji and Pratap, well meaning and sacrificing physicians who prescribed arsenic when they should have given fresh grape-juice? Will you like to call Krishna Europeanised because he believed also in the *vinasha* of *dushkritis*?"

\* \* \*

This is a hard or rather awkward question. But I dare not shirk it. In the first instance Guru Gobind Singh and the others whose names are mentioned did not believe in secret murder. In the second, these patriots knew their work and their men, whereas the modern Indian revolutionary does not know his work. He has not the men, he has not the atmosphere, that the patriots mentioned had. Though my views are derived from my theory of life I have not put them before the nation on that ground. I have based my opposition to the

revolutionaries on the sole ground of expedience. Therefore, to compare their activities with those of Guru Gobind Singh or Washington or Garibaldi or Lenin would be most misleading and dangerous. But by test of the theory of nonviolence I do not hesitate to say that it is highly likely that had I lived as their contemporary and in the respective countries I would have called every one of them a misguided patriot, even though a successful and brave warrior. As it is, I must not judge them. I disbelieve history so far as details of acts of heroes are concerned. I accept broad facts of history and draw my own lessons for my conduct. I do not want to repeat it in so far as the broad facts contradict the highest laws of life. But I positively refuse to judge men from the scanty material furnished to us by history. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. Kamal Pasha and De Valera too I cannot judge. But for me as a believer in nonviolence out and out, they cannot be my guides in life in so far as their faith in war is concerned. I believe in Krishna perhaps more than the writer. But my Krishna is the lord of the universe, the creator, preserver and destroyer of us all. He may destroy because he creates. But I must not be drawn into a philosophical or religious argument with my friends. I have not the qualifications for teaching my philosophy of life. I have barely qualifications for practising the philosophy I believe. I am but a poor struggling soul yearning to be wholly good, wholly truthful and wholly nonviolent in thought, word and deed, but even failing to reach the ideal which I know to be true. I admit, and assure my revolutionary friends, it is a painful climb but the pain of it is a positive pleasure for me. Each step upward makes me feel stronger and fit for the next. But all that pain and the pleasure are for me. The revolutionaries are at liberty to reject the whole of my philosophy. To them I merely present my own experience as a coworker in the same cause even as I have successfully presented them to the Ali brothers and many other friends. They can and do applaud whole-heartedly the action of Mustafa Kamal Pasha and possibly De Valera and Lenin. But they realise with me that India is not like Turkey or Ireland or Russia and that revolutionary activity is suicidal at this stage of the country's life at any rate, if not for all time in a country so vast, so hopelessly divided and with the masses so deeply sunk in pauperism and so fearfully terror-struck.

I wrote another letter. This was also published in *Young India* in the same way on 7 May 1925. Here is the letter as published in the *Young India*:

#### AT IT AGAIN

My revolutionary friend has returned to the charge, but I must tell him that he has not been as patient with his composition as before. He has introduced in his letter under discussion much irrelevant matter and has argued loosely. So far as I can see, he has exhausted all his argument and has nothing new to say. But should he write again, I advise him to write his letter more carefully and boil down his thoughts. I have been obliged to do that for him this time. But as he is seeking light, let him read carefully what I write, then think out his thoughts calmly and write out clearly and briefly. If it is merely questions he has to ask let him simply write them out without arguing to convince me. I do not pretend to know everything about the revolutionary movement, but as I have been obliged to think, observe and write a great deal, there is very little new that he can tell me. Whilst, therefore, I promise to keep an open mind, I ask him, please, to spare a busy servant of the nation and a true friend of the revolutionary the labour of reading much that he need not read. I am anxious to keep in touch with the revolutionary and I can only do so through these columns. I have a soft corner for him in my heart for there is one thing in common between him and me—the ability to suffer. But as I humbly believe him to be mistaken and misguided I desire to wean him from his error or in the process myself be weaned from mine.

My revolutionary friend's first question is:

"The revolutionaries have retarded the progress of the country.' Do you differ with your own view, when you wrote in connection with the Bengal partitions: 'After the partition people saw that petitions must be backed up by force, and that they must be capable of suffering. This spirit must be considered to be the chief result of the partition... That which the people said tremblingly and in secret began to be said and written openly... People, young and old, used to run away at the sight of an English face; it no longer awed them. They did

not fear even a row, or being imprisoned. 'Some of the best sons' of India are at present in banishment.' The movement which followed the partition or more correctly which was the manifestation of the unrest of the people was the revolutionary movement, and the best sons of India you speak of are mostly revolutionaries or semirevolutionaries. How is it that these so-called ignorant and misguided persons were able to reduce if not remove the cowardice of India? Would you be so intolerant as to call the revolutionaries ignorant, because they cannot understand your peculiar dogma of nonviolence?"

There is no difference between the view expressed in *Indian Home Rule* from which the writer has quoted and the views now expressed by me. Those who led the partition movement, whatever and whoever they were, undoubtedly shed the fear of Englishmen. That was a distinct service to the country. But bravery and selfsacrifice need not kill. Let my friend remember that *Indian Home Rule* as the booklet itself states was written in answer to the revolutionary's arguments and methods. It was an attempt to offer the revolutionary something infinitely superior to what he had, retaining the whole of the spirit of selfsacrifice and bravery that was to be found in the revolutionary. I do not call the revolutionary ignorant, merely because he does not understand or appreciate my method, but because he does not even appear to me to understand the art of warfare. Every one of the warriors whom my friend quotes knew his art and had his men.

The second question is:

"Was Terence MacSwiney a 'spotless lamb' when he died of hungerstrike of 71 days? Please remember that he was to the last an advocate of conspiracy, bloodshed and terrorism, and maintained his ideas expressed in his famous book *Principles of Freedom*. If you can call MacSwiney a 'spotless lamb', will you not be ready to use the same term for Gopimohan Saha?"

I am sorry to say I do not know enough of the life of MacSwiney to be able to give an opinion. But if he advocated "conspiracy, bloodshed and terrorism" his method was open to the same objections that have been advanced in these pages. I never regarded him as a "spotless lamb". I gave my humble opinion when his fast was declared, that from my standpoint it was an error. I do not justify every fast.

The third question is:

"You believe in varnas. Therefore, it is selfevident that you hold the kshatriyas to be of the same utility as any other varna. The revolutionaries profess to be kshatriyas in this nihkshatriya epoch in India. 'Kshatat trayate iti kshatriya'. I consider this state of India to be the greatest kshata which India has ever met with, in other words this is the time when the need of kshatriyas in India is the uttermost. Manu, the prince of Hindu lawgivers, prescribes four ways for the kshatriya: 'sama, dana, danda, bheda'. In this connection I reproduce a passage from Vivekananda, which I think will greatly help you to comprehend the matter full well.

"All great teachers have taught "resist not evil", they have taught that the nonresisting is the highest moral ideal. We all know that if, in the present state of world, people try to carry out this doctrine, the whole social fabric would fall to pieces, society would be destroyed, the violent and the wicked will take possession of our property, and possibly take our lives also. Even one day of such nonresistance would lead to the utter dissolution of the country.' I know what you will do in this awkward position, you will try to interpret it differently, but you shall find that he has left no room for such misinterpretation, because he instantly adds, 'Some of you have read perhaps the *Bhagvad-Gita* and many of you in western countries may have felt astonished at the first chapter wherein our Shri Krishna calls Arjuna a hypocrite and coward, on account of his refusal to fight or offer resistance, because his adversaries were his friends and relatives—his refusal on the plea that nonresistance was the highest ideal of love. There is a great lesson for us all to learn, that in all things the two extremes are alike; the extreme positive and the extreme negative are always similar; when the vibrations of light are too slow we do not see them nor do we see them when they are too rapid; so also with sound, when very low in pitch we do not hear it, when very high we do not hear it either. Of like notion is the difference between resistance and nonresistance.... We must first care to understand whether we have the power of resistance or not. Then having the power if we renounce it and do not resist we are doing a grand act of love; but if we cannot resist and yet at the same time make it appear and ourselves believe that we are actuated by motives of highest love, we shall be doing the

exact opposite of what is morally good. Arjuna became a coward at the sight of the mighty array against him, his "love" made him forget his duty towards his country and king. That is why Shri Krishna told him that he was a hypocrite: "Thou talkest like a wise man, but thy actions betray thee to be a coward, therefore stand up and fight".'

"I want to add nothing more except a few questions. Do you think that your so-called heart and soul nonviolent disciples can resist this alien bureaucratic government by physical force? If yes, on what ground; if not, how then does your nonviolence remain the weapon of the strong? Please answer these questions in the most unmistakable terms, so that no one can make different interpretations.

"Along with it I shall ask you the following questions, which directly arise from your statement. In your swarajya is there any place for soldiers? Will your swarajya government keep armies? If so will they fight—I mean use physical force, when necessary—or will they offer satyagraha against their opponents?"

I have room in my philosophy of life for kshatriyas. But my definition of him I take from the *Gita*. He who does not run away from battle i.e. danger is a kshatriya. As the world progresses the same terms acquire new values. Manu and the other lawgivers did not lay down eternal principles of conduct. They enunciated certain eternal maxims of life and laid down for their age rules of conduct, more or less in accord with those maxims. I am unable to subscribe to the methods of bribery and deceit even for gaining entrance into heaven much less for gaining India's freedom. For heaven will not be heaven and freedom will not be freedom if either is gained through such methods.

I have not verified the quotation said to be from Vivekananda. It has neither the freshness nor the brevity that marks most of that great man's writings. But whether it is from his writings or not, it does not satisfy me. If a large number of people carry out the doctrine of nonresistance, the present state of the world will not be what it is. Those individuals who have carried it out have not lost anything. They have not been butchered by the violent and the wicked. On the contrary the latter have shed both their violence and wickedness in the presence of the nonviolent and the good.



I have already stated my meaning of the *Gita*. It deals with the eternal duel between good and evil. And who does not, like Arjuna, often quail when the dividing line between good and evil is thin and when the right choice is so difficult?

I heartily endorse, however, the statement that he alone is truly nonviolent who remains nonviolent even though he has the ability to strike. I do therefore claim that my disciple (I have only one and that is myself) is quite capable of striking, very indifferently and perhaps ineffectively I admit; but he has no desire to do so. I have had in my life many an opportunity of shooting my opponents and earning the crown of martyrdom but I had not the heart to shoot any of them. For I did not want them to shoot me, however much they disliked my methods. I wanted them to convince me of my error as I was trying to convince them of theirs. "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you."

Alas! In my swaraj of today there is room for soldiers. Let the revolutionary friend know that I have described the disarmament and consequent emasculation of a whole people as the blackest crime of the British. I have not the capacity for preaching universal nonviolence to the country. I preach therefore nonviolence restricted strictly to the purpose of winning our freedom and therefore perhaps for preaching the regulation of international relations by nonviolent means. But my incapacity must not be mistaken for that of the doctrine of nonviolence. I see it with my intellect in all its effulgence. My heart grasps it. But I have not yet the attainments for preaching universal nonviolence with effect. I am not advanced enough for the great task. I have yet anger within me, I have yet the *dwait bhava* (duality) in me. I can regulate my passions, I keep them under subjection, but before I can preach universal nonviolence with effect, I must be wholly free from passions. I must be wholly incapable of sin. Let the revolutionary pray with and for me that I may soon become that. But meanwhile let him take with me the one step to it which I see as clearly as daylight i.e. to win India's freedom with strictly nonviolent means. And then under swaraj you and I shall have a disciplined, intelligent, educated police force that would keep order within and fight raiders from without if by that time I or someone else does not show a better way of dealing with either.

These letters created a great commotion at that time as they were quoted in all important newspapers. Now there were definitely two camps inside the national movement. The revolutionaries from the very beginning were ready to tolerate Gandhi and even consider his activities as supplementing the other activities, but Gandhi and to some extent Jawaharlal Nehru although admiring and praising De Valera of Ireland and Kamal Pasha of Turkey wanted to wipe away the revolutionaries. Nehru devotes a whole chapter in his *Autobiography* to decry old revolutionaries living in exile in Europe.

Apart from the above documents a glimpse of the ideology of revolutionaries could be had from a model list of books for revolutionaries prepared by Sanyal. This list contained books by or on De Valera, Garibaldi, Mazzini. There were some books on Russia. I do not remember the names. I bought a certain book *Russ ki Rajyakraanti* (Russian Revolution) in Hindi and many other books. At that time I read one book *History of Socialism* by Kirkup. I think during that period that was the only book on the history of socialism available in India. Then there were books in Bengali, English and Hindi on various patriotic subjects.

Ideas of scientific socialism were fast invading the minds of Indian youths. But while reading the history of the Russian revolution we did not distinguish between the activities of the Bolsheviks and the Narodniks. To us Lenin was a good patriot like Garibaldi or Sun Yat-sen. I had heard and read about Marx, but failed to understand at that time his role fully. He more or less seemed to be an extremely kind-hearted gentleman, philanthropically inclined towards the proletariat. His beard and his eyes inspired us with great respect, but this respect was not very much different from that we entertained towards, say, Rabindranath Tagore.

This was not very strange seeing that for us Indians in 1922-25 the real fight was against the British. We had to win the patriotic war, of course along with it we could fight or at least prepare for the fight for socialism. That is a different question. The fight against Gandhi and so-called

Gandhism was an important plank of our programme. It has to be a plank in our fight for socialism. Forty years ago the fight against Gandhism was somewhat difficult, but thanks to epigons and the corrupt disciples it is not difficult. This corruption is inherent in Gandhism, but that is another subject that requires separate treatment.



## *Gandhiji on National Language of India*

Surendra Gopal

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MAULANA AZAD ONCE REMARKED, "Gandhiji has given many things to India, but probably very few people realise that one of the biggest things that she has received at his hands is the idea of national language". Maulana Azad was right to an extent. Although the idea of national language started agitating the minds of Indian leaders as early as the second half of the nineteenth century, still it was Mahatma Gandhi who made it, like the movement for freedom, a popular issue. With an uncanny foresight he realised that the absence of a national language was not only a symbol of national humiliation but also a hindrance to country's development. Thus even before he had entered actively in the political life of the country, he pleaded for a national language for India in *Hind Swaraj* and came to the conclusion<sup>1</sup> that it could be

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in R. D. Singh 'Dinkar', *Rastrabhasa Andolan Aur Gandhiji* (in Hindi), Patna, 1968, p. 43.

only Hindi. His ideas crystallised further when he started participating in the freedom movement for the country.

Mahatma Gandhi felt that a truly national language was a must for promoting national unity.<sup>2</sup> He stated, "But I insist so much on language because it is a powerful means of achieving national unity and the more firmly it is established the broader based will be our unity."<sup>3</sup> An alien language, for example English, in Indian context created "permanent bar between the masses and the English-educated class", which did nothing but retard the progress of the country to its destination.<sup>4</sup> Mahatma Gandhi pointed out a number of other baneful consequences resulting from the absence of an indigenous national language.

He felt that the retention of English as a medium of instruction had led to the atrophy of Indian intellects and hearts.<sup>5</sup> He insisted that the Indian student wasted his precious time in learning through English. Through his mothertongue he could acquire the same knowledge in a much shorter period. He cited his own experience, "I know now that what I took four years to learn of arithmetic, geometry, algebra, chemistry and astronomy, I should have learnt easily in one year, if I had not to learn them through English, but Gujarati. My grasp of the subject would have been easier and clearer. My Gujarati vocabulary would have been richer."<sup>6</sup> "If I had instead passed those precious seven years in mastering Gujarati and had learnt mathematics, science, Sanskrit and other subjects through Gujarati, I could easily have shared the knowledge so gained with my neighbours. I would have enriched Gujarati, and who can say that I would not have, with my habit of application and my inordinate love for the country and the mothertongue, made a richer and greater contribution to the service of the masses."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Thoughts on National Language*, Ahmedabad, 1961, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.      <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Medium of Instruction*, Ahmedabad, 1958, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Mahatma Gandhi noted that excessive attachment to English had led to the neglect and 'impoverishment' of Indian 'provincial language',<sup>8</sup> resulting in a cultural crisis and a vacuum. But opposition to English did not make him blind to its richness, greatness and usefulness. He wrote, "...I am a lover of English language and the English. But my love is wise and intelligent. Therefore, I give both the place they deserve."<sup>9</sup> He recognised the great importance of the English language for international intercourse. "I hold its knowledge as a second language to be indispensable for specific Indians who have to represent the country's interest in the international domain. I regard the English language as an open window for peeping into western thought and sciences. For this, too, I should set apart a class. Through them I would spread through the Indian languages the knowledge they have gained from the west. But I would not burden India's children and sap their youthful energy by expecting the expansion of their brains through the medium of a foreign language."<sup>10</sup>

Thus Mahatma Gandhi showed that there could be no justification for the usurpation of the rightful place of Indian languages by English. English should retain its proper place while the Indian languages must come into their own symbolising national regeneration.

Words were not enough for Gandhiji. He suggested ways and means whereby up-to-date scientific knowledge could be imparted through the medium of Indian languages. There should be a sustained and planned programme of translation from foreign languages into Indian languages.<sup>11</sup> Above all, people should not lose heart because of lack of suitable terminology and textbooks. Once they started teaching in Indian languages in right earnest, these problems would resolve themselves.

Thus Mahatma Gandhi had shown convincingly that re-

<sup>8</sup> *Thoughts...*, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>11</sup> *Medium...*, p. 8.



tention of an alien language as a national language was not in the best interests of the country and the problems posed by underdevelopment of Indian languages were not insurmountable.

He realised well that evolution of an indigenous national language in India was beset with many difficulties. India was a multilingual country in which many languages could claim a hoary past and boast of glorious literary heritage. To elevate one of them to the position of primacy would cause jealousy and genuine misgivings among others. Mahatma Gandhi showed that these fears were unfounded. The Indian languages did not have to be afraid of one another, but they had to be vigilant against encroachments by the English language.<sup>12</sup> Their main fight was against the alien English and not the indigenous and the local one which would after attaining primacy not, supplant, but 'supplement' the sister languages.<sup>13</sup> The way would then be opened for their greater progress and further enrichment.

Mahatma Gandhi sought to allay further misgivings on the part of the provincial languages by laying down that only those who were to have profession of interprovincial character need to learn the national language in addition to their mothertongue. For others it was to be optional. Nobody could claim that he was being 'overburdened' as compared to others. In short, Mahatma Gandhi established clearly that India must have an indigenous national language. His greatness lay in the fact that while others in the nineteenth century had mooted this idea, thought, wrote and spoke about it, it was Mahatma Gandhi who linked it with the popular movement for independence.

As pointed out earlier, Mahatma Gandhi had reached his conclusion about the national language in India in the opening decade of the present century when he wrote *Hind Swaraj* and had suggested Hindi for this honour. This showed not only his broadmindedness for he hailed from a non-Hindi-speaking area, but also his great political realism.

<sup>12</sup> *Thoughts...*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

He could feel that Hindi, of all the Indian languages, alone fulfilled the requirements and had the potentiality of becoming a national language.<sup>14</sup>

Applying the criterion of numbers, he pointed out that among the Indian languages, Hindi was spoken and understood by the people of almost the whole of north India, and therefore could claim the following of the largest group. Moreover, Hindi could be learnt with ease by the non-Hindi-speaking people of India. This gave it an added edge over sister languages. But Mahatma Gandhi gave his own definition of Hindi. "I call that language Hindi which Hindus and Muslims in the north speak and which is written either in the Devanagari or Urdu script."<sup>15</sup> He refused to accept that Hindi and Urdu were two different languages. The difference consisted only in script. Written in Arabic, the language was called Urdu and when written in Devanagari, it was known as Hindi.<sup>16</sup> This was the definition given by Mahatma Gandhi in his presidential address at the second Gujarat educational conference, held at Broach on 20 October 1917.

If we keep in mind the contemporary political situation during the first world war in India, we can better appreciate Mahatma Gandhi's pronouncements. At the Lucknow session, for the first time, the representatives of the Indian National Congress and Muslim League had come together. The prospects of a joint front against the Britishers looked brighter. Mahatma Gandhi was, therefore, keen to build a permanent bridge between the two communities and so included Urdu which the Muslims claimed to be their language within the ambit of Hindi, which he was seeking to advance as the national language. Through the medium of the national language he tried to arrest the separatist tendencies of the Muslims from the mainstream of the national life. From now onwards his attitude towards the question of national language was coloured by his deep concern for

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6, 53.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Hindu-Muslim unity. Thus while presiding over the Indore session of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1918, he stated Hindi to be that language "which is spoken in the north by both Hindus and Muslims and which is written either in the Nagari or the Persian script. The Hindi is neither too Sanskritised nor too Persianised."<sup>17</sup>

After the first world war was over, the Muslims started the khilafat movement against the Britishers. Mahatma Gandhi became an ardent supporter of the khilafat movement hoping thereby to bring the Hindus and the Muslims together in the fight for India's freedom against English rule. Therefore, he started making a series of concessions to the Muslims over the issue of national language. At first this led him to seek equal status for the Persian script with that of the Devanagari.<sup>18</sup> This he did although he was fully conscious of the fact that Devanagari had deeper roots in the soil and was followed and accepted by the majority of the Indians. In order that the protagonists of Devanagari might not feel unduly hurt, he laid down that the majority need not learn both scripts. "Officials must know both scripts".<sup>19</sup> It was here that the seeds of his future plan for Hindustani were planted.

Mahatma Gandhi's new approach to the language problem had an obvious drawback. The issue of Hindu-Muslim unity was a very wide one and the language issue could at best be a part of it. Moreover, the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity had by then become a complex political question and the issue of national language by being tagged on to it also became politicalised which made cool, dispassionate and rational thinking difficult.

Hereafter Mahatma Gandhi changed his position, though he denied having ever resiled from his earlier stand.

So far he had been content to describe Hindi as the national language although it included Urdu as well. Now he gave the call that not Hindi but Hindustani should be the national

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

language of the country. Hindustani was described as a mixture of simple Hindi and Urdu, which did not lean heavily either on Sanskrit or Persian.<sup>20</sup> He admitted that Hindustani as described by him was nonexistent in the country and was only 'taking shape',<sup>21</sup> and needed careful nursing. Over the question of script, he repeated his two-script formula, Devanagari and Persian.<sup>22</sup> Thus from being a protagonist of Hindi, he became a propagator of Hindustani as the national language of India.

Under his influence the Indian National Congress, then the foremost political organisation in the country, accepted Hindustani as the national language of India at its Kanpur session in 1925.<sup>23</sup> At the same session, under his inspiration the Congress also pledged to carry out its work in Hindustani.<sup>24</sup> Once he had made up his mind, he plunged heart and soul into propagation of Hindustani as the national language of India. However, he did not sever his connection with Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, the foremost body for the furtherance of the cause of Hindi. He attempted to bring round to his view all others. He succeeded to an extent for he was once again elected president of the Indore session of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1935.<sup>25</sup> Under his guidance the sammelan adopted a resolution which accepted Urdu written in Persian script as a part of Hindi although the Sahitya Sammelan kept Devanagari as its authorised script.<sup>26</sup> Thus the protagonists of Hindi were prepared to accommodate Mahatma's views in the larger interests of the nation.

When in 1937 the Congress came to power in several provinces of India, it tried to implement the policy of introducing Hindustani in educational institutions and govern-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 98.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 105.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

mental offices.<sup>27</sup> The experiment did not yield the results expected by Mahatma Gandhi.

A language could not be manufactured and made palatable to the population against facts of history and logic. The Muslims at large, now under the spell of M. A. Jinnah and the Muslim League, rejected it thinking it to be the smoke-screen, behind which Hindi sought to establish itself. As a matter of fact, the chances of a Hindu-Muslim rapprochement had by then considerably receded and in spite of concessions there was no hope that the Muslims would accept a national language for India. Encouraged by the Britishers they had begun to dream of a Muslim majority state, Pakistan, carved out of India and in the circumstances any talk of a national language seemed to them irrelevant. The Muslim attitude produced its reaction amongst the followers of Hindi, who now resented the denial of its rightful place only in order to please an intransigent section. Hence, Mahatma Gandhi's policies instead of helping in the evolution of a national consensus over the national language question created one more party to it.

But it was not in Mahatma Gandhi's nature to give up easily. On 2 May 1942 he organised the Hindustani Prachar Sabha with Sriman Narayan and Kaka Saheb Kalelkar as its most active workers.<sup>28</sup> But before the newly-established organisation could make its mark the Quit India movement of 1942 broke out and Mahatma Gandhi along with other leaders of the Indian National Congress were put behind the bars. Those who remained free carried on with the work of propagation of Hindustani, but their efforts were not successful. After his release from the prison, Mahatma Gandhi reactivated the Hindustani Prachar Sabha.<sup>29</sup> In order to show his earnestness, he resigned in 1945 from the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, ending an association of almost three decades.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Mahatma Gandhi had however been fighting a losing battle. Since the dawn of the forties Muslim separatism had grown stronger. Soon its dream of Pakistan by partitioning the country was to become an established fact. The mission of Mahatma Gandhi for bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity had failed. This knocked the bottom out of Hindustani's claim to become the national language of India. When India became free Hindi written in Devanagari script was recognised as the state language of Uttar Pradesh. The decision pained Gandhiji immensely. He saw in this a blow to his cherished ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity.<sup>31</sup> But the writing on the wall was clear. The Constituent Assembly voted in favour of Hindi as the state language of India, although it put off the implementation for future. However, Mahatma Gandhi's effort to make Hindustani the national language of India came to naught.

It will be pertinent here to discuss the causes of the failure of Mahatma Gandhi's language policy. This is important, for Mahatma Gandhi cannot be said to have failed to take into account or minimise the difficulties that might confront him. A section of his countrymen was obsessively attached to English and the emerging national language had to contend with this well-entrenched vested interest. The unfounded fear of the protagonists of the provincial languages was another serious hurdle. The times in which he lived as well as certain drawbacks in his plan were responsible for his failure.

When Mahatma Gandhi propounded his policy, the socio-economic forces were yet not ripe enough. In the absence of large-scale industrialisation in the country, there was little necessity for the average citizen to leave his home in search for a job. The high percentage of illiteracy further reduced the necessity of a national language. Therefore, the country could listen to Mahatma Gandhi's exhortations, but the society was unable to adopt a national language.

Mahatma Gandhi's insistence on Hindustani further complicated matters. Hindustani was alien to southerners and

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-72.



comparatively unknown to the northerners. Thus his bid to 'create' a language was bound to be unsuccessful for it was liked neither by those whom he wanted to please nor by those for whom he intended it. When it became apparent that behind the facade of Hindustani Mahatma Gandhi was trying to 'patronise' Urdu in order to win the support of the Muslims for the freedom struggle, and when it was felt that the separatist demands of the Muslims could not be stopped by making these concessions, his policy collapsed in the ensuing reaction amongst the majority of the Indians. Mahatma Gandhi tried to dismiss such opposition by saying that "counting of heads is no more a remedy than breaking of heads" but he failed to appreciate that disregard of the wishes of the majority for the sake of minority is not the best way to make a proposition acceptable.

However, failure cannot hide Mahatma Gandhi's great contribution. He focused national attention on such a vital problem for the first time and started a debate which is still going on.

## *Gandhiji, As I Knew Him*

Ven. Anand Kausalyayan

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INDIA IS UNIQUE IN THAT she has not only two national songs, but two national days also, 26 January and 15 August; the first one reminds us of the day on which the nation finally resolved to carry on struggle ceaselessly till the attainment of complete freedom, the second one is the day on which we actually became a sovereign nation. Had we not made a strong determination on 26 January, perhaps we would have never attained freedom on 15 August. Hence 26 January is no less important than 15 August.

On the 26 January 1948, we had hardly finished celebrating one of our two national days, and only just after four days we had to mourn the loss of the father of the nation, the father who had directed us to take the oath of complete freedom, the father who had helped us to attain it.

Today our Bapu is no longer in our midst, when we are enjoying the freedom for which he had struggled so hard.

On the inauspicious evening of 30 January 1948, I had

hardly got down from the train at Varanasi station when I learnt about the sad and shocking end of Gandhiji. It was not a news—it was the destructive fire of the jungle which was spreading in all directions.

History does not record any other instance of a nation being orphaned thus; the father of the Indian nation becoming target of the bullet of one who was not only a Hindustani, but a Hindu also. And it is said that the hypocrite had not even forgotten to pay his respects, before he aimed at the uncovered chest of Bapu.

At the passing away of ordinary people, generally their relatives alone mourn their death; but when Gandhiji breathed his last, more than even Devdas Gandhi, his son, not only his other relatives, his friends, his admirers wept, but even such people wept bitterly as lived under the mistaken belief that Gandhi was their enemy. Millions sorrowed who had not even seen Gandhiji.

Why did they weep at all? Why did they weep so much? The only possible answer can be that a flower of humanity had withered away that particular evening.

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On 6 December 1945, knowing that Bapu was always very busy, I was hesitating to step into his cottage at Sevagram, Wardha, when I heard the words: "Come along, come along". I stepped in. "You can stay here as long as you wish." "Yes Bapu, I shall try to spend most of my time here, as long as I stay at Wardha."

After the exchange of a few more courteous words, he said, "Well, the bell has already rung; now the first thing for you is to go and have your meals." "I do not eat any solid food in the evening but shall gladly have a cup of milk", I replied. At a signal Srimannarayan Aggarwal (the present governor of Gujarat) led me to the dining room.

At Sevagram, if one did not dine at the fixed hour, one had to wait for the next chance, just as one has to wait for the train, if one misses the earlier one. This arrangement, looked from the angle of punctuality was excellent, but punctuality alone is not enough.

Being an intimate friend of Maha Pandit Rahula Sankritayan and considered trustworthy by his comrades, I had on several occasions stayed as a guest at the Communist Party headquarters in Bombay. There too meals were served at fixed hours, but if for some reason or other, either the guest or even one of their own comrades was unable to take the food at the fixed hour, his food was served and the plate kept for him to eat at his convenience. In the case of a guest he was generally not left alone, just to eat his food. There was always somebody to keep company, keep him engaged in some lively conversation. Thus the warmth of the hospitality was somehow kept intact as otherwise food could not be relished, particularly in the cold weather. I used to eat my food at my fixed hour and do not remember to have ever sat with the comrades. Yet there was always a comrade by my side, when I sat for eating. I was never left alone, just to eat or not to eat. Often it was Mahendra, who obliged me. It was just possible that it might be one of his assignments to see that the guests were not neglected. It may be my weakness, but somehow or other I relished this courteous behaviour of the comrades more than the cold punctuality at Sevagram.

I am reminded of an experience, which I had at Sevagram, the very next day I arrived there. I had finished my noon meal and wanted to have a little rest. Such people as are particular about spicy dishes may or may not relish food at Sevagram, but from the point of view of nourishment, there was nothing wanting in it. I somehow liked it. When I had my fill, an ashramite came to me and said, "Guest or no guest, everybody has to work here after having taken his food."

I do not shirk of work, but I am in the habit of resting a while after my lunch. I was left alone. After an hour or so I got up and asked what work they expect me to do. "The time allotted for work has already come to an end" was the reply. I changed my time table—food, work and then rest. This slight adjustment did not affect me at all, as the period allotted for work was such a short one.

Next day, when I had my noon meal, and was found most willing to work, the task that I was allotted was sorting of mixed grains and pulses separately. It was a new lesson for me and the result must not have been satisfactory at all. The period of work terminated rather too soon. As the bell rang, I said: "If you like, you can enter into a life-long contract with me. On your part you shall have to give me as good a breakfast as you had given me this morning, and as nourishing a lunch as I had this noon, and on my part I shall agree to do daily as much work as I have done today."

It is just possible that I might be wrong. But what I thought then, and do not think otherwise even now, is that there ought to have been some justification for giving me that much food in return for doing only that much work! It struck me that Gandhiji's ashram was also as good or bad an institution as that of an average sadhu or monk. Eating punctually at fixed hours etc. was only meant for the members of the ashram or for their guests at the most. Labourers working at the ashram were not entitled to all those luxuries. In a sadhu's ashram, the inmates generally maintain themselves on the charity of the generous people, and in Gandhiji's ashram too, it was not different. Sevagram too was subsidised by certain well-known millionaires.

When as I returned after having had my cup of milk, I saw that Bapu was very busy. Problems of various sorts were being faced and resolved one after another. I myself was hesitating to burden him still further. Just then Dr Sushila Nayyar reminded Bapu that it was getting rather too late and it was time when he should observe "silence". "No, this is simply impossible." "I am afraid, the strain may become too much." "It is my duty to give time to all such people as have been given appointments. Not to fulfil one's promise amounts to telling a lie."

I sympathised with Gandhiji... he was obliged to see people and have a few words with everybody till 10 p.m.

When, we were all having a walk along with Bapu,

Srimannarayan Aggarwal did me the favour of introducing the topic of "national language". Gandhiji exchanged a few sentences with me also and then just added: "Now, you have to be at the ashram; do not slip away during my absence. In case you do so, I shall have to find fault with you, on my return from Bombay."

I felt like saying, that in case I stayed, you shall have no reason to find fault with me, and in case I depart you shall find none to find fault with. But said nothing of this sort. Instead I submitted: "Bapu, you are a strange host, you have your guests at home and yourself bid goodbye".

He had a hearty laugh over it and added, "Yes, yes, I like such guests, who would consider my home as theirs particularly during my absence."

Just then, he was once more reminded that it was time for him to observe "silence". I also added, "Yes, Bapu, it would be advisable for you to observe silence now."

Just at that time somebody else started saying something. Bapu had his two fingers on his lips, as an indication of his "silence". I happened to remark, "Bapu, this silence pertains only to speaking, not to hearing. There is little harm if you would condescend to hear what this gentleman has to say." Gandhiji instantly covered both his ears also with all the ten fingers of his hands. Had some photographer taken a snap of Gandhiji in that posture, that particular shot would have brought him a fortune today. Indeed it was a wonderful pose. I regret that I cannot share with my readers, my mental record of the same.

Next day early in morning it was drizzling. Gandhiji was strolling in his verandah, supported by two girls. As I passed that way, he spotted me. I noticed that his hands were raised in courteous salutation, to which I naturally responded. And I heard him saying—"You too can join this party. But we shall stick to the subject of the conversation."

At that time certain instructions were being given to one or two of the ashramites. I also took my stand near by. The place which I had occupied was a bit damp. This was some-



thing which he could not bear. He explained: "That spot is rather damp. The doctor in me says that you should not stand there. It is dry up here, please come this side." Now Bapu had himself punctuated his conversation twice, I thought there would be no impropriety, if I also put in a query and exclaimed: "Bapu, I had stopped in order to ask just one thing only." "Yes, it was clear to me." "I wanted to know that as the date for your departure to Bombay is certain, is the return date also similarly fixed?" "Look here, in Bombay we get a kind of coconut, which does not contain even a drop of water. If Mr. Jinnah presents me nothing but such a coconut, I shall be back by Sunday. But instead, if he gives me some candy also and promises me to give certain other things, then he can make me linger on for a few more days in Bombay."

I understood that Bapu was ready for all eventualities. Maha Pandit Rahula Sankrityayan took objection to my referring to Gandhiji as Bapu (father). I saw little harm in addressing him thus, but never accepted him as such. And how could it be otherwise, because Gandhiji, even in his correspondence used to put his signature as Bapu. As far as Gandhiji was concerned, the word had ceased to be a common noun, and instead become a proper name!

When I learnt about Gandhiji's time-table and realised that there was every possibility of his being delayed at Bombay, I said: "Bapu, if you would be gracious enough not to insist on the condition that you have laid down against my leaving Sevagram, I feel that I too should accompany you to Bombay for I have something to do there." "Yes, yes, there is one advantage in accompanying me. One gets comfortable accommodation even when one has purchased only a third class ticket."

What to speak of comfortable accommodation! For Gandhiji and his companions, they used to "reserve" one special compartment from Nagpur itself. None dared enter it. At Wardha, milk-white khadi pillows and bedding were spread in it. That particular compartment could be called "III

class" only because it was designed as such. Otherwise it surpassed even a first class one. It was a class in itself. It was "Gandhi Class". Next day, I too availed myself of the comforts of "Gandhi Class" and travelled together with Bapu, in the very same compartment.

When the Hindi-Hindustani controversy as regards our national language was in its full swing, on several occasions I met Gandhiji and talked things over. For several years I was the secretary of the Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti, which Gandhiji had himself started and of which he himself was a member. In spite of all the attempts which late Babu Purshottamdas Tandon made to keep Gandhiji within the fold of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Bapu thought otherwise and had resigned from the membership of the same. What else could Bapu do? If Tandonji was not prepared to become the member of Gandhiji's newly oriented Hindustani Prachar Sabha, how could Gandhiji agree to remain a member of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan! Now neither Bapu is alive, nor Tandonji; only sacred memory survives.

One day, in the early morning Bapu asked, "Swamiji, has Rehana Behn requested you to give a discourse to the inmates of this ashram this evening?" "Yes, Bapu, but in return I had requested Rehana Behn to arrange that I may have the good fortune of hearing you; for you have never addressed the ashramites since I have been here."

Gandhiji, great as he was in many other things, was a unique conversationalist too. I had to accept my defeat and agree to address the inmates of the ashram, the same evening on Buddhism and Ceylon.

In those days there resided one, Mr. Gulati, at Sevagram. He could be called the engineer of all-India congress functions held at various places. I asked him: "Today Bapu has asked me to address the inmates of the ashram this very evening. I know his time is very valuable. Please give me just an idea as to how long I should speak, lest I may not chatter too long." Mr Gulati's answer was rather shocking: "You can

carry on as long as you like, because Bapu does not stay to hear anybody. He just introduces the lecturer, and slips out himself."

I must admit I was not prepared for such an answer and I decided to see that Bapu honours my address with his presence. At the time of lunch when I was seated next to Gandhiji, and was taking my food in my iron begging bowl, somebody asked: "Bapu, why should Swamiji keep an iron bowl to eat?" "So that, if occasion demands, he may protect his head, even if somebody strikes it."

I wondered, what is this strange question and equally strange answer by this apostle of nonviolence. Later I learnt that an artist from Allahabad had been struck on his head by some ashramites and the incident was uppermost in Bapu's mind. It was most probably because of that incident that Bapu had suggested this additional use of the iron begging bowl of a Buddhist monk. When the laughter caused by this jovial remark had subsided I said: "Bapu, I have heard that you are too busy to keep sitting for long even in your evening prayer meeting. Your practice is to introduce the speaker, entrust him to his audience and take leave yourself. There are one or two things which I want that you should hear. Please let me know, if you would be able to squeeze out a little time, or not?" "Yes, I shall make it a point to be one of the audience. One's criticism in one's absence does not do him any good."

In the evening usual "prayer" took place. A record of the yarn spun by the inmates of the ashram was completed. If I am not mistaken, the market price of the whole yarn spun that particular day was not more than one rupee. Even one rupee is something. It is very much better than nothing. But somehow or other I have never been able to bring myself to believe that a spinning-wheel rotating round the earnings of a rupee or so could ever bring about any economic transformation of society. When the account of the yarn spun on that day was closed, my discourse began.

I said in a nutshell all that I knew about Buddhism and Ceylon. The discourse came to an end. The people were

about to get up and disperse. It just struck me that the two things which I wanted Bapu in particular to hear remained unmentioned. I told so to Bapu. He made a signal. And all those who were about to leave took their seats again. Just as sometimes one has to write a postscript to a letter even after one has signed it, similarly I had to put in an addenda of my delivered speech. I observed: "Bapu, on the one hand there is no lack of your admirers in Ceylon, but on the other hand there are a few who take delight in bitterly criticising you. They say when Congress was not in power, Gandhi said that the day we are in power, with one stroke of the pen, we shall return to Buddhists their Buddha Gaya temple. But in Bihar there was congress ministry for full seven months, yet the ownership of Buddha Gaya temple could not be restored to Buddhists. Another complaint which some people have uppermost in their mind is this. They say that when Gandhi visited Ceylon, we collected as much money as we could and made a present of that amount to him. But when there was malaria epidemic in Ceylon and thousands of families just died, we begged Gandhi to assist us. But no assistance whatsoever came from him. Instead his secretary sent a letter asking us to rest assured that 'Gandhiji was bound to do his best, he was only waiting for his conscience to ask him to do so'. The people say, we died like cattle. Gandhiji's conscience remained as cold as ice."

This was the occasion when the great poet Rabindranath had sent some assistance. Not only he, but even Rajendra Babu though not as the president of the Congress, but in his individual capacity, had sent some medicines to Ceylon. But a token gesture from Bapu would have had enormous effect on the relationship of Indians and Ceylonese there. It was a pity that Gandhiji missed the bus.

It could not be that Gandhiji did not have anything to say about what I said. Yet he preferred to remain silent. It would have been better, if he would have said something. Bapu heaved a sigh, got up and simply walked away towards his cottage.

One cannot say whether this silence represented the truth

of what I said, or may be Bapu just ignored it. It may be either way.

There has been only one true follower of Gandhism and he was Bapu himself. The rest of us can merely celebrate Gandhi centenary, but not advance the cause of Gandhism in the least.