Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF GANDHI

Edited by

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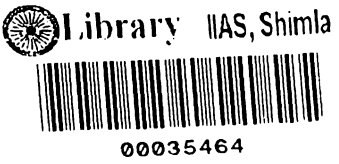

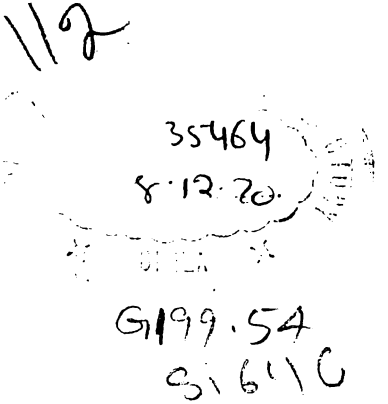

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INTRODUCTION

THE EASIEST THING FOR AN INDIAN TO DO WITH GANDHI IS to pay him a tribute. And, indeed, his was such an extraordinary personality and he was such an amalgam of rare qualities that no matter how apparently extravagant the tribute, it would still be well deserved if not exactly inadequate. But this way leads to the pedestal. Which is not where Gandhi wished to be or does belong. We put him there so as to avoid looking in the face the monumental challenge that he was to all accepted habits of thought and modes of behaviour. However hallowed he might have made the ground on which he walked it was still this solid earth on which he walked. "I am of this earth, earthy," he protested repeatedly. He knew the Hindu tradition well enough and had all the requisite qualities to become a mere saint if he had wanted. Instead, he threw himself heart and soul in the rough and tumble of politics. His concerns were entirely this-worldly, man and society, both of which he wanted to transform radically and attempted it—though, unfortunately, not with conspicuous success—with a weapon never used before him for this purpose. But we do not add one centimeter to Gandhi's stature by substituting a legend for the man in order to prove him an infallible prophet or to prove him as having in his bag *the* trick which could cure all the ills of all past, present and future societies.

It is, however, as easy to put Gandhi in the pillory as on the pedestal. Disparagement can and has been in the case of some critics as emotional and unthinking as adulation on the part of some admirers. He has been denounced as an enemy of progress by those whose concept of progress leaves out of account the fate of man. If Gandhi was "the greatest living anachronism of the twentieth century", as he has been described by one writer, it was because he was the greatest rebel. And rebelliousness *is* anachronistic in a world of conformism. He searched for a wider and more radical under-

standing of the needs of man than was provided by politicians and economists and even philosophers or religious leaders. Those who accuse him of being a crank and a faddist only mean that he was not their kind of crank or faddist. He was certainly no friend to a civilization which makes it impossible for man to experience the joy of privateness except in a state of drug-induced hallucination. If he rejected technology, it was the technology that had demonstrably failed to pacify existence or to abolish war and cruelty, exploitation and oppression or even to exterminate physical and material poverty which it had set out to abolish. He was certainly not enamoured of "the electronic paradise of technology" which yet failed to provide a good life. He was out, in Bertrand Russel's words, "to tame, to civilize industrialization." He rejection of 'affluent productivity', however, was not a commitment to a return to nature, but a token of "a higher sense of human development". In his scheme of things man occupied the central place and he judged every belief, every institution from the point of man's happiness and the scope they gave man for the fullest development of his material, mental and spiritual development.

The idiom that Gandhi used gives rise to the misconception that he was moulded in the Indian tradition and was a traditionalist. Although in all the policies that he advocated he took full cognizance of the Indian reality, he campaigned consistently and with a vigour of which he alone was capable against both traditional attitudes and traditional institutions. In tirelessly teaching respect for manual labour and the virtues of efficiency, diligence, orderliness, punctuality, frugality, scrupulous honesty, rationality in decisions on actions and self-reliance and against fatalistic passivity, laziness, aversion to action purposively to improve one's living conditions and unconcern with the public good, he was striking at the root of Indian ethos and at deeply ingrained Indian traits. In the social sphere he fought against evils like untouchability—and eventually the caste system itself—and child marriage and for the liberation of women, freedom to widows to remarry, and communal harmony. It is undeniable, though, that his approach to caste and communal pro-

blems and his technique of social reform generally was messianic, but it did rock India's social structure as it had not been rocked since Buddha's times. In the economic sphere he stood for the total abolition of exploitation and poverty and for a kind of equality which even radicals considered rather extreme and impracticable. His concept of trusteeship was not a compromise with this ideal but a device, so novel that it made sense to very few, to bring about socialization of private property without depriving society of its none-too-abundant entrepreneurial wealth. Besides, since change of ownership does not change the system nor does the abolition of private property abolish the difference between the truly superior and the rest, it was a device, too, of ensuring that the superior did not institutionalize their superiority.

His plea for village industries, and on the spinning wheel as their symbol, was not a plea for a return to primitiveness. It was the only practical method then available of checking the drain of wealth and skill from the villages into the towns, preventing the growing social and cultural and economic hiatus between the two providing, without any governmental help, desperately needed partial employment to the vast under-employed and under-productive rural masses, relieving the incredibly abysmal poverty of the villages and thereby injecting some dynamism into an utterly stagnant economy. In the political sphere his concept of democracy did not stop at adult suffrage and formal periodical elections. Of course, he took these and the civil liberties on which they rest for granted. But he was for a system in which the common man had a say and a hand in the running of the affairs of immediate concern to him. His conception of democracy involves the greatest possible number of citizens, not merely by proxy, in policy making and affords, not merely in principle, every citizen a chance to participate, not merely vicariously, in decision making. In the sphere of education he was for a system which not only taught the three Rs but also dignity of labour and inculcated a sense of social awareness and social responsibility.

Gandhi was thus trying to lay a secure cultural base for a secular society in which the process of modernization could

proceed smoothly. Unless, of course, by modernization we mean no more than setting up a few industrial plants, with borrowed capital and borrowed know-how, which are neither economic in construction nor efficient in running and which are, besides, without support of a secure base of a cluster of other ancillary industries.

But if revolutionaries of the copybook variety refused to recognize in him a kindred spirit, it was because even for a revolutionary he was too unconventional. Even M. N. Roy, who alone among them, having succeeded in emancipating himself from the mental slavery of an exploded ideology, arrived at the conclusion that the society which best ensured man's freedom was a society decentralized both politically and economically, was so overcome by prejudice against what he believed to be Gandhi's religiosity and asceticism that he refused to see any similarity between his and Gandhi's vision.

The school of thought which regards Gandhi as an implacable enemy of modernization, but which nevertheless swears by his name as a convenient political expedient, has been at the helm of India's destiny unchecked and uninterruptedly for more than two decades. It may legitimately claim, of course, that it has achieved in many respects in these two decades more than the British did in well over a century. The intended irony in this implicit admission of a common denominator between the Indian rulers of India and the much condemned British imperialist rulers of India apart, the comparison between post-World War II decades and the pre-war century is hardly apposite. The British rulers themselves did more in the two post-World War I decades than in the previous half a century of their rule. But that would hardly be considered an adequate ground for congratulating them.

The pride of place in these achievements is given, in the political sphere, to the unification of the country and the establishment of parliamentary democracy and, in the economic sphere, to planning. But it would be a bold man who claimed that India is a more cohesive nation today than when it was fighting for political independence under Gandhi. The fear of 'balkanization' is, one hopes, unfounded. But

the intractability of border disputes, regional exclusiveness and hostility, linguistic chauvinism and fanaticism, perpetual anxiety about 'national' or 'emotional integration' are not exactly evidences of national oneness and solidarity.

The most that has been said in praise of India's parliamentary democracy is that it is the largest (as if this was so by design and not an adventitious circumstance of history and geography) and, further, that it has successfully held four five-yearly general elections and several mid-term ones (which would appear extraordinary only against the assumption that it was not expected to be capable of doing so) and that it has survived two wars (but so have the totalitarianism of the one and the autocracy of the other of the two countries involved in these wars). The fact that most major political questions, like reorganization of states and language, and even minor ones, like demarcation of boundary between two states and sharing of river waters, were debated in the streets with the methods customary to street debates rather than within the constitutional framework is a pointer to the complete dissociation of political institutions and processes from social life. Devaluation of political principles, political degeneration and corruption, unprincipled formations of united fronts, splintering of parties, the epidemic of frequent floor crossings solely for personal benefit, the flourishing market for the sale and purchase of legislators, and cross voting—all make, collectively, but also singly, nonsense of the parliamentary form of government besides creating political instability. Politics seems to be concerned more with subverting than with serving public good. All these are indices not of health but of a disturbing malaise in the body politic.

In the economic sphere India has had three five-year plans and three annual plans and is now launched on the Fourth Five-year Plan. None of these had the simple virtue of matching the magnitude, breadth of vision and financial grandeur with practical possibilities. Their failure to achieve their targets was put down to 'failure of implementation' as if planning is supposed to be done in total disregard of the implementation potential. The unreality of the plans was

further compounded by wrong assumptions and wrong priorities. In consequence, a preponderantly agricultural country had not been able to feed itself and has had to beg for or buy food abroad and yet was unable to avert two acute famines. The entire economy has been, so to say, trying to climb a greasy pole—a little bit of laborious and slow ascent followed by a rapid slide down. Planning has been trying to work out the theory of percolativity, if one may be permitted to use the word. It has assumed that if some islands of affluence were created, the affluence would percolate down in such measure as those down below could take without being thrown off balance. That would be a combination of progress *and* stability. If the per capita income per annum increased by 1.5 per cent in one decade (1950-60) it slumped down to a mere 0.5 per cent in the next. It is the kind of planning which has produced the paradox of acute inflation in a relatively stagnant economy. Unemployment has been mounting even more rapidly than the alarmingly rising population. The explosive force of the effect of this some ten years from now can well be imagined if it is borne in mind that in spite of the success of the drive for family planning the population will have risen to 650-665 million. By the end of the Fourth Five-year Plan 8 per cent of the working population will be without jobs. The masses in the villages, where four out of every five Indians still live, have remained in relative stagnation. Even the green revolution has passed them by except in so far as it has at once accelerated and accentuated the polarization in rural society and made it a breeding ground of volcanic discontent. Land and tenancy reforms, even such of them as have been enacted, have never got off the statute book. Economic inequalities have been widening and are now accepted and rationalized as the necessary price of much-needed rapid progress. The promised revolution has been shelved, the occasional rhetorical exuberance in public speaking for political gains notwithstanding.

Even after more than two decades of independence and 'modernization' Indian society continues to be hopelessly fragmented and like a house irremediably divided. Com-

munal violence has become more frequent, more brutal and more destructive of life and property and continuously mocks the civilized conscience. Caste as an institution not only persists but has gained in importance. The hope that legislation would abolish the degrading and shameful practice of untouchability has been dashed to the ground. The depressed sections are nowhere near rising from their depression, despondency and fear. Education is in a mess. All those who are concerned with it—students, teachers, parents, the general public—are all thoroughly dissatisfied. Students in particular are so tired of expressing their dissatisfaction verbally that they have taken to violence which has now become part of campus life.

The above is not intended to be an indictment. It is only an attempt to set down, without exaggeration and without emotion and in barest outlines, the background against which to pursue a line of inquiry. How was it that in the land where Gandhi walked, sometimes with an elemental force, and galvanized millions, he was not only forgotten but actually repudiated even before the embers of his funeral pyre had turned into ashes. This was certainly not the type of society that he expected Free India to build. What, then, went wrong? Jayaprakash Narayan has this answer: "... the political followers of Mahatma Gandhi in pre-independence days did not believe in Gandhiji's philosophy, nor in his non-violence as a science of action and change—in short, revolution. They joined Gandhiji's satyagraha movements as a matter of political convenience, for no one before or since—no individual, no organization, no revolutionary, no politician—has stirred up the people of India as Gandhiji did. Because of this very superficial interest in the deeper things which Gandhiji stood for, his political followers turned their backs on him after his death."

This is one-half of the answer. For the other half we will have to examine the nature and course of the Gandhian movement itself. But before we come to that let us examine that part of his social philosophy which relates to social change. Gandhi's non-violence was a militant programme of group action for social transformation. His insistence on

non-violence stemmed from his belief that ends and means being inseparable and in fact indivisible, it was impossible to create a non-violent society (in which alone man can be really and truly free and happy) through violent means. Jayaprakash admirably argues the case (in an essay not included in this book) thus: "The most important characteristic of this (non-violent) method is that its means must be in harmony with its ends. If the end is a non-violent society, the means also must be non-violent. if human freedom is the end, coercive means (except moral coercion) are ruled out; if man is an end in himself, he cannot be used as a means; if truth is to be the basis of the new life, untruthful means are inadmissible; if the end is the dispersal of power, the means cannot be centralized power." It is to be noted that the argument here is on the logical, not on the ethical, plane. And that is where we propose to keep it so as to avoid being drawn into a debate that can become endless, observing only in passing that when ethics is concerned with human-social problems, that is with matters secular, it is indistinguishable from logic. We will steer clear of the question of values—*a priori* or derivative —in this discussion. But if Gandhi were to be content only with stating a proposition which could be defended in terms of logic, his contribution to social philosophy would have been nil. His original contribution lay precisely in this: he devised a technique which was at once non-violent and a programme of immediate, direct social action. He applied it, too, for varied purposes but on a scale large enough to put the validity of his proposition to the acid test of empirical experience.

The negative aspect of the proposition stands proven by history. Even the noble Marxist ideal of a non-violent society in which "from each according to his capacity and to each according to his needs" is the voluntarily and generally accepted way of life, in which the state will have died of sheer ennui, in which nothing more than temporary *ad hoc* committees will be needed to manage the affairs of men, was subverted in the process of achievement because of the employment of means which were not in harmony

with the goal. I shall quote Jayaprakash again: " 'Power to the people' has been the slogan of so many of the modern revolutions of history. Yet, because they were all born in violence, it happened invariably that those who succeeded in taking hold of the means of organized violence usurped power for themselves, protesting no doubt that they were doing so in the name of the people and for the good of the people. Not that these revolutionary leaders were frauds and charlatans. They were only working out the logic of violence. It is nearly two centuries since the Great French Revolution. Yet the French revolutionaries of the present day are still crying for 'power at the level of the work-place . . . whether these workers be students, academics, industrial labourers or even peasants'. Lenin marched to power on the crest of the slogan 'all power to the Soviets'. Soviet Russia is a super-power today, but the soviets of workers', peasants' and soldiers' deputies have no power, if they exist at all" (*Quest,* No. 64, Jan-Mar. '70, p. 15).

The positive aspect of the proposition that 'every present step taken rightly will automatically lead to the distant goal' has yet to be proved empirically. It is from this point of view that Gandhi's satyagraha movements acquire special and crucial significance. There is another instance of a country, in another part of the world but which, significantly, was like, India, a British colony, having achieved independence through a largely non-violent movement. I mean Ghana. In his autobiography Kwame Nkrumah writes: "At first, I could not understand how Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence could possibly be effective. It seemed to me to be utterly feeble and without hope of success. The solution of the colonial problem, as I saw it at that time, lay in armed rebellion. How is it possible, I asked myself, for a revolution to succeed without arms and ammunition? After months of studying Gandhi's policy and watching the effect it had, I began to see that, when backed by a strong political organization, it could be the solution to the colonial problem." (Thomas Nelson & Sons, Edinburgh, 1959, pp. v-vi). It indeed was in Ghana's case. After a struggle, which was much shorter than India's, Ghana

became independent. And Kwame Nkrumah set himself up as a dictator. And when he was dislodged, he was dislodged not by a non-violent movement but by an army coup.

That India escaped the same fate is beside the point. What is relevant to our present consideration is that in both the cases non-violent techniques were no more adequate guarantees of total and lasting emancipation than violent techniques were in certain other historical cases. The social goal of the two non-violent political 'revolutions' remained as elusive as in the case of violent revolutions.

Non-violent measures may range from peaceful protest to non-cooperation, to civil disobedience, to civil usurpation—all covered by the generic term satyagraha. Gandhi used each one of these. But his movements till the Quit India movement of 1942 were for specific and limited objectives. Their success, however, was not to be judged by whether they achieved their objectives. Each movement was to be looked at as the flexing of non-violent muscles for the final battle.

Gandhi realized early while evolving his technique that it should be a two-edged weapon, protest and 'functional demonstration', by which is meant a constructive alternative to the conditions against which protests are directed. With all his originality and mental resourcefulness, Gandhi was unable to devise a single organization which would perform the dual function at the same time. So he divided his movement into two streams—one for 'subversive' agitational political activity and the other for constructive work. He may have done this only for the sake of division of labour. Though complementary and supplementary to each other, they were yet kept distinct and fairly separate and were thrown together only in critical situations when the British Government in its folly and out of nervousness failed to distinguish between the two and treated them both with even-handed repression.

The bifurcation had certain consequences. The political wing, which was represented by the Congress, in order to make itself as large a platform as possible so as to accommodate even conflicting social interests, kept its social

objective vague, emphasizing only the goal of political independence. It never clearly defined what system of government or society were being aimed at. Whether Gandhi wanted it this way or whether he acquiesced in it is not very important. Gandhi's views regarding social transformation remained his personal views and he never made an issue of them with the Congress. More, whenever the radical section of the Congress raised questions of the socio-political-economic reorganization of the Indian society they were opposed, in many cases with Gandhi's support, on the ground that such an exercise would divide the forces willing to fight for political independence. It was not a post-independence discovery that the political followers of Gandhi did not believe in Gandhi's philosophy and did not share his vision of the future Indian society. Gandhi knew it. And yet he groomed them as national leaders and, indeed, as his successors. It is difficult to prove that Gandhi himself did not believe they were fulfilling him.

If Gandhi had succeeded in evolving a method in which, in Jayaprakash's words, "change of the old and construction of new both proceed side by side and step by step", in which each step is at once politically and socially emancipating, the situation on the morrow of independence would have been radically different and much more so after two decades of independence. As it was, the Indian National Congress was concerned only with power. And when power came it was usurped, just as in the case of violent revolutions, by those who had taken hold of the means of organized action, non-violent in this case. All, of course, in the name of the people—again, as in the case of violent revolutions. Having seized power, they are doing 'good' to the 'people' according to their lights.

But what of the other stream of the Gandhian movement, which was entrusted with 'functional demonstrations'? Not having been drilled in *militant* group action, Gandhi's followers in this stream were incapable of the kind of action that was called for to close the emancipatory deficit of their brethren in the other stream. With their emphasis on quietude they were pushed out of the mainstream of life.

One misses in them the restlessness they should have learned from Gandhi. Their reliance is on indirect methods which, although involving the masses in a state of quiescence, keep them out of militant action.

But Gandhi is being rediscovered in other lands and other climes. He is not dead. And so it was only in the fitness of things that the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom organized in the centenary year a series of talks on Gandhi. The lectures were delivered at the Committee's three centres in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi between December 1968 and February 1969. The Indian Committee is deeply in the debt of the speakers who agreed at great personal inconvenience to deliver the lectures. The talks have been collected in this book and are being published for the first time.

New Delhi M. P. SINHA
April 1970

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Jayaprakash Narayan

The Relevance of Gandhi

I MUST BEGIN BY SAYING THAT PERHAPS I AM NOT THE right person to speak on this subject, because, as you know, I happen to be deeply involved in the Gandhian movement at present. I would not be so involved if I did not believe that Gandhi was relevant to our problems and to our age. I am thus a very committed person and it may well be that because of this I cannot take a very critical attitude as some others might. I hope you will keep this in mind.

In considering the relevance of an individual or an idea, what is of great importance is the point of view from which one is looking at the question. What does one himself want? That is, what are one's own ideas and ideals? For a person having one type of ideas and pursuing one set of ideals and objectives Gandhi may be entirely irrelevant. On the other hand, for another person who is interested in other ideals, who cherishes other sets of values of life, who has set himself other social, economic, political objectives Gandhi would be very deeply and intensely relevant. I shall illustrate this by a few examples which occur to me. There are certain individuals—in politics, or in public life, may be even in the intellectual field—who may not be concerned with ethical questions and moral values. They are of the view that as far as, let us say, politics and public affairs are concerned, as far as affairs of the state and questions of international relations are concerned, there is no room in these fields for any ethical considerations or ethical values. Obviously, Gandhi would be wholly irrelevant to them from this point of view. I personally believe that at the bottom of

all philosophies of life, all the political *isms,* at the bottom of, let us say, democracy, socialism and communism, is this question of human values. I do not have to remind you of the recent attempt made in the communist world to give a human face to communism and of what happened in one particular instance. I am sure that to a man like Dubcek Gandhi is *not* irrelevant, nor to all those who put up such a unique and marvellous opposition to one of the biggest military powers in the world. To the people of Czechoslovakia, to whom I am referring, Gandhi cannot be irrelevant. There may be some to whom human life is of no particular importance or significance. To them the life of the individual, or the individual himself, is just a means to an end, a pawn in the game of politics, or of power, or of something else. To such persons Gandhi would be, at least in this respect, irrelevant. On the other hand, there are those for whom—to use the humanist phrase—man is the measure of all things, for whom man is the centre of society and the main concern of all philosophies of life, all political theories; for whom, in other words, man is not a means but an end in himself. To such persons Gandhi would be very relevant.

We in this country believe in and have accepted democracy. It may have many imperfections and shortcomings, but still it has withstood all the stresses and strains which a poor and backward country with a huge population like ours has to undergo. It has survived through all this for 21 years and more. There are some, though, to whom democracy is irrelevant, whose faith in democracy is very superficial and who use the concept and processes of democracy as a cover for something that is its very opposite—for them Gandhi would not be relevant.

So, you see, how the subjective quality of the individual who is considering the relevance of Gandhi is also very relevant. I happen to be an individual who believes in "man as the measure of all things", who believes deeply in the humanist philosophy, though not in what some would call materialistic, rationalistic humanism (with which I have no quarrel). My own humanism is based on the belief in the universality and the supremacy of the human spirit. For

a man like me, who believes in democracy deeply, and who would not sacrifice or want or let the freedom of man be sacrificed for anything—for the State, the glory of the party, or anything else—for me, and for these very reasons, Gandhi is very relevant.

This should serve as a kind of general statement of how I look upon the question of Gandhi's relevance to our age. You may be aware that many people have said, not in India only but in many parts of the world, that Gandhi was perhaps ahead of his time. He was specifically a prophet of the atomic age in which the engines of violence which man has invented for the first time in history threaten to destroy the whole of mankind. Gandhi not only preached non-violence as a philosophy and an ideal but practised it on a very colossal scale and did it, if not with complete success, with very great success. As long as there is this violence which threatens the very future of the human race, the relevance of Gandhi would continue. He will remain relevant till this danger of total annihilation of the human race is removed.

I was quite surprised when I read, as some of you might have read, the epilogue in Volume II of Pyarelal's monumental *Mahatma Gandhi, the Last Phase*. General Douglas MacArthur, if you please, "describing Gandhi as one of those prophets who 'lived far ahead of the time', said: 'In the evolution of civilization, if it is to survive, all men cannot fail eventually to adopt his belief that the process of mass application of force to resolve contentious issues is fundamentally not only wrong but contains within itself the germs of self-destruction.' " Coming from a military leader of that stature the statement is rather remarkable. Sometimes military men are more acutely aware of the dangers of mass violence—not only mob violence but mass, organized violence in the name of nation or empire or ideology or what have you. I think the danger of such violence is appreciated often times better by military men than by politicians or others. Mary Bethune, American Negro woman leader, said when Gandhi was assassinated (this is also from Pyarelal's

Epilogue): "A great warm light has been extinguished.... His spirit, reached for the stars and sought to win a world without gun or bayonet or blood.... As we, mothers of the earth, stand in awesome fear of the roar of jet planes, the crash of atom bombs and the unknown horrors of germ warfare, we must turn our eyes in hope to the East, where the Sun of the Mahatma blazes." I know it no longer blazes in the East, but it did at one time. *The New York Times,* certainly not an impractical idealist like some of us, said that "He has left as his heritage a spiritual force that must in God's good time prevail over arms and armaments and the dark doctrines of violence". All this eloquence might have been prompted by the emotions aroused by Gandhi's assassination, "another crucifixion", as Pearl Buck described it. It might be that this was only the outpourings of the anguished heart of the human race, but I do believe that what they said has a germ of truth, which has yet to be learnt by all those who are trying to find a way out of the dangers which threaten to overwhelm us. When I say us, I do not mean the Indian people alone but the people of the whole world.

Now, let us come to India and to our present-day problems. I am not a philosopher. To me the attraction of Gandhi was that of a revolutionary. It is this aspect of Gandhiji's life that first attracted me to him and that still attracts me to him. I was very much impressed by one experience through which I lived during the first non-Congress Ministry in my State. If you have given any serious thought to the problem of land reform in India, you will agree with me that after the abolition of the Zamindari system there has been hardly any worthwhile land reform in the country. That this has stood in the way of agricultural development was brought out not by a socialist or a communist, not by a Gandhian like me, but by Dr. Ladejinsky, a Ford Foundation specialist, who was commissioned by the Planning Commission to make a report on the tenurial system in the country and their relation to the agricultural performance in the package programme areas. To those who may be interested in the question I would recommend this small report, which for some time had been suppressed by the Planning Commis-

sion because it was so adverse to the State Governments which were all Congress Governments at the time.

Keeping all this in mind I made a very simple suggestion to my friends in the Mahamaya Prasad Sinha Ministry. I told them that if they were thinking of a radical land reform bill, they were welcome to make it as radical as they liked and they would have my support. But, I pointed out, a new legislation would take a long time. The drafting of the bill, the presentation to the Assembly, the reporting of the Select Committee, the discussions with the opposition parties—all this is time consuming. Moreover, the coalition itself had within it parties which might not be prepared to go very far —parties, in fact, which were even more conservative than the Congress Party, at least on this question. Therefore, I suggested an alternative programme of action. I reminded them that there were on the statute book several enactments passed by the Congress administrations in the last 19 years. I pointed out the relevant ones and I said, "Why don't you implement all these? If you do, you will have made a small revolution in the countryside in Bihar". They are simple, ordinary things, like recording the homestead tenancy rights of Harijans and other landless people who had their huts built on the lands of landowners; the law gave them occupancy rights in the small plots of land on which their little huts were constructed; they could not be evicted from this land. The only requirement was that they should be registered and brought on government records. They could be brought on record *suo moto* by officers without anybody having to apply. The fact of actual tenancy was easy to ascertain, for the whole village knows who is living where and on whose land. The relevant legislation was passed as far back as 1950 when Mr. Srikrishna Sinha was the Chief Minister. Take for another example the rights of share croppers, which is in all conscience a terrible problem. Similarly, the ceiling legislation is already something like 5 years old, and yet you would be surprised to know that not a single acre of land has yet been declared surplus and distributed to the landless in the State of Bihar. The Revenue Department during the Mahamaya Prasad Ministry said it was their

calculation that the ceiling was so high and so much time had been given to the landowners to sell or transfer their land that not more than 67 thousand acres could be made available for re-distribution. Well, if *benami,* bogus transfers had been made to servants, or to people who were dead, or to relations who did not exist, then it was for the government to detect evasions and bring the culprits to book. Again, take the Money Lenders Act. The highest rate of interest permissible in law is 12½ per cent, but 150 per cent interest is being charged even now in the tribal areas. It would appear that the poorer the farmer the higher is the interest he is made to pay to the moneylender.

I said the laws were there and all that the Government had to do was to implement them. Nothing was done. The Jana Sangh and Raja Saheb Kamakhya Narayan's party, both of which were constituents of the coalition, kicked up such a terrific row that the government nearly broke on the issue and nothing was done. I am now very eagerly looking forward to what Mr. Jyoti Basu (I hope as the leader of the largest party he is made the Chief Minister)* may do in West Bengal in the way of land reform. We in India have parliamentary democracy. A very large majority of the voters are farmers. May be they are only dwarf farmers, petty holders of an acre or half an acre, but nonetheless they have the mentality of property owners and I think that is one reason (if there are others it is for economists and sociologists to identify them) why India has been so backward in land reforms or even in enforcing those laws which were passed years ago.

Now, why did I bring all this up? Merely in order to show how this revolutionary leader, Gandhi, fashioned a tool of revolution, a method, which was independent of the State, independent of legislation, and by means of which you went directly to the people and brought about changes by changing the people. Any hack can write about the failure of this movement or that programme, but it will surprise you, if you look into the figures, that many times more land, more

* This was said before the formation of the United Front Ministry in West Bengal.

acreage of land, many times more area of land, has been redistributed through the movement of land gift, *Bhoodan,* than by land legislation in the whole country. In one or two States legislation did perhaps go a little ahead of *Bhoodan,* but taking the country as a whole, five times, may be even ten times, more land has been redistributed by *Bhoodan* than by legislation.

I shall make bold to make another statement to you: As of today there is no political party in the country, no matter how radical it is, which has a more radical agrarian programme than, let us say, the *Gramdan* programme of Vinoba. You will not find even the most radical of the leftist parties, the Left Communist Party, saying in its election manifesto in West Bengal that when it came to power it would abolish private ownership of land and vest it in the village community, the *Gram Sabha.* I am quite sure every socialist, every communist, believes that the means of production should be socially owned, though not necessarily by the State, and socially controlled. But they just cannot put it down on paper because they fear they would not get votes. Even the half-acre-wallahs will say: "No, thank you. We are not such fools as to give you our votes so that you may take away our ownership rights." And, yet, you can go, as we have done, and persuade them voluntarily to sign a document (which is a legal document under *Gramdan* legislation), declaring that they surrender their ownership rights in land to the village community, the *Gram Sabha.*

This radical change from private to community ownership is a very radical transformation. And it is taking place. In about seventy thousand villages in the country, if not more, the majority of the farmers, if not all, have agreed to do this. This may be a mere paper declaration, but it is a declaration made by them and attested to by their signatures on pieces of paper. The next stage as provided by the law is the confirmation of the *Gramdan.* It is this character of Gandhi and his philosophy, and not only the philosophy but the methodology that he fashioned and placed before the world and used himself, that has been an attraction to me. And I find that this seems to be working. May be in

the Indian conditions, as far as land is concerned, this method is the only one which will succeed. This is a bold statement to make, but I do make it as a result of whatever I have been able to study and experience. Because an overwhelmingly large part of the electorate is made up of farmers, peasant proprietors, small or middle class (big are very few, as you know), re-distribution of land through legislation is extremely difficult. *Zamindari* was abolished because there were only a few *zamindars*. Industries might be nationalized because owners are few. But in this particular case it seems to me that Gandhi's method is the only method that is likely to succeed.

I shall not talk on the theoretical level of how great a revolutionary Gandhi was. His whole life bears testimony to that. He kept on experimenting with what he called the Truth — continuously discovering, discarding, improving. But my subject is not what Gandhi did, but what his relevance is to us today. And the relevance is here in actual practice in this very sensitive field of rural life, rural society. Bihar is 90 per cent rural, the whole of India is about 72 per cent; only 18 per cent is urban even now. In the sensitive field of the question of relationship of land to the rural people the relevance of Gandhi is still seen in action in this *Bhoodan-Gramdan* movement. I had first reacted to *Bhoodan* in the same way in which my other colleagues in the Socialist Party had done. Like them I thought it would take centuries. But I discovered that it would not take centuries, and it has not taken centuries. In fact, it has worked much faster than any other method. In spite of Mr. Nehru, in spite of the Planning Commission, in spite of the socialists, in spite of the communists, the government has made very little progress in this particular field. This seems to be the picture generally in the whole of Asia wherever change has been attempted to be brought about democratically. (Where there is dictatorship that is another matter; we are not discussing that at the moment.)

Take our unemployment question, take our whole direction of industrialization, economic development and the rest of it and see where we are today. Take our system of edu-

cation. Any one who really has his feet firmly planted on the Indian soil (he may have his head anywhere—in Moscow, in Washington, in London or in Paris) cannot say that Gandhi was irrelevant to the present conditions of India. And he will continue to be relevant, may be for half a century, or even more. I was a critic of Gandhi in my socialist days. I still am a socialist of a sort—a voluntarian or a communitarian socialist, if you please. But I am convinced that when Gandhiji emphasized finding jobs for human hands before we found jobs for machines, he was looking at the development of our country from the people's point of view, from the human point of view, not from the econometrician's or the statistician's point of view. Unless our economic development takes this turn, we shall make little progress. I had hoped that after Dr. Gadgil's taking over the Planning Commission this would happen. I have still not lost hope, though I am very much disturbed by the trends that I notice. I feel that unless economic development is man-oriented rather than statistics-oriented, we would go down further and further downhill. The situation in the country would become more and more disturbed and discontent among the people would mount. I do not know what directions it may find; our democracy may be threatened and anything may result from it.

Gandhiji is criticized for his suspicion of industrialism. He suspected that industrialization would completely distort human life and values of life. I may not go the whole hog with him on this. But I would like to remind you that Gandhiji did not say that he was against science, against technology. After all, a seeker after truth that he was, he could not have been against science. He himself made experiments in fields you and I would hesitate to enter, and it was all a scientific approach. He was not against technology or science, nor against the machine. But he did not want the machine to become the master of man. What has happened in the Western society, including the communist society, is that technology, the machine, has become the master. The London *Economist* in one of its recent issues visualized the development in the American society in the next few years. It is a

picture which strikes terror into my heart—a society which is so over-mechanized, over-organized, over-centralized, so gigantic, so colossal, so far beyond the human scale that the autonomy of the individual is completely obliterated. It might nominally be democracy. But the man is not his own master; he cannot make choices; he feigns he makes them, but somebody else makes them for him. One begins to doubt whether there is any difference between totalitarianism so-called and this kind of democracy. I certainly would not like to live in such a society. Man is almost anonymous in such a society. May be he has his own little circle of friends, or little community. But yet, on the whole, he is just nobody; he does not count for anything at all.

These aspects of technology and of science, I think, are basically ethical. They revolve round the question whether one would inculcate an attitude of mind which does not put any kind of limit to wants. It sounds silly to talk about limitation of wants in a poor country like India. But take the United States or any of the prosperous countries. There is there an insatiable craving for more and more technology and the limitless expansion of human wants and an unending race between them. And the whole world becomes an unwilling victim of the technological Frankenstein that has been created. I have here something from Schumacher which I shall read out to you: "I was recently in the United States and in meetings I heard this. They freely talk about the polarization of the population in the United States into three immense megalopolitan areas—one extending from Boston to Washington, a continuous built-up area of 60 million people; one around Chicago, another 60 million; and one on the West Coast from San Fransisco to Santiago, again a continuous built-up area with 60 million people, the rest of the country being left practically empty, deserted provincial town and the land cultivated with huge tractors and combined harvesters and immense amounts of chemicals. If this is somebody's conception of the future of the United States, it is hardly a future worth having." I cannot agree more with Mr. Schumacher when he makes this statement. If the repeated technological explosion that is taking place

is allowed to go unchecked, then I wonder if the American President, or even the whole American people, will be able to prevent the evolution of American life and society in this direction.

We have to ask ourselves if we in India would also like to develop into this kind of society. This is a matter of choice, a subjective thing. I happen to believe in the small community, not necessarily the small community that we have today but the agro-industrial community in which the amenities of life are provided, of course, but in which there is opportunity for cultural life and intellectual life and opportunity for self-development. What the limits of such a community should be in the matter of population and area may be a variable quantity, but nonetheless variable within bounds. I think the social sciences and the physical sciences have, for the first time in history, made it possible for man to really order his future. Enough is known about man, the individual and the society to enable us to do this, as Julian Huxley says. But how is this going to happen, unless people understand where they want to go and unless they are able to control those who are making decisions for them? As at present they do not even know where the decisions are being made.

I have digressed a little, but the point I am making is that there is no virtue in bigness itself. Look at the way Delhi is growing. There must be a limit to the size of the city if Delhi is to be a city worth living.

This much about the relevance of Gandhi to technology, to science, to such questions as planning, employment, and so on. I am not saying that one must accept it in its entirety. It would be a very foolish person, a foolish Gandhian, who were to seize every letter of Gandhi and try to put it into practice. There must be enough of originality to take from Gandhi what is worth taking and apply it to what we have today. I am quite sure that in the spheres which I have mentioned there is a very great deal which we can take. I spoke of the agricultural situation and the rural community. I shall conclude by saying a few words about business, industry and commerce.

We have, broadly speaking, three competing concepts. They overlap undoubtedly, but they can still be distinguished. One is that of private enterprise which, as industrialism develops the way it is developing at least in the United States and some of the other countries, becomes less and less private but nonetheless is there. At least the private profit element is certainly there even though the management is in the hands of a class of managers, who have hardly any ownership rights except perhaps as share-holders. The other is the democratic socialist concept and the third is the communist concept of industry. Now, here also problems have arisen which are very serious and deserve to be understood better and examined further. But I shall confine myself to the problems of our own country. Socialists who believe in the democratic method, not to speak of communists who, while making use of democracy, themselves say that they do not believe in it in all situations, always cry in Parliament for more and more nationalization. Nationalization is believed to be a kind of solution of the problems which capitalism in India has created. Now, some of the nationalized industries are doing well but most of the larger ones are not. This may be the fault of management, not the fault of nationalization itself. But all this argument does not go beyond the economic level. It is clear to me that the values of socialism, as I understood them when I was a socialist and as I understand them even today, are nowhere near realization in the nationalized sector. What is happening in the communist countries as well as in the socialist and the democratic socialist countries is that nationalization is followed by bureaucratism so that it becomes a kind of bureaucratic economy rather than a socialist economy. If you wish to call a bureaucratic economy a socialist economy just because ownership is vested in the nation I have no quarrel. But that is not my conception of socialist economy. Jamshedpur and Rourkela are not far from each other, one is in the private sector and the other in the public sector. Except for the manner of distributing the surplus value, to use a Marxian phrase, what is the difference between the two? There isn't any surplus value in Rourkela for distribution,

but one hopes there will be. It is our bureaucracy, I think, which is at fault and which is one of the great evils from which we suffer. I do believe that unless this whole bureaucratic system is radically transformed there is no future for our administration, for our government, for our industry or anything else. This was, however, by the way. Take the relationship between the employees and the management—there is no difference. At least in Jamshedpur there is one recognized union. In Rourkela, on the other hand, there are five unions contending among themselves all the time and the management plays one against the other. Take, again, the way the workers live, the way the managers live, the technicians live, look at the townships that have been built, at the question of the place of workers in the management—there is no difference. Here, I think, every country, whether in the democratic world or in the communist world (I won't call it by any other name), has failed to solve the basic problems. The only country which perhaps is nearer a solution from my point of view is Yugoslavia, although there too the League of Communists continues to be the final arbiter of the fate of the people. If you go a little deeper into the question of the performance of workers, including technicians and others in the socialized or nationalized sector, you will find that there is a great deal to be desired.

I shall like to share a reminiscence with you. When we formed the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 and framed its programme, I showed it to Gandhiji and asked for his opinion. He looked at it and pointing his finger at one of the items said: "This is after my own heart. If you people can really do this, I am all with you." And the item? It read: "From each according to his capacity and to each according to his needs." Now for me this is the ideal. True, a long-range ideal, but nonetheless an ideal to work for. Unless you reach this ideal there is no socialism because either there will be coercion or there will be incentives, including monetary incentives. Stalin had to introduce Stakhanovism and use other methods. Even Tito had to accept the gap between the highest and the lowest. In the spheres in which the ethics of socialist economy is important and relevant, I

do not know what else except Gandhi would be relevant. This is so because you cannot force any individual to give of his best and take only what he needs. It has to be done willingly. It must come from within. It is an ethical behaviour and nothing else. I dare say that in the communist and socialist world there are idealists who are burning the candles of their lives at both ends for the cause. But I am not talking about a few idealists. I am talking of the generality of people. The common people have to accept it as the only right kind of conduct.

We have not yet been able to find a practical way of implementing Gandhiji's concept of trusteeship, which is applicable not only to the owners, but also to the workers. Every member of the society has to have this attitude of being a trustee. This means a responsible citizen, a responsible worker, a responsible manager. This means that everyone discharges his responsibility of his own will and volition as if he was impelled from within and not because he draws a fat salary or because he dreads the sword hanging over his head. I do think that if the kind of values in the economic field that communism believes in have to be realized, they can only be realized by some method of voluntariness, which is the essence of trusteeship. How it is to be brought about I do not know, but I hope we will discover a way. If a whole State comes under *gramdan,* then we will have to face the problems of urban communities, the problems of industry and commerce and the problems of labour and so on. At the moment, however, we are groping in the dark. But it seems to me that here also Gandhi has a contribution to make. His guidelines were two: conversion and non-violent non-cooperation. Conversion means going to the people trying to persuade them. This is the opposite of applying force and is a perfectly democratic method. Non-cooperation was to be applied when a great majority had been persuaded and only a few recalcitrants were left. But non-cooperation is wholly unlike a strike, a *gherao* or a *bundh* and is, of course, totally non-violent. These were the two methods Gandhi had indicated. But how he would

have applied them in concrete situations—in regard, for example, to Ahmedabad millowners with whom he had a fight in his early days—I do not know.

While I have shared these thoughts with you I have been conscious that I have not organized my thoughts very well and so have taken such a long time to outline them. But what I have said will have given you, I hope, some idea of why and in what way I consider Gandhi relevant to our age and our country and why I believe he will remain so relevant for many years to come.

Jayaprakash Narayan

Gandhi After Independence

A GREAT DEAL IS BEING WRITTEN AND SPOKEN ABOUT Gandhiji during this centenary year, but most of it is about his great spiritual and moral qualities or about his philosophy or about what he did during his life time. As far as I know, very little attention has been paid to what Gandhiji thought of doing after independence. I do not mean to give offence to anyone when I say that the political followers of Mahatma Gandhi in pre-independence days did not believe in Gandhiji's philosophy, nor in his non-violence as a science of action and change, in short, revolution. They joined Gandhiji's *satyagraha movements* as a matter of political convenience, for no one before or since —no individual, no organization, no revolutionary, no politician—has stirred up the people of India as Gandhiji did. Because of this very superficial interest in the deeper things which Gandhiji stood for, his political followers turned their backs on him after his death. Many people wonder why those who had sat at the feet of Mahatma or by his side, who were his colleagues for decades, suddenly forsook him. Indeed, this had begun to happen during his life time, during the few months which were given him after independence. He was aware of it, and he wrote in the *Harijan* how he had become a spent bullet. Because of this unconcern with the revolutionary philosophy of Gandhi no attempt was made to give serious thought to what Gandhiji had proposed should be done during his life time but certainly after he was gone.

I should like to remind you here of two or three things in this connection:

First, on the 15th August, 1947, Gandhiji was not in Delhi and he was not taking any part in the rejoicings of the day. He happened to be in Calcutta and there he remarked that this was not the *swaraj* for which he had led the struggle. The *swaraj* of his conception had yet to come. To bring about this *swaraj* was going to be the next task of his life.

Secondly, it was not as if Gandhiji had left his meaning of *swaraj* vague when he took the leadership of the Congress and the people of India to lead them towards the goal. True, he did not give a picture complete in every detail, but he did give a fairly good idea of what kind of India he wanted to reconstruct. His ultimate goal, as you know, was *Sarvodaya*. This may have been an ideal society, never to become a reality. Nonetheless, it was an ideal towards which Gandhiji wanted to strive—a society of the equal and the free; a society in which there was no State or in which the State had shrunk to very small dimensions so that the people managed their affairs themselves; a society which was at peace within itself and at peace with the world outside; a society which aspired to be an equal member of the world community; a society in which the individual gave more attention to the performance of his duty, and only subsidiary attention to his rights because he understood that his rights flowed from his duties—such a society in which each lived for all and all lived for each was, however, of the future. I mentioned duties and rights, so I must hasten to explain that I do not mean that Gandhiji did not believe in the rights of the individual. Of course, he did. He believed in the rights of the individual, the rights of the worker, the rights of everyone. But in his ideal society the individual would first willingly and voluntarily serve this fellowmen and only then consider himself deserving of rights as a reward for the services rendered.

Although Gandhiji, as you know, was one of the greatest idealists that ever lived, he was at the same time one of the greatest realists. He was a practicalist. He therefore knew that there were different stages through which the country,

the society, the Indian people would have to pass. The *swaraj* for which he was going to work immediately was an intermediate stage in its evolution. Gandhiji described this intermediate stage also fairly well.

He conceived of *swaraj* as growing from the individual's own *swaraj,* that is, self-discipline, self-government spread over the whole society. Even this intermediate stage was not to be imposed from above but was to be created by the people themselves. Gandhiji was enough of a realist to understand that the requirements for a non-violent individual were so difficult and so high that it was not possible for common people to attain them. But he said that as the inventions and discoveries of science had made it possible even for a small boy to get incandescent light by merely pressing a button, so the science of non-violence, when developed by rare individuals capable of rising to great heights, would make it possible for even common people to practise it. He conceded that it might not be possible for all to practise the ultimate programme of non-violence, but contended that if the masses tried to follow the ways of non-violence this would be a revolution, too. He always believed in the individual and the people rather than in institutions and even less in such things as the State. He wanted people themselves to create this kind of *swaraj* by self-development of the individual and the community.

Now the third point to which I want to draw your attention is this: Gandhiji as a practicalist understood well the value of organization. When he needed an instrument to fight for the freedom of India he took the Congress. It was in a very bad state when he came upon the scene. You will doubtless remember the struggle between the moderates and the extremists. The moderates were then in power and the extremists were almost sulking in the background. Gandhiji took over this organization and transformed it into a powerful instrument, which could bend people to its will. So while Gandhiji spoke of people's action, he was already thinking of how to create this new organization which would be his instrument for the gigantic task he had placed before himself. He put down most of the things of which I have been

speaking to you in a draft resolution for consideration by the All India Congress Committee. Judging by the language and by the fact that he had struck off words and put in new words, it seems he was still working on the draft. In his own way Gandhiji was a great stylist of the English language. He combined in his style simplicity, lucidity and force. The loose formulations in the draft suggest that he was still working at it. It seems the final form, in which Pyarelal published it in the *Harijan* and a photostat copy of which he published in the *Last Phase* Volume II, was given a day before Gandhiji's assassination. I should like to read it out to you to refresh your memory. This is how the resolution begins (I shall read out only the first paragraph):

"Though split into two, India having attained political independence through means devised by the Indian National Congress (he is modest enough not to say devised by himself), the Congress in its present shape and form, that is, as a propaganda vehicle and a parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain (please follow this intermediate concept of *swaraj*) social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages, as distinguished from its cities and towns." (I think that as a result of discussions with his colleagues he might have been persuaded to change this formulation, because I do not see why the masses of the cities should be left out. I do not think he would have refused to see that it was wrong.) India according to him, had still to attain "social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages". It was thus a three-fold objective that he placed before himself. I shall take them one by one.

The social independence of the masses—you know the most important feature of the social structure of our country is the caste system from which stems untouchability. Caste system and untouchability have affected even those religions which do not believe in caste, such as Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. For example, Brahmin Christians marry only Brahmin Christians in the western coast of our country; the Muslim community also has its higher castes and lower cas-

tes—Sheikhs and Saiyyads and Ansaris and so on; and Sikhs have Sikh Harijans. The legislation against untouchability notwithstanding, untouchability is very much prevalent even in towns, but in our villages it is glaring. Social independence, there is no doubt, is yet to come.

Economic independence of the masses means freedom from exploitation and inequalities. Precious little has so far been achieved in this direction.

Moral independence—I think only Gandhiji could have thought of moral independence. Socialists and communists, I am sure, think in terms of economic and social independence, of a casteless and classless society. This is common ground between them and Gandhi. But for moral independence and its implications socialists and communists have little concern. As I look around and see how we behave, I do not think we of the middle classes of India really are morally independent. During the freedom days we had a phrase; slave mentality. This was the phrase we used in respect of the people who were supporting the foreign power. With independence it was assumed that we had got rid of this mentality. But have we? Take the behaviour of any *burra sahib* towards his subordinate, towards his peons, his clerks—it is the same mentality at work. The whole question of the ethics of independent, equal, democratic people is a subject to which some of our sociologists should pay their attention.

Then Gandhiji goes on to enunciate the fourth objective: ascendency of the civil over military power. This is how he put it: "The struggle for the ascendency of civil over military power is bound to take place in India's progress towards its democratic goal. It must be kept off unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies."

In the future non-violent *sarvodaya* society there would of course be no army because the State itself might not be there. Even if it was there, it would be like the alarm chain in a railway train, to become active when called upon to do so in cases of emergency. In normal times the State would not be seen. It would be hidden somewhere and the people would carry on without the State. But, for the present, when

the state was there and the military was there, the ascendency of the civil over military power, Gandhi said, must be ensured. Please remember that he said this in January 1948. No Nasser, no Ne Win, no Ayub Khan and no Suharto had appeared so far upon the African-Asian stage and yet Gandhi had the prescience to see that the struggle between the civil and the military power for ascendency was bound to take place in India's march towards a democratic goal. He was firmly of the view that the army must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies.

Now we come to the last part of the problem: "For these and other similar reasons, the A.I.C.C. resolves (this is the famous sentence which some of our socialist friends are fond of using for propaganda purposes, particularly during election time) to disband the existing Congress organization and flower into (there is something missing here, for it is gramatically wrong)—a Loksevak Sangh under the following rules with power to alter them as occasion may demand." Here Gandhiji was thinking of dividing the Congress organization. He was realistic enough to understand that somebody had to run the people's government. Mr. Nehru and Mr. Patel and may be a few others could be left to do that, but what would the thousands upon thousands of workers, freedom fighters, be doing? He was already preparing to mobilize them organizationally and place before them a concrete programme. What this concrete programme was is not stated in the draft. But you can see that he was trying to take over again the organization which he had taken over earlier from the old Congress leaders and made into a revolutionary weapon. He was now thinking of taking it over in order again to make it a weapon for yet another revolution. Pyarelal reports Gandhiji as saying that his first job would be to reform politics. That is why he emphasized that Congress and Congressmen must lay a self-denying ordinance upon themselves and renounce power and devote themselves to building the non-violent power of the masses, not the violent power of the army and the police and the rest of the administration that the British Government had

left behind. I may add paranthetically that Mr. Nehru not only took over this administration intact but went on strengthening it. Gandhiji wanted to purify politics and turn it into an instrument of service rather than a domination and self-aggrandisement. You can see what has happened. You can turn your mind to those days and compare the situation then to the present situation.

Pyarelal says that the other two tasks to which Gandhiji wanted to address himself were organization of the youth and mobilization of the masses. The need for these arose from the increasing tendency to officialize nation-building activities and to adopt a policy of development in which the common man has little say and which is largely beyond his comprehension.

Gandhiji's plan was put upon the shelf. And we have not had the intelligence to discover what it was that was put upon the shelf. In spite of the fact that it is there for everyone to see and read and in spite of the fact that some authors of the Sarvodaya movement have often talked about it, I have sometimes found that after I have spent an hour or two speaking about this very question, somebody comes up to the platform and tells me, "This, Jayaprakashji, is all right, but why did you renounce politics". This is indicative and a part of our slave mentality. We of the middle class suffer from it because we are a creation of slavery. Many people think that Macaulay did a great service to India by giving us this educational system. I do not think so. I think nobody did more disservice to India by just one single act. This education cut us completely off from the roots of our civilization, from the roots of our life, from the roots of our history and made us all absolutely rootless, hanging by the coat tail of foreign powers. Hardly any educated Indian today thinks that it is possible to do anything by ourselves. He believes that whatever is possible to be done can be done only by the Government. This I call slave mentality. It is evidence of the fact that morally we are still slaves. And when Gandhi talked of moral independence this is what he had in mind.

I am talking to a very educated audience here. Can you

name a single country which made its progress in the western world in the last one hundred years entirely because of what the State did? Till the Russian revolution in all these countries the State was what you call a liberal State, which maintains an army, which maintains some kind of organization for keeping order, which passes some regulatory laws. For the rest, it was the individual, either singly or in co-operation with others, who did everything else, whether it was industry and agriculture, whether it was scientific research and invention, whether it was exploration or anything else. It was private enterprise, not in the capitalist sense, but in the real sense of the word. The free people of these countries were not waiting for their governments to solve their problems. There certainly were some things which the government alone could do. For the rest, it was the people who themselves acted. The miracle of Germany or the miracle of Japan after the last war is certainly not the doing of their respective governments. The people worked hard, even children co-operated, and built up from scratch so to say, from the bottom, a new country, a new society.

Imagine what would have happened to our country and where we would have been today if from the 15th August, 1947, millions and millions of us—young and old, men and women—had put our shoulders to the wheels, working for the country in whichever way it was possible! There is so much to do in our own little neighbourhood. But instead of doing it ourselves we wait for somebody else—may be the Corporation or the Metropolitan Council or the Delhi Administration—to do it for us. If the Indian people had been on the move, if the people had been mobilized for people's action, if the leaders had not depended on this outmoded system of administration which the Britishers had created for their own purposes, imagine where India would have been today! Not at the top of the world, I know. But it would have certainly been one of the leading nations in Asia and Africa. And, please remember, we of the middle classes, we who belong to the intelligentsia, we are the greatest criminals in this respect. We have no faith in ourselves and we have no faith in the people. Everyone wants to become a

member of this assembly or that assembly, a footling minister at least and thinks that that way alone can he serve his country. Assemblies, parliaments, ministers have all their proper place, but they cannot do everything.

After the Russian Revolution a new kind of State came into existence for the first time in history. The Fascists and Nazis took it for a model not for communist purpose, but for their own special purpose. Even in these totalitarian countries the building of, for example, a new Russia, a new China was not entirely the handiwork of the government of these countries. They realized that the people had to be mobilized. They mobilized them partly by working upon their emotions, inspiring them to endeavour, to sacrifice, to suffer, and partly by compulsion. The entire cultural revolution in China was the mobilization of the youth of the country for purposes which the rulers had in mind. Gandhiji was thinking of mobilizing the youth for different purposes in the Indian context. These things have not been attempted in the last twentyone years. Gandhiji wanted to do them. This is the sum and substance of Gandhi after independence.

This draft resolution shows that Gandhiji was going to take the most revolutionary step of his revolutionary life. It is really a great pity that history was denied the opportunity of seeing how a great revolutionary leader, called after his death the Father of the Nation, used his matchless weapon to mobilize the people and how he created through service and non-violent organization a new society, and how through non-violent resistance controlled the State and the rulers. I have said this umpteen times in mass meetings, but I do not remember to have said this to an educated, sophisticated audience like this ever before.

One day some years back I was travelling from Patna to my Ashram in Gaya district, a distance of a hundred miles, in a jeep. I had with me a Japanese young man who was going to see the Ashram and meet four other Japanese who were then working in the Ashram. As we motored along, this young Japanese was very keenly observing things on the roadside. On the way we stopped at a well for a drink of water. We had not gone more than 60 miles when my

young companion turned to me and said: "Jayaprakash Narayan, you people say that India is a very poor country. But I don't think India is really a poor country." I was taken aback. "What", I asked him, "have you seen in the villages that you have passed through except mud huts with thatched roofs? Where have you seen any evidence of prosperity?" He said, "Well, this is daytime but I observe in every village people sitting under the shade of a tree or on the verandah talking and smoking. Now, if people can sit around without doing anything during daytime, during working hours, they must surely have enough to eat? In my country, Japan, we have to work hard. If we did not work hard we would not be able to survive. Every able-bodied person has to work, on the farm or in the factory; sick people are in hospitals; old men and women might be in the home, but even they would be doing something, may be painting pottery or doing something of that kind." All I could say to this was mutter excuses: "You know, we have unemployment in this country. These people do not have enough work. That is why they are sitting around doing nothing." When he spoke now there was annoyance in his voice. "No work to do!", said he, "do you remember the well we stopped at for a drink? Didn't you see that all around the well there were little puddles where dirty water collected; leaves were rotting; and there was no end of flies and mosquitos. And they drink that water! What prevents them from bringing some dry earth from the field and filling the puddles up and keeping the well clean?"

Now, tell me, what could I say to that: I would invite you to go to any village in India, not in prosperous Punjab or around Delhi, and have a look at the wells. You go to Bihar, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, or to Andhra, you will find village wells in a terrible state. They spread all kinds of disease. But people draw water from them and are altogether insensitive to the surrounding filth. Was I to say to my young Japanese friend, "We have in this country a democracy the like of which you do not have and therefore these people in the villages wait for Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru to bring a *bhoomi sena,* a land army, to do the cleaning?"

Which land army could do this? It is impossible for any State to do all the things that must be done so that our country goes forward.

America is the most affluent country in the world, the most prosperous country. I was in Philadelphia a few months back and went with my Quaker friends to see a weekend camp, a weekend camp in which I found a dozen students of the University of Pennsylvania, some blacks and some whites, some boys and some girls. This was a ghetto area of Philadelphia. The boys and girls had brought food from their homes, had their lunch together and were going to work eight hours in that little cottage of a Negro. And what were they doing? They were papering the walls, and filling up all the little holes with some kind of substance which they had brought with them. Now, even in America, in prosperous America, if the students feel that there is need to go to the slums and do this kind of work, don't you think that in India this kind of work should be multiplied not a hundred-fold but a thousand-fold, may be a hundred thousand-fold? It was of this that Gandhi was thinking.

The great leaders of the revolutions of modern times—the French revolution, the American revolution, the Russian revolution, the Turkish revolution, the Cuban revolution, the Algerian revolution, after the success of the revolution became the top dogs, the rulers. I am not suggesting that they did it for love of power. They did it perhaps to realize the objectives of the revolution through the instrument of the state. But Gandhi did not do this, for what he wanted to do just could not be done by state power. He himself said that his work far from being finished was just going to begin. Imagine a man of seventy-nine talking like this and saying that he wanted to live to the age of 125 years in order to accomplish this task! He realized the limitations of government action. And you can see it for yourself. You can see that whenever a development project was a centralized project, like Bhakra Nangal or Rourkela or Bhilai, something was accomplished, though at great cost both of money and time. But wherever the plan was a dispersed plan and had to be carried out over wide areas of the country, it in-

variably failed. It failed because of lack of popular cooperation. This is a kind of upside down picture. It is the people who should be doing and it is the government which should be cooperating. That was what Pyarelal meant when he said that the people were not involved.

Gandhiji wanted to change all this. How he would have gone about it we do not know. He had a genius for making big things out of small things. You remember how much ridicule was poured over the Dandi march before it was begun. Some of you were too young then to remember. Some of you may not have been born. But quite a few of you may have read H. V. R. Iyengar's articles in *The Indian Express*. He was a sub-divisional officer or something of that kind and was posted in some district in Gujarat. A day or two before the Dandi march was to begin he applied for leave which was readily granted. The District Magistrate, Mr. Iyengar's boss, wasn't worried about the march at all. "This will fizzle out. Nothing will come out of it." (I am not using his exact words.) Mr. Iyengar says that when he arrived at Madras there was a telegram already waiting for him: "Come back immediately." He was called back because the whole of Gujarat, the entire country, was on fire. Gandhi devised simple programmes. Indeed, the programme had to be so simple that every child could follow it. Take, for example, the salt satyagraha. Even children got involved. They took their bags, went to the Collector's office and shouted: "We have violated the salt law." Similarly, in the 1942 movement in Bihar, a British sergeant caught hold of a boy hardly 12-13 years, tied a rope around his legs and lowered him into a well and when his head was touching the water, shouted from above: "Say you regret it, say you will not do it again, or else I shall drown you." Up came the reply from deep down the well (it brings tears to one's eyes) "Quit India, quit India." One knew then that the day of the empire was done, that it could not continue much longer.

But how Gandhiji would have brought capitalism and feudalism to an end, what programme he would have devised for economic, social and moral independence of the Indian people, nobody knows. All we can say is that he wanted to

substitute service with power and through service create a new force in society. People lament those days now. Where, they ask, has the spirit of self-sacrifice fled? Gandhiji wanted to keep that spirit alive by calling people away from seats of power and position, back into the wilderness with a programme of service which is the discipline of non-violence. Even as the violent army has its course of discipline, just so the non-violent corps of satyagraha has a course of discipline. It helps him establish rapport with the people, so that when the call is given, when a programme is placed, there is an immediate upsurge.

You know what happened after Gandhiji's death. The politicians, as I said at the beginning, put his programme on the shelf. Nehru never mentioned it. One day I talked of people's action etc. and he said, "What do you mean? The State is there. We have so many hundreds of thousands of public servants. Where is the need for any other public servants?" I think he was disillusioned later when he realized the limitation of the administrative system or machine.

The other day I was invited to speak at the founding day of Yugoslav Republic. Reading the documents they had given me, I discovered the very significant fact that when the partisans defeated the Nazis Tito had already a programme for the full utilization of the spirit and the energy of the partisans. And he gave a call for voluntary service: "Let us join hands to build the roads, to repair the bridges, to repair the schools and hospitals and build new ones." This programme for voluntary service lasted for three whole years. And it is said that it was this that gave momentum to the whole pace and programme of the Yugoslav society, which resulted in the highest rate of growth in the world during one of these years, 13 per cent. This record has not been bettered. Japan with all its high rate of growth reached a level of 11 per cent in one year.

And in our country? If you go to our villages and look around, you will find thousands and thousands of freedom fighters who are disappointed and feel frustrated. They are eating out their hearts, not because they did not become members of legislature or ministers, but because they have

nothing in the way of nation-building to do. On the other hand, as you know, there is so much to do in the country. After all, only a few hundred people, or may be a few thousand, are needed to man the legislatures and the ministries. What were the rest of those hundreds of thousands who went to prison in the course of the freedom struggle to do? For want of a programme which could engage them, they have all been immobilized.

I wonder if all this means anything to you. Being a Gandhian, I have a purposeful attitude towards even intellectual activities. I believe that even our research should be purposive. Not that I am against fundamental research, but I hold that even fundamental research should be related to the fundamental problems of science, social and physical, of India. It is in this spirit that I have given you some idea of what Gandhi proposed to do after independence. If what I have said makes sense to you, you should do your bit. I am not inviting you to put on khaddar or to become a Gandhian. But in whatever way it is possible for you to help your neighbours, to help your fellow human beings, please consider this to be your responsibility and your duty as a citizen of free and democratic India. I am sure if we had the kind of dictatorship that Germany had under Hitler, or that Russia had under Stalin, or that China has under Mao, we would be compelled to do things. And if we resisted, we would be sent to labour camps, there to starve and yet work sixteen to twenty hours a day; part of the time we might have been made to dig our own graves. No matter whether one was the greatest professor or the greatest scientist living, one would be compelled to fall in line. And falling in line was not enough, either; one had to make the contribution asked for and in the manner that was laid down. I am not suggesting that in totalitarian countries all this is done entirely by force or by striking terror. There sure is the spirit of patriotism at work; there is the desire to create a new society; there are new ideals to pursue, although they all shine brightly only for a time and then start getting dimmer and dimmer; there are all sorts of other incentives.

But we have chosen democracy and these methods are

not for us. Democracy, however, is worth nothing and cannot last unless the citizen realizes his responsibility and discharges it willingly—his responsibility not only to his family, not only to the job he is doing, but also to the community at large. This is what Gandhiji wanted to teach us. This was part of his concept of moral independence—the creation of a new and responsible citizen of India.

Nirmal Kumar Bose

My Experiences as a Gandhian–I

ALTHOUGH I HAD GIVEN UP MY STUDIES TEMPORARILY during the later stages of the non-cooperation movement in 1922, I was never attracted by politics. I had always felt that the pursuit of science was my only occupation. Gandhiji's leadership of the national movement, his singular courage had an attraction for men like me, but the way he seemed to reject technology and science appeared to be strange and unimaginative. My own work of science kept me busy during the year 1922-1929. Even earlier than that, I had begun to realize through voluntary service in famines the poverty of our villages. But as I travelled more and more through the villages of the tribal people in Bihar, Orissa and several other provinces, I began to realize that the pursuit of an intellectual life was very much like a luxury if it had nothing to do with the relief of the miserable condition in which the majority of India's rural population lived.

In the year 1930, I joined the University of Calcutta as a research scholar in anthropology; and it was in the same year that the Civil Disobedience Movement was started by Gandhiji. During the Salt Movement an organization was set up in Bengal in which Satish Chandra Dasgupta of the Khadi Pratisthan played an important part. Many of my friends became associated with this movement, and I also felt drawn towards it. An office was set up near the University of Calcutta. I resigned my post of research scholar when I was placed in charge of the publicity section of the Salt Movement in Bengal.

Within a short time, the office was raided by the police

and closed down. Some of us who accidentally escaped arrest during the raid gathered together and formed a plan of our own. The salt law was then being broken in a large number of places in the district of Midnapur. We decided that instead of merely offering civil disobedience in or near Calcutta, we would rather go to some provincial town and walk all the way to Midnapur where satyagraha would be offered. So three of us chose the district of Birbhum, our intention being to walk all the way from this district through Burdwan, Hooghly and Bankura until we reached Midnapur.

But when we reached Bolpur, and addressed a few meetings in the town and neighbouring villages, all of us felt that there was so little of political information and organization in this part of the country that it would perhaps be better for us to settle down here in some form of Gandhian constructive activity. A small shop for the sale of khadi had already been established in the town a month or so earlier by a gentleman who was a schoolmaster, but who was also a devoted Gandhian. He had spent some time, even before the civil disobedience movement, in Gandhiji's company in Sabarmati. And we chose this Khadi Sangha as the centre of our constructive activities. Bolpur was a small town, or rather a big village, in those days, and the quarter where the Khadi Sangha was located was one where landless labourers, mostly belonging to the 'lower' castes, lived. So our work began here.

Personally I was not interested in the sale of *khadi* or spinning wheels. During the height of the civil disobedience movement many people came to buy spinning wheels and ready-made slivers of cotton, and produced fairly good yarn which could be woven into cloth. But as we became involved in the sale of *khadi,* my personal feeling was that it was wrong to import spinning wheels, steel spindles and cotton from outside and then send the yarn by railway to distant places to be woven into *khadi.* This was certainly not 'decentralization' as we had understood it from Gandhiji's writings. So it became our duty to find carpenters and blacksmiths to produce spinning wheels locally and then to get

the yarn woven by local weavers, of whom there were many in the neighbouring villages.

We worked hard month after month until all the technical aspects of the production of *khadi* were properly taken care of. We did succeed in the manufacture of good wheels and spindles, and also eventually in the production of various grades of *khadi* with the help of local artisans. By the time this was over, the number of spinners whom we served had already gone up to hundreds. Good yarn and good *khadi* began to be produced. But my personal experience was that this was done more because of sentiment than because it was profitable. So we set about a new experiment in the field of economics, if I may use that term.

Among the hundreds of spinners with whom we were in constant contact there were men and women of all kinds. We chose a few among them from different walks of life. Two were coolies working in a coal depot near the railway station. They weighed coal for their customers and carried them on their heads or in push carts for delivery. There was also a confectioner who was not so hard worked. He prepared his confectionery for sale in the morning and then sold it throughout the day. On market days, twice a week, there were many customers and he had a brisk sale. But on other days, he had some amount of time when he could spin. The fourth spinner was a shopkeeper who sold hardware. He sat in his shop all through the day and could spin whenever there was no customer to attend to.

The autumnal festival of Durga Puja was about three months away. That is the time when men buy new clothes for their children and for themselves. We of the Khadi Sangha appealed to these four friends of ours not to waste a single minute, but produce as much yarn as they could during the coming three months. We would exchange it for an equivalent weight of woven *khadi,* charging the cost of weaving in cash. The experiment was very fruitful. The two coolies in the coal-yard produced enough yarn for one piece of *dhoti* each, 4 yards by 44 inches. The confectioner produced four pieces of cloth altogether, while the hardware

merchant, Sarkar Mahasaya, produced enough for 13 pieces of *dhoti, sari* and the like in three months' time.

This proved to our satisfaction that if the idle moments were converted into work, even the coolie in the coal shop could produce, perhaps, four pieces of *dhoti* every year. Of course, the unremitting work which all of these spinners put in was extraordinary. Even if half of the labour was thus employed, we felt that no family in Bolpur or the surrounding villages would need to buy any cloth for his family at all. There was enough spare time and spinning was quite pleasant if the wheel were kept in perfect order and the cotton properly carded. Of course, the Khadi Sangha took charge of this part of the job, and we thus made a successful experiment.

As the tale of these experiments went round the villages, a strange thing began to happen. Slowly the demand for more work and also for wages for spinning in cash began to mount. But we stubbornly refused to pay wages in cash. We encouraged the new set of poor spinners who began to arise in the villages to spin for their own cloth. But many of them, particularly women of the poorer but respectable families who were in purdah, had no money to buy either the wheel or the slivers. So the wheels were given to them and the payment spread over a year. The wheels we made cost no more than rupees three. With regard to cotton, our arrangement was that we would advance slivers, say, one seer in weight, the spinner being required to bring back to us half-a-seer, or seven or six *chhataks,* according to whether it was medium or fine yarn. Later on, when the spinner had thus accumulated, say, two seers of yarn of her own, she could send it to the Khadi Sangha and receive one seer by weight of woven *khadi,* the difference going to pay for the cost of weaving.

When the poorer spinners realized in this way that, without the investment of a single pice, they could spin and receive pieces of cloth, enough for their use, by only *working,* the pressure on the Khadi Sangha began to mount. All the money we had invested in buying cotton and in paying to the weavers thus came back to us in piles and piles of well

spun yarn. A new way had to be found for converting this back into cash, so that we could buy cotton once more or pay the weavers in cash. Fortunately, as this was Bolpur and Santiniketan was near by, it became very easy for us to produce coarse or medium *khadi,* towels and bedsheets, shirtings or *dhotis,* all of which was generously and eagerly purchased by the students and teachers of Shantiniketan.

Clearly this experiment taught us that even with our existing resources it was possible to bring work to at least the poorest section of our people which would eventually help them to produce all the cloth which they needed. There was, however, one element the cost of which had not been counted. It was the service rendered by the Khadi Sangha itself which had not been paid for. But our experience definitely was that once the whole organization began to run smoothly, it was possible to multiply it all over Birbhum district, and that with a very small number of dedicated workers, it would be possible to keep the industry running. The question of initial capital had been solved in an original way. There is a custom among the rice-merchants of Bolpur according to which, on every transaction, a few pice per rupee is charged for public service. Generally this fund, called *Iswar-vritti,* is set apart by every trader and used at the end of the year in some festivity like the Durga or Kali Pooja. Our initial funds had been gathered by collecting a part of the *Iswar-vritti* from the merchants of the town.

Unfortunately, when our experiments began to prosper in this manner, the civil disobedience movement started again; the workers were snatched away by the police and found themselves in gaol in quite another kind of environment. Personally for me, gaol came as an interruption. But I came in contact with a very large number of political workers from all over Bengal. A small fraction among them had experience of Gandhian constructive work, but the majority of them were people whose central passion was political work for India's independence. It was then that I began to realize that Gandhiji's ideas, whether in the field of economics or even of politics, had hardly any interest for them. It was as if the civil disobedience movement in which all

of them had participated was being carried on in a kind of intellectual vacuum. Among those who were in gaol a substantial proportion were leftists, Socialists or Marxists. Some amount of leftist literature was also available which was read with enthusiasm. But Gandhism did not have an intellectual appeal; there was not much to read in it; nothing systematic. So it was left intellectually unprobed and unsupported.

This turned me to something which suited my temperament as well as the production of *khadi*. I decided to devote myself to reading the writings of Gandhiji and presenting the result to political workers to the best of my ability. From the period in about 1933 onwards, this has been one of my chief interests: to read carefully, examine with diligence how and why Gandhiji developed certain ideas, to modify them if necessary, and then to present the result in the form of lectures or books. For several years I wrote mostly in Bengali and only occasionally in English. The results were obviously negligible. But it gave me a kind of satisfaction which I could not have derived in any other way.

Meanwhile, the small centre of constructive work which had been established in 1930, was kept alive by the devoted work of some workers and sympathizers in Bolpur town. The production of *khadi,* however, went down; and the centre was eventually closed. Those who were part-time helpers found it impossible to continue the work even by means of their joint labours. The whole-time workers, who had taken our place, found education a more satisfactory job. Thus the Khadi Sangha became converted into *Sikshagar*, a centre of primary and also adult education by means of evening classes. It also became a kind of political and civic club for the neighbourhood.

The *Sikshagar* has gone through many vicissitudes in the course of thirty years and more. Sometimes it was developed as a women's industrial centre in addition to the primary and adult classes which were run in it. Sometimes it became a centre of *ambar charkhas*. But all these ancillaries have dropped out, one by one, for lack of a determined social worker who has the health, capacity and energy to see it

through. The school, however, still remains. Gurudev's[1] Sriniketan, that is, his school for village reconstruction, has now taken charge of it and has been running it as a centre of extension services.

Before I close I shall relate to you another experiment, perhaps of a quixotic kind, which was conducted at the *Sikshagar* in Bolpur during the last ten years or so. There is some land which has become attached to the school through money donated by the public. This land can be irrigated from a well which belongs to the school, or from a tank which is the property of a small zamindar who lives near by. Once it was decided by the families who lived near the school that the land should be cultivated and vegetables grown. The suggestion which one of them made was that they would all go to the zamindar, and ask for his permission to use the water of his tank for irrigating the school's fields. In return, they would clean up the tank, raise fish, and give him half of the catch as rent.

When the time came for confronting the zamindar with this proposal, there was great enthusiasm and all the farmers and labourers became united. The zamindar was approached, he said he would give no formal permission, but they could do what they liked. It was a kind of victory for the labourers, and they set about cultivating the garden with great enthusiasm.

I had attached one condition to the use of the school-land. The rent for the land payable to the owner continued to be paid by the school, and the labourers were to raise as much as they could on the land, provided (1) they first distributed among the families involved what every one of them needed, (2) and if a surplus was left, it was to be sold, and the fund thus raised was to be used for medical or other assistance when necessary.

During the first year, when the memory of the united demand before the zamindar lasted, all went well. But during the next and the year after the next enthusiasm began to flag and the production of vegetables progressively went down. One day when this question was raised by me in the

[1] Rabindranath Tagore.

assembly which sat regularly every evening, the labourers admitted that the production had gone down. One of them said, "Some have many members in their family and some have few. Those who have few ask themselves why they should work hard when the benefits are to be enjoyed more by others?" I asked what should be done under the circumstances. Almost everyone was for dividing the land into separate plots allowing each to raise for himself whatever crop he liked.

This was indeed done. But a new development took place in another three or four years' time. One of the labourers, who was more energetic and also quarrelsome, snatched away quite a bit of land from one of his neighbours by raising a fence. He then brought a relative of his from another village and gave it to him to cultivate. Those who had been deprived did not dare to fight back and there was bitterness and hostility where there had been unity and co-operation. And all this happened when none of the labourers owned the land, the land still belonged to the school which continued to pay the rent from its own coffers.

A new situation thus arose. But what was the answer? How could the co-operation of past several years be restored? I might mention that another development had taken place in the meanwhile. The sons of these very labourers had been educated in the school and in their own way they had become familiar with the ideas of Gandhiji. They knew that Gandhiji wanted men to unite not merely in war but in peace. They knew, many of them had only heard, how the work of *khadi* used to be carried on, and they had also come to believe in some kind of sharing with one another.

When the fathers became recalcitrant, an appeal was made by the teachers to the younger generation. It was put to them at a meeting of both the fathers and the sons that the teachers or political workers were going to do nothing; they had to do it all by themselves. If the fathers had to surrender their selfish rights, the pressure must come from their sons, not from outside.

There was of course a long series of discussions between fathers and sons; everything was done openly in the small

community. Eventually all the land has come back to the school, and it is now the present batch of students who cultivate it with the assistance of those who want to help. But such work is naturally arduous and the children are not good in gardening. Yet, even though production has gone down, the boys continue to work on the land after their classes in the hope that this will be good education and good play for them.

My personal experience in the Gandhian type of constructive work has thus been varied, sometime interrupted, but always intensely rewarding. I have felt that it is possible by intelligence and organization to meet some of our more urgent needs in the villages through the villagers' own labours. Gandhian constructive work does not exhaust itself with the spinning wheel. It is only a starting point from where work can be extended to hygiene, composting, education, recreation and a dozen other things. Another thing that I have learnt is that the unity of war does not necessarily bring about the unity of peace. Joint effort in peace-time construction, in sharing with one's neighbours the fruits of one's own labour does not automatically come when a battle has been won. It has to be secured independently, probably after a large amount of toilsome education.

Again, if peace-time co-operation is *forced* upon a people, either through the action of an active party or may be by means of law, there still remains a hurdle which may not be crossed at all. This is the level of inter-personal relationships where the good done by the Party or the State can be undone if adequate educative effort and organization is not continued for that specific purpose.

These are indeed hard lessons. But I do not know if there can be an answer to the human problems except through intense constructive work carried out with intelligence, determination and patience.

Nirmal Kumar Bose

My Experiences as a Gandhian–II

IN THE PREVIOUS LECTURE I CONFESSED THAT POLITICAL activities were far less interesting to me than constructive work of the kind which came under the Gandhian programme. I had felt drawn by the concern which Gandhiji had for the lowliest, particularly for their freedom from all forms of exploitation. The deep influence of reading Kropotkin, Tolstoy, Bertrand Russell and Bernard Shaw had led me towards philosophical anarchism; and this was echoed in the writings of Gandhi as well. I had certainly noted that the foundation of the latter's philosophy lay in his faith in God, but this had hardly any attraction for me. Yet I found that one could subscribe to his ideas and associate oneself with his programme of work without any injury to one's inward commitments. And thus I continued to remain a Gandhian—of course, in my own way.

It was easy for me to subscribe to his view that if a man was prepared to hold fast to what he held to be right, then he could never be enslaved. One could easily be fortified in this belief by the examples of Socrates or Galileo, and certainly of the numerous pioneers of faith who had been born in every land in course of man's long history. Gandhi was original and unique in that he wanted to convert this into an instrument, not merely of personal action, but of collective action as well. This was a brave new experiment; and to this I felt intellectually as well as emotionally drawn rather forcefully.

I had no direct experience of the organization of violence. But from what I observed all around, I shared with Gandhi

the belief that violence led to the concentration of power in a few hands instead of its diffusion. Even the brief experience which I had gained, roughly from 1920 to the year 1936, had made me feel that the party system, as it operated in India, led to a concentration of power in a few hands; and it was in consequence of an unhappy experience of that kind that I actually tendered my resignation from the ordinary membership of the Indian National Congress in 1936 rather than merely allow it to end by lapse in course of time.

Nevertheless, I continued to be firmly committed to what I understood to be Gandhiji's economic and political theories. This commitment deepened further when I discovered that the Congress gave greater importance to bringing about the end of British rule in India than to simultaneously building up the non-violent power of the masses from below. The faith of those leaders of the Congress with whom I personally came in contact, and whose labours I shared, seemed to lie in the view that the masses *had continuously to be led,* at least for some time to come. This opinion was not confined to Congressmen alone. Many of my friends who had drunk deeply in Marxian literature shared it. The State and its capture were important for Marxians and non-Marxians alike.

They may have been right. But I felt that I could hardly be of any use to men of that faith. And so I retired with renewed faith in the need of an experiment in the organization of non-violence on a massive scale. Even in this regard the intellectual part of the work seemed more attractive to me than constructive work in which I had laboured, with interruptions, from 1930 to 1936. What gave me added justification for such work was what I had observed in a fairly large number of Gandhian workers both in Bengal and elsewhere. They seemed to be swayed by faith and obedience, sometime even by unquestioning or blind faith in a manner which, I thought, was good for no man. The fear was that when work was worshipped more than thought which should inform it (and also be the result of work), it eventually led man into the dead sands of routine. I felt

that there should be freedom and creativeness even in following Gandhi.

I have tried to explain at some length my attitude towards Gandhi and Gandhism, because this was not only my justification for withdrawing from political activity, but because it gave me an added reason for dedication to my own work in anthropology. In this field my principal concern had become the phenomenon of culture change. Whatever I did or tried to do in that line was calculated to give a new meaning to my own commitment as a social worker. Even the study of Gandhism became for me an experimental study in one of the methods of social change. In other words, it gave a new dimension to my pursuit of the Gandhian way.

But let me continue the story. I left the Congress in 1936 and went back, after an interval of eight years, to the University of Calcutta in 1938. The work in Bolpur continued and I remained associated with it, though less actively than before. My interest in Gandhism deepened and I found myself able to write numerous articles and a few books on the subject. The majority of them were, of course, in Bengali. Then came the Quit India Movement in 1942. And when the fateful resolution was passed in August 1942, I found myself once more landed in gaol with many of my old and a considerable number of new comrades.

The detention ended in 1945 after the Second World War was over. In the meanwhile, i.e. between 1930 and 1941, there were two or three occasions when I gained an intimate contact with either Gandhiji himself, or some of his close associates like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan or Khurshedben Naoroji, the grand daughter of Dadabhai Naoroji. When I was released from detention and took up my work once more in the University, we heard that Gandhiji had decided to come to Midnapur in order to meet the workers who had carried on non-violent resistance all through the years 1942 to 1945. Midnapur had been subjected to heavy repression, while a terrible cyclone had swept over the land in October 1942. Yet the will of the resisters had remained unbroken.

About this time a letter came to me from Rajkumari

Amrit Kaur stating that Gandhiji desired me to see him immediately after his arrival in Bengal. The story of this interview has been related in *My Days With Gandhi* and need not therefore be retold here. I did meet Gandhiji before he left for Midnapur and then for Assam and Madras; but I did not join his company, although that is what he had desired.

The year 1945 passed by. Then came 1946, when serious communal riots broke out in Calcutta in the month of August. During these riots, some of my friends who had no political interests or commitments began to run a rescue service for both Hindus and Muslims. Stranded families were gathered in private cars and then reached to safe places with their relatives or friends in other parts of the town. Much of this brave rescue work was done by excellent social workers, quite a few of whom had not received high education. But those amongst us who were Gandhians felt more and more helpless as we could not prevent the slaughter of people when it took place even in our presence. In sheer fright and in self-defence the Hindu population of Calcutta hit back when the Muslim League government celebrated its Direct Action Day. Perhaps the same kind of fear was also operating on the other side.

Our hearts were sick with what we witnessed as we walked or drove through the streets. Dead bodies lay in a bloated condition on the deserted roads, the doors and windows of homes remained tightly closed to shut off the stench which arose, and the roofs of houses became the refuge of numberless vultures who were at their unbounded feast. Days passed by, the riots continued, and some of us Gandhians began to feel that we were hardly capable of dealing with the situation in a non-violent way. The crisis was too deep and inwardly at least I felt that we had failed. The field had been left to those who believed in striking back. In other words, violence apparently seemed to have scored over our faith when it came to doing something effective.

When we were in this stage of mind, when we could do nothing more than carry on relief operations as best we could, the newspapers reported one day that severe riots

had broken out in Noakhali in East Bengal. Within a few days, Satish Babu of the Khadi Pratisthan sent us word that our services were needed immediately. Gandhiji had asked him to send a batch of satyagrahis at once to Noakhali in order to ascertain what had actually taken place there. They were to see things with their own eyes, come back if they could and report. And so a batch of over two dozen satyagrahis left for the scene of devastation. In the meanwhile, we heard that the President of the Congress, Acharya J. B. Kriplani, and his wife, Sucheta Devi, had already proceeded to Noakhali.

Gandhiji arrived in Calcutta on the 29th October, 1946, and I was placed at his service along with some of my closest friends. The task assigned to me was of a light character. I was to go through the newspaper reports of speeches by Muslim leaders and to note any direct incitements to violence in them. I was also to prepare an account of the economic situation in Naokhali district. When this was ready, I reported the findings to Gandhiji; and when he left for Noakhali on the 6th of November, 1946, I was among those who accompanied him in the train.

In a few weeks' time, we settled down in the village of Srirampur in Noakhali and from then onwards I had a singularly favourable opportunity of serving Gandhiji along with a stenographer volunteer, named Parasuram and also of observing how he worked.

In those days, Gandhiji appeared to be sometimes in a tense, but sometimes in a relaxed mood. On a few occasions he was overcome by frustration and even gave vent to expressions of anger. He could be terribly angry at times. But what struck me much more was that immediately after any event like this he would close his eyes, clench his fingers, and after a little while completely recover his poise and equanimity.

It is interesting that one day he asked me a rather unusual question. He demanded that now that I had observed him at very close quarters, I must tell him exactly what I felt about him. I did so truthfully; but this leads me to another event when I had met him on his way to Midnapur in

Calcutta, a few months earlier. On that occasion, we had a talk about my book entitled *Selections from Gandhi*. His complaint against it was that I had created in it a picture of him better than it really was. His writings that I had collected showed him at his best. They presented, he said, a picture of his aspirations, and not of his achievements. I argued that we had learnt from Poet Rabindranath's writings that a man should be judged by the best moments of life, by his loftiest creations, rather than by the smallnesses of everyday life. Gandhiji replied:

> Yes, that is true of the Poet, for he has to bring down the light of the stars upon the earth. But for men like me, you have to measure them, not by the rare moments of greatness in their lives, but by the amount of dust which they collect on their feet in the course of life's journey.

This was one of those moments when I realized what great heights Gandhiji could attain. But as I lived close to him and was privileged to observe him in small acts as well as in acts of greatness, the picture that I had in my mind about him became modified in certain details, considerably enlarged and richer on that account.

As Gandhiji went from village to village and met scores and scores of people every day, it appeared to me that he took infinite pains to ascertain what had actually happened. He was not easily satisfied. He would himself, or through an interpreter, examine the correctness of any report until it was fully verified. Or else, he would not act upon that report at all.

On the eve of his departure from Delhi for Noakhali on the 28th October, 1946, he had said in the course of his after-prayer speech that the "sufferings of women had melted his heart. He wanted to go to Bengal and wipe their tears and put heart in them, if he could". I remember that on one occasion in Noakhali a number of women came to see him. They had lost their nearest and dearest ones during the riots. They came and took the dust of his feet

in obeisance and prayed for a few words of consolation from him. Gandhiji's face hardened. He said that they must recover their courage. He had come to Bengal not to bring consolation but courage, without which a new life would never be born.

Noakhali is a district in which, before the riots of 1946, there were 18 per cent of Hindus in the population, while the rest were Muslims and the Hindus owned three-fourth of the property. Gandhiji was aware of all this. He was aware, too, of the grievous suffering to which the Hindus had been subjected, how their homes had been looted and burnt, and how those who really counted among them had been brutally done to death. Yet, when he met those who came to see him, he asked them if they had not been educated with the money derived from the farmers and artisans. He was glad that they had become engineers, doctors and school-masters, but now it behoved them to bring their talents to the service of those on whose labours their prosperity was built. The engineer should come and help in building better houses, better roads, so that the villagers could make their homes cleaner and more beautiful. The doctor should likewise teach people how to secure clean drinking water, how to make the village clean, how to prevent disease. He emphasized that it was only thus that they could repay the debt they owed to the villagers.

Indeed, one evening in the course of his after-prayer speech, he went so far as to say that they must thank God that he had given them an opportunity of building up their lives anew. All the suffering which they had undergone could be thus converted into God's blessing and it was only in that spirit that they could re-organize their relationship with their neighbours. Here was, indeed, courage of an unexampled kind. And it occurred to me that this was possible because there was in him deep love for those to whom he was speaking and because he believed firmly in the establishment of human equality on the economic plane.

As part of Gandhiji's endeavour to bring peace in Noakhali, it had been proposed by the Government that peace committees should be set up in the villages. Gandhiji advised

the Hindu leaders to accept the proposal, but they demanded that the Government should satisfy some of their conditions before they agreed. Gandhiji listened carefully and then said,[1] "Your proposal that those demands should be satisfied before the peace committees can be formed, virtually means a summary rejection of the peace offer. This will only succeed in embittering feelings still further. The Government offer should be accepted on grounds of expediency. I do not, however, plead for peace at any price, certainly not at the price of honour. Let us act on the square, and let us put them in the wrong. It was exactly in this way that Indians were able to gain the silent sympathy of a large number of Europeans in South Africa. If, after a fair trial, the committees are found unworkable, you can come out with your honour intact. That sense of honour will give you a courage which no man can beat."

Speaking about the plan of posting two workers (one Hindu and another Muslim, nominated by the Muslim League) in each village, Gandhiji said, "If I succeed cent per cent in my own plan, then conditions will improve. But of this there does not seem to be any prospect at the present moment. Yet, as a man of hope I continue to hope against hope. In the present case, I confess through bitter experience that there is no sign of change of heart, but certainly there has been a change of plan. Considerations of expediency demanded that the proposal should therefore be accepted."

The demands were now examined one by one. With regard to the demand that certain Muslim officers should be replaced by Hindu officers, Gandhiji remarked that it was unreasonable and a communal demand. "While putting forward such a proposal, you should ask yourself if the Muslims of Bihar can reasonally make a similar demand. In my opinion, the present demand is absurd and I would personally never countenance it. You can, of course, substitute in its place 'impartial officers in place of biased ones'; that would be fair."

Someone pointed out that the Ministry in Bihar had

[1] N. K. Bose, *My Days With Gandhi*, pp. 60-62.

employed Muslim armed soldiers to quell the disturbances, the suggestion being that this was for the appeasement of the Muslims. Gandhiji was clearly of opinion that such a thing, if true, was surely a sign of weakness.

The last point raised was in connection with the Hindu members of the peace committees. One Hindu leader pleaded for postponement as most of the leading Hindus had left the district and only poor weavers, blacksmiths or farmers remained behind. If these were to be on the committees, they would be no match for the more intelligent and educated Mussalman representatives. Gandhiji said with some warmth that if they had fled, leaving their neighbours to their own fate, they did not deserve to be called leaders. The seats would have to be occupied by barbers, washermen and the like, who were as much interested in the preservation of their life and property as the rich. It was not unlikely that they might submit to the influence of Muslim members. But the risk had to be run if true democracy was to be evolved. "In all preliminary steps in democracy, we have to run tremendous risks."

Months thus rolled by and eventually in March 1947 Gandhiji felt that duty called called him to Bihar, from where complaints came that the rehabilitation of the Muslim sufferers was not being effectively carried out by the Congress Government. And so he left Noakhali and proceeded towards Patna on the 2nd March 1947.

When the time of departure came, some of the volunteers asked Gandhiji how long they should stay at their appointed task in Noakhali. Gandhiji's reply was, "As long as you are alive". And it must be said that the credit of these volunteers that they have all remained at their posts, sometimes in gaol, sometimes out of it, while a few have even lost their lives, but never desired to forsake the duty which had been entrusted to them.

In Bihar Gandhiji toured from village to village and spread the same lesson that he had courageously imparted to the people of Noakhali. But new developments were taking place, one of which was at the personal level and the other in the political firmament of India. The personal

happenings need not be recounted here except for one aspect of it which had a wider significance.

Gandhi developed sharp differences with some of his most intimate co-workers over the question of his relationship with women workers who came close to him. Some of the co-workers were rather uncharitable in their criticism, and this left him in a lonely frame of mind. I was personally not interested in this aspect of his life, namely, his experiments in *brahmacharya*. But once he invited my opinion, particularly after his differences with some of his co-workers in Wardha and Ahmedabad had widened. I said what I exactly felt, but added at the same time that he showed personal preferences, and also dislikes, which proved that he did not perhaps treat everyone with equal objectivity.

It was at this point that something else occurred which confirmed my opinion about his likes and dislikes about particular persons. Personally, I had been deeply interested in the radical aspects of Gandhiji's economic and political philosophy. I knew that he had evolved from one position to another and, in the earlier stages, he had even contradicted what he had said or written earlier. Yet, the core of his beliefs was sufficiently clear and radical; and this was what I tried to emphasize in my own writings as well as in my political discussions with him.

Thus in a conversation he had expressed the view in regard to his theory of trusteeship that the true heir of a trustee should be the public. On another occasion he said that a capitalistic system could only be built up by violence and could therefore be defended by violence alone. If a community wanted to defend its gains by non-violence, it must first of all get rid of all "ill-gotton gains". Even with regard to caste, he had begun to say that, although he had held other views in the past, he had now begun to believe (this was in Noakhali) that it was a necessary piece of social reform. In one evening's speech he went so far as to say that marriage between men and women of different faiths was a desirable piece of reform; after all, religion was a personal affair and should not be allowed to interfere with social or political relationships.

While he was thus making many statements of a revolutionary nature, I requested him one day to prepare the English report of his own speeches for the press, a task which was formerly done by me. I feared that the report of his speeches of such a revolutionary character, which I made in my own language might, later on, be mistrusted. This practice went on for some months until we came to Bihar. Later, there was some reason for me to feel that this was disturbing to some of his most intimate colleagues in Sevagram and elsewhere. When this was coupled with my feeling that Gandhiji could be subject to strong personal likes and dislikes, I thought it was time for me to return to my work in the University. While taking his leave, however, I assured Gandhiji that he would not have to call me for service whenever he came to Bengal, but if he needed my service elsewhere, he had only to send me a line on a post-card.

These are personal matters and I should not dwell on them any more. But it was clearly my feeling in those critical days that Gandhiji was becoming more and more isolated from his closest co-workers, who had been by his side for years, in regard to his personal life. And this became further accentuated when, in his political relationships also, he began to feel more and more lonely.

The days through which we were all passing were critical ones for India and we watched every step that was taken in the negotiations between the Cabinet Mission, on the one hand, and the Congress and Muslim League, on the other. Gandhiji remained in Bihar for some time and then went to Delhi. The communal situation in India rapidly deteriorated, while the experience of our national leaders who had joined the Interim Government became disastrously unhappy. The Civil Services and the Army were infected by the communal virus and were thus becoming more and more undependable. The political organization of the Congress had proved to be too weak to cope with the communal disturbances. So when the proposal came from the Viceroy of India that the Congress and the Muslim League should accept partition, so that each could at least have a depend-

able Civil Service and Army as its command, it appeared that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhai Patel were agreeable to the proposal. The difficulty might arise if Gandhi opposed. And it is reported in Alan Campbell-Johnson's book entitled *Mission With Mountbatten* that when this question was being discussed, Sardar said that he "considered that Gandhi would abide loyally by any decision taken," evidently by the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress.

In other words, Sardar knew how deeply committed Gandhiji was to the democratic organization of the Congress, and also how he assured complete freedom even to his closest 'followers' to differ from him if they wished. This event must have happened toward the last week of April, 1947. When Gandhiji realized what was going to happen, he made one last but desperate attempt. He went to see the Vicerory, spoke to him and, while leaving for Bengal on the 8th May, 1947, wrote a letter to the Viceroy from the railway train, which is reproduced below in part:

> Dear Friend,
> It strikes me that I should summarise what I said and wanted to say and left unfinished for want of time at our last Sunday's meeting.
> Whatever may be said to the contrary, it would be a blunder of first magnitude for the British to be party in any way whatsoever to the division of India. If it has to come, let it come after the British withdrawal, as a result of understanding between the parties or an armed conflict which according to Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah is taboo.

In other words, Gandhi was thus taking a legalistic stand in order to prevent the partition, if he possibly could. While on the train I had the privilege of reading a copy of this letter, and then had the following conversation with Gandhiji:

G. Mountbatten had the cheek to tell me: "Mr. Gandhi, today the Congress is with me and no longer with you."
B. But what did you say in reply?

G. I retorted: "But India is still with me."

My complaint to him was that he had not made good that claim. Instead, at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee on the 14-15th June 1947, Gandhi had recommended to this supreme body that they should endorse the recommendation of the Working Committee in favour of partition.

A few months later, when Gandhiji came to Bengal in the first fortnight of August, 1947, I was once more privileged to be with him. And one day while discussing the problem of partition with him I raised a question.

B. If we interpret your support of the Working Committee by saying that you did so in order to give protection to the leaders who had already decided to accept partition, would it be wholly wrong?

G. It may bear that interpretation, but it is not true. With whom was I going to carry on the fight? Don't you realize that, as a result of one year of communal riots, the people of India have all become communal? They can see nothing beyond the communal question. They are tired and frightened. The Congress has only represented this feeling of the whole nation. How can I then oppose it?

B. If you felt that partition was wrong and would not solve the communal problem, why did you not try to alter the dicision of the Congress? Would you allow a child to burn its hand in the fire and not restrain its freedom?

G. I do not know. The future alone can say whether I was right or wrong in supporting the decision of the A.I.C.C. I felt that the situation was not ripe for my opposition.

B. Could you not have created a situation? You have done so on many an occasion. Even in the A.I.C.C., as well as in the country as a whole, you knew that there were many who were completely unhappy at the partition. Could you not rally that force?

Gandhiji's answer to my question was one of the most surprising that I ever heard from him. He said:

G. I have never created a situation in my life. I have one qualification which many of you do not possess. I can almost instinctively feel what is stirring in the heart of the masses. And when I feel that the forces of good are dimly stirring within, I seize upon them and build up a programme. And they respond. People say that I had created a situation; but I had done nothing except giving a shape to what was already there. Today I see no sign of such a healthy feeling. And therefore I shall have to wait until the time comes.
B. But how long will that be?
G. Perhaps it will be three months or perhaps four, when the people will begin to realize that the independence which has come falls short of Swaraj. It is only then that I shall have to think anew.

It was thus that independence came to India on the 15th August, 1947. It was indeed a great day. There was widespread rejoicing. And yet Gandhiji said to a number of young men who had come to meet him that this freedom "was a sorry affair". These were his exact words. And so in Calcutta he went on working day by day in his mission of healing, until one day I asked him again: "Now that partition has come, what should we do?" His answer was that we were to work for educating and organizing the villagers into a consciousness of their new rights and duties.

I asked him again:

B. Supposing India works for the freedom of the masses in this manner, what should be our attitude towards Pakistan?
G. If real work for building up Swaraj is carried on in India, then in course of time it will have its influence upon the masses of Pakistan.
B. But what about our political relations with Pakistan?
G. If they remain happy with their sovereignty, let them

be. What is of much greater importance is that we shall have to work for the freedom of all the seven and a half lacs of villages.

In other words, he was, even after partition, not drawing a distinction between the five and half lac villages in India and the two lacs in Pakistan. And then he proceeded to say:

G. Perhaps my work will be in Pakistan. How many of you will go with me?

I had a hunch that his work was to lie in West rather than in East Pakistan, for the Pathans of the North West Frontier Province, who had worked devotedly for the Gandhian ideal, had been let down by their comrades in the Indian National Congress. And in answer to his question, I said to him:

B. Bapu, it is not for you to ask us who should go and who should not go. It is for you to name those you want.

And this is how we got a glimpse of the thoughts which were stirring within Gandhiji's mind during the fateful days when independence came.

We heard rumours that Gandhiji had actually suggested to the members of the Working Committee on the verge of their acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan of partition that they should rather withdraw and prepare for a final massive struggle of civil disobedience. We had also heard that the courage of the leaders had failed because the cost in civil strife might turn out to be too heavy and perhaps because they felt that the final result would be uncertain. Therefore they thought it wiser to accept partition and make the best use of whatever power was given to them to build up a new India.

Indeed, Michael Brecher, in his book, *Nehru: A Political Biography,* has quoted a speech indicating that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was compelled to accept partition as the lesser evil, as otherwise India would become involved in a

civil war "which would have checked the progress of India for a long time to come". (P. 376).

This is also borne out by a speech which the Congress President, Acharya J. B. Kripalani, made when he tendered his resignation before the A.I.C.C. in its meeting of 15-17 June, 1949. In course of that speech, Kripalani said:

"The situation in the country had rapidly deteriorated. The interim Coalition Government was neither a true coalition nor a proper Government. The Muslim League block was avowedly hostile and the Vicerory who still wielded supreme power was there to play off one party against the other. The Congress leaders in the government realized too late that they had played into the hands of the Viceroy in agreeing to take the Muslim League into the Government without adequate and explicit guarantees of co-operation. Riots had broken out in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and later in the Punjab and the Frontier as a result of the cult of hate and violence preached by the Muslim League. The Provincial Governments were unable to cope with the riots and Central Government was told by the Viceroy that it would not intervene. The situation was intolerable.

"The British Government's Plan of June 3rd seemed to open a way out of this tangle of chaos and frustration. Though the price demanded was the partition of India, the Congress agreed to pay the price in the hope that Muslim League, having got what it wanted, would cease its hymn of communal hate, and the two dominions, freed from the incubus of foreign rule, would be able to turn their resources and their energy to the reconstruction of the social and economic structures of the two States. The other alternative before us was to withdraw from the Interim Government and rally the nation for a final non-violent battle against the combination of the British and Muslim League. This was what Gandhiji would have liked us to do, but the Congress leadership found the prospect of an immediate and peaceful transfer of power too tempting and chose the first alternative. Gandhiji himself, knowing that the Working Committee had acted in good faith and international

complications would be involved in reversing the Working Committee's action, advised you to endorse their decision to accept the June 3rd Plan."[2]

It has sometimes been said that Gandhiji acquiesced because, in the alternative, he would have had to be at the helm of affairs and build up a new leadership within the Congress. To both Sri Krishna Kripalani and Sri Amritalal Chatterji, he had reportedly said that if he were twenty years younger, he would have perhaps done so. But to my mind, this is not wholly true. He rather felt that the time was not ripe, and he wanted to wait a little longer before formulating any fresh plan of action. We shall see this a little later.

We thus observe how Partition and the Independence of India came to us at a moment of weakness, instead of in a moment of strength. And when independence came, the whole country was torn by a recrudescence of communal violence both in the West in Punjab and the East in Bengal. It is estimated that half a million lives were lost, while the dislocation of life and economy which occurred was of an unprecedented nature in the history of our land. The violence which broke out was also beyond comparison, and all our previous experiences in non-violence were extinguished like an insignificant lamp before the storm of human barbarity.

It was at such a juncture that a leading Negro intellectual of America, Professor Stuart Nelson of the Howard University, came to see Gandhiji and asked him how it was that non-violence seemed to have failed even while it had apparently succeeded in the political struggle. Gandhiji replied that "it had become clear to him that what he had mistaken for satyagraha was not more than passive resistance, which was a weapon of the weak. Indians harboured ill-will and anger against their erstwhile rulers, while they pretended to resist them non-violently. . . .

"Now that the latter were voluntarily quitting India, our apparent non-violence was going to pieces. The attitude of

[2] *Congress Bulletin,* No. 6. 31 December, 1947.

violence which we had secretly harboured, in spite of the restraint imposed by the Indian National Congress, now recoiled upon us and made us fly at each other's throat when the question of the distribution of power came up...."

Gandhiji then proceeded to say that it was indeed true that many English friends had warned him that the so-called non-violence of India was no more than the passivity of the weak, it was not the non-violence of the stout in heart who disdained to surrender their sense of human unity even in the midst of a conflict of interest but continued their effort to convert the opponent instead of coercing him into submission.

"Gandhiji proceeded to say that it was indeed true that he had all along laboured under an illusion. But he was never sorry for it. He realized that if his vision had not been clouded by that illusion, India would never have reached the point which it had done today."[3]

And it was thus that, even in the midst of defeat, Gandhiji made his God responsible, and laid all his victory and defeat at the feet of the Master whom he had zealously served all his life.

[3] *My Days With Gandhi,* pp. 270-71.

Amritananda Das

A Reintroduction to Gandhian Economic Thinking

THIS HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT SUBJECT HAS YET TO ATTRACT ITS proper share of scholarly attention and as a natural result the importance of the Gandhian contribution to the economics of the colonial areas continues even today to remain almost entirely obscure.

That the meaning of Gandhian economics continues to remain virtually unknown may seem a rather surprising statement to make in view of the vast volume of so-called "explanatory" literature on Gandhian economic thinking. However, as soon as we try to approach the subject in a scientific manner, it becomes painfully obvious that with one or two exceptions the contributors to the discussion have adopted a completely incorrect methodological orientation.

The usual trend of this literature is to treat Gandhi as basically a *philosopher* and to try to derive the Gandhian economic policy-recommendations as logical *deductions* from certain basic axioms of Gandhian philosophy, e.g., the principle of non-violence. As a methodological procedure this is totally wrong.

In the first place, this procedure assumes that economic policy-prescriptions can be logically deduced from non-economic axioms alone. Moreover, it should be obvious that unless non-economic ethical judgements are supplemented by an analysis of how the economic system operates it is methodologically invalid to expect economic policies to be derived from them. This basic procedural inaccuracy has meant that

the basic Gandhian vision of how the economic system in colonial areas operates to create a vast and growing volume of poverty has been pushed into the background. Further, the entirely false and gratuitous impression has been created that as the Gandhian economic programmes allegedly "follow" from immutable philosophical axioms, these policies are historically *non-relative* and that they constitute a programme that is applicable and relevant to all kinds of economic situations. This "scriptural" approach has inevitably led to a situation in which the disciples of Gandhi have been totally unable to reinterpret the Gandhian doctrines in line with changing historical circumstances.

In the second place, this approach has tended to put an exclusive and inappropriate stress on the principle of non-violence. While it is quite true that the Gandhian economic policies cannot be derived *without* assuming the principle of non-violence, the role of this principle continues nevertheless to be misconstrued. Analysis in detail will reveal that the principle of non-violence does not appear as a principle determining the goals of economic policy but simply as a basic *constraint* on the types of policies which might be used to achieve these goals. The simplest proof of this is that non-violent policies may be directed to policy-goals quite different from the typical Gandhian ones.

This simple point has been unnecessarily confused by the prevalent puerile discussions on the ends *versus* means issue. Anti-Gandhian viewpoints stress that Gandhiji failed to grasp the basic praxeological principle that once there is a commitment to a certain end there is automatically also a commitment to the most efficient means towards that end. Gandhians, on the contrary, never tire of emphasizing that bad (i.e., ethically unsatisfactory) means cannot lead to good (i.e., ethically satisfactory) end-results. Even aside from the fact that the two sides here are using incompatible concepts of ends and means (the anti-Gandhians defining "ends" as "end-results"), the discussion is hopelessly irrelevant to the real facts of the situation. The facts are that as a result of this vision of the way in which the economic system of colonial areas operates Gandhiji had arrived at certain ideals for eco-

nomic policy in such areas. These ideals are such that it is nothing short of absurd to assume that *violent* policies can be used to attain them. The psychosomatic type which would react favourably to the aims of Gandhian economic policy are such that they are exactly antithetical to the types which would tend to resort to violent methods for goal-attainment.

Thus, it becomes clear that the "scriptural" approach to Gandhian economic thinking is a source of very great confusion. It also follows that the only way to cut through this confusion is to go beyond the specific policy-programmes enunciated by Gandhiji and to try and understand the basic analytic vision of the operations of colonial economics that lay behind and gave meaning and consistency to these policies. For doing this, it is essential to place the question in the proper context.

Gandhi and Colonial Economics

Let us try to understand what this proper context is. In order to do this we must digress a little and start off from the question of economic theory and policy in the colonial areas.

As is well known, the Smithian brand of liberal economics promulgated the basic principle that the free operations of the market mechanism (to be distinguished from the operations of ideal free markets) were sufficient to lead to economic progress provided that the State established the basic institutional framework for allowing the market mechanism to function and placed no restraints on its operations. A simple and logical deduction from this was that the process of colonialism must turn out to the benefit of the colonized areas. The Western powers were seen to be introducing the rule of law and the basic institutions of capitalism in place of arbitrary rule of feudal despots. The consequences of this process could only be the emergence of rapid economic progress in the colonized areas.

However, reality failed to conform to this simple and comfortable model. It soon became obvious that, far from leading to rapid progress towards prosperity, the introduction of Western capitalism into the environment of the Eastern

agrarian economies was leading to the creation of a vast mass of poverty. Further, the situation was not such as to allow the hope for a quick transformation so that the claim that these phenomena were merely the transitory problems of readjustment could not continue to be reasonably held.

The experience of the colonial areas, thus, seemed to require a new sort of economics to explain their plight. It was also apparent that some new policies would have to be devised for dealing with the problem of poverty in colonial areas.

Two lines of thought arose to deal with the problem. One school sought to find the explanation in the exploitative relationship of colonialism. This was predominantly a neomercantilist line. One branch of it concentrated on the drain of bullion from the colonial areas. A typical Indian representative of this sort of thinking was Dadabhai Naoroji. A slightly more sophisticated neo-mercantilist argument was based on the Listian notion that free trade between developed and under-developed areas tended to inhibit the industrial development of the latter. A typical Indian example of this school is R. C. Dutt.

Apart from this neo-mercantilist analysis, another school of thought attempted to find the explanation in the incapacity of the "natives" to take up the capitalist road to prosperity. Race, climate, culture, religion and a host of other factors were brought in to explain why the natives were lazy and improvident according to the standards of Western capitalistic society. A factor which was given the greatest importance was the high birth rate and high rate of population growth in these regions. An Indian example of this kind of analysis was the works of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya.

It was the outstanding contribution of Gandhiji to see that none of these lines of approach provided a satisfactory account of the basic economic problem of the colonial areas. It was his pioneering insight that the fundamental problem was to be found in the decay of the domestic handicraft industries in the villages and the resulting loss of occupations and impoverization of the Indian masses who were

forced into agriculture as their only means of support. It was further clear to Gandhiji that in this process of village decay, the city-sector of the colonized areas (and in particular the manufacturing industries of the colonized areas) played the same role as did the manufacturing industries of the colonizing country.

The Basic Gandhian Economic Problem

Let us now try to analyze the nature of this problem in detail. Visualizing an initial situation in which the pre-colonial economy was in a state of prosperous *stasis* with a basic division of labour between agriculture, village-based handicrafts and city-based luxury handicraft industries, we can trace out the impact of colonizing capitalism on this set-up. The first stage of penetration is one in which the Western trader enters the picture as a buyer of the luxury products of the superior city-based handicrafts. As yet the Western trader can contrive to sell relatively little to the future colony. As such the basic division of labour in the future colony is not disturbed and the relatively small economic effect that this trade produces is almost entirely favourable for the future colony.

The second stage comes with the military and political ascendancy of the Western trading interests. This power is exerted to secure two things. First, the Western colonizers acquire mining and plantation interests and operate these on the basis of forced labour in semi-servile conditions. Secondly, they use their political power to destroy the city-based luxury handicraft industries so as to eliminate competition for their industrial exports in the city-markets. Even now, however, the Western penetration does not affect the village sector as such and the traditional division of labour of the village economy remains undisturbed. Thus, the phenomenon of mass poverty remains confined to the mines, plantations and the dispossessed city-handicraftsmen.

The third stage ushers in the real problem. This is when, with the development of cheap mass-manufactures in the Western capitalist countries, the colonial policy changes from one which regards the colonies as sources of imports

to the one which regards them as *markets for exports*. Naturally, the transition is gradual but it marks a definitive stage in the development of colonial relationships.

The effect of the new orientation is to bring about the end of the traditional division of labour in the villages. The opening up of the villages through improved transport system means that the cheaper mass-produced manufactures replace the village-based handicrafts. To the village agriculturist, it appears as if the terms of trade *vis-a-vis* industrial products had changed in favour of the agriculturist. Thus the change-over from village-based handicrafts to mass-produced factory products appears as a simple matter of economic interests. As a matter of fact, this is so in only the short run as far as the agriculturists are concerned. But in the longer run it lays the foundations of a serious economic problem.

The root of the problem is that the villagers have but one occupation left to them. As population grows faster than ever before as a result of the introduction of Western techniques in the field of famine prevention and in medicine, the pressure on the available land becomes ever sharper. A natural result of this is the emergence of the phenomenon of disguised unemployment. We have been arguing as if the period in which village handicrafts are destroyed and the period in which there emerges a redundant agricultural population are separated by a fairly long period of time. But this need not be so. The situation might very well be such that the dispossessed handicraftmen cannot find full employment in agriculture even initially. In that case the emergence of the problem would be even more accelerated.

The fourth stage of the development of the problem is reached with the entry into the scene of the domestic mass-manufacturer. For these domestic capitalists based on the city, the villages appear simply as markets. Thus, they stand in the same relationship to the village economy as do the foreign capitalists. The domestic capitalists with their greater understanding and better connections with the unorganized money-markets complete the economic ruin of the village handicraftsmen.

The fact that agricultural output remains virtually stagnant

means that the total consumption of manufactured goods rises little if at all. Thus, the output of the factories only displaces the output of the village manufactures. Since, however, the labour-output ratio is distinctly higher, as also the capital-labour ratio, the shift from village handicrafts to factory products implies (a) that a greater number of people are robbed of their occupations than find employment in the factories and (b) that in consequence of the high capital-labour ratios the employed workers get fairly high wages especially as compared to the disguised unemployed villagers.

This last fact leads to a further complication. Attracted by the prospects of high wages the underemployed villagers tend to move into the cities. At the same time, however, the aggregate economic conditions are such that they do not unfailingly obtain the industrial employment they are seeking. On the contrary, the limitation of the market for factory products implies that most of them do not get any employment so that they are reduced either to sponging on the employed or to swelling the numbers of the disguised unemployed in the cities. Thus, along with mass poverty in the villages there also emerges mass poverty in the cities.

In such a situation, with relatively little employment available in the factories, the chances of independent entrepreneurship being blocked by limited markets and monopolistic conditions and agriculture being no longer a paying proposition, the most enterprising and the more privileged turn to white-collar employment, primarily government service in clerical capacities. But even this field soon dries up and the emergence of white-collar educated unemployment closes the whole vicious circle.

Cities in a Parasitic Role

In such a set-up the cities tend to play a parasitic role with respect to the non-urban sectors. We have already seen how the situation is such that rapid economic growth in the cities is virtually ruled out by the structural properties of the situation. But this does not mean that the cities do not play a significant negative role.

This negative role is played through three economic

mechanisms. In the first place, the visibly higher incomes of the cities (even after allowing for the existence of a vast mass of poverty) as compared to the villages means that there is a continual influx of the more enterprising and progressive elements of the villages into the cities. Thus, the lure of the cities tends to draw away the most promising elements of the village population. In the second place, the existence of the cities as centres and as sources of luxury products means that the meagre economic surplus of the villages tends to be consumed either in the cities themselves or on city-based consumption goods. Capital formation in the villages is thereby substantially hindered. In the third place, since the only alternative to agricultural investments is investment in city-based manufactures and since in the given institutional set-up the latter are much more "productive" than the former, the city also functions as a mechanism draining away the investment capacity of the villages.

It has also to be noticed that the resources which the cities tend to draw away from the villages are absorbed in socially unsuitable forms. The employment that the incoming villagers usually obtain are mostly those assigned to "surplus" populations. Similarly, the inflow of investible capital from the villages is also usually put into the unproductive forms of retail trade and small business which are also merely another manner of supporting the disguised unemployed.

In the ultimate analysis, therefore, the end-result of the colonial process is to destroy the economy of the village sector, to create a mass of unemployed and unemployable industrial and rural proletariat and to set up a number of economically parasitic entities called cities. Notice that by the time the final stage is reached, the significance of purely colonial exploitation has become relatively much smaller. It is rather the colonial economy itself which is engaged in self-cannibalization. It is quite possible to hold that it was Western colonialism which was causally responsible for this tragic situation. This was an undoubted *historical fact*. But it also followed that *the mere removal of colonialism would do little to solve the problem of mass poverty*. And this

would be so not because of the perpetuation of Western colonialism through neo-colonialist practices but because the colonial situation would persist *so long as the city-sector continued to use the village sector as its colony.*

The Quality of the Gandhian Vision

We are now in a position to understand the outstanding importance of the Gandhian vision. Its pioneering role is of course very evident. Most of this vision was worked out even before Gandhiji started writing the *Hind Swaraj* (1921). The basic idea that colonial economies were fundamentally distinct from the developed Western economies had been initiated only a little earlier. But even so it was nearly 1943 by the time Western economics began to take full cognizance of this fact. Further, the idea that the development of domestic national-bourgeoisie and the associated rise of domestic manufacturing industry might give rise to a serious economic problem-situation was a brilliant analytic insight that has even now been only inadequately absorbed into the Western analysis of the colonial economic situation.

A highly significant analytical point was also the idea of the parasitic role of cities in the colonial areas. It is only with the work of Hoselitz that Western thought has become aware of this problem nearly thirty years after Gandhi. A similarly important fact was the Gandhian analysis of the reason why the development of mass-manufactures in the undeveloped countries could not be expected to absorb the entire surplus population of the village sector. It is even now only rarely taken account of by Western economists. The outstanding counter example is of course the work of Gunnar Myrdal but Myrdal himself is outside the mainstream of Western economics as yet.

But the really outstanding merit of the Gandhian analytic vision was the directness and the courage with which it emphasized that the mere removal of Western colonization and the attainment of political independence would not solve the economic problems of colonial areas. The point that the worst features of the heritage of colonialism was the build-

ing-up of the colonial relationships into the colonial economy itself and that the solution of this problem required a lot more of insight into the socio-economics of colonial areas than was provided by "swadeshi" neo-mercantilism was the most outstanding contribution of Gandhian economic thought. Most of the difficulties of the economic policy-makers in the colonial areas can be traced to the neglect of this fundamental truth.

Concordance of Gandhian Vision and Policies

We must digress a little at this stage in order to demonstrate the perfect concordance of the Gandhian economic policies with this vision of the operation of colonial economies. The major objectives of this exercise will be to show that the specific Gandhian policies form a coherent whole only in the background of this basic vision and that a sufficient case exists to justify holding the view that this rather unfamiliar framework is the true basis of Gandhian economic thought.

The logical step from the vision to the specific Gandhian policies involves an intermediary step. This mediating step represents the formation of the ideals of Gandhian economic policy. If we are to follow the logical order of development these ideals have to be investigated first.

Gandhian economics starts from the fundamental proposition that the economic policy of colonial regions must be aimed at dismantling the typical existing economic order prevailing in such areas and erecting the foundations of a new economic order in which the exploitative effect of factory-manufactures and the parasitic effect of the urban-rural relations will be eliminated. Exactly how these aims should be pursued, however, cannot be simply determined from these objectives themselves. Certain further ethical judgements have to be introduced in order that the transition from diagnosis to prescription can be achieved.

Broadly, three routes can be distinguished which lead out of the typical colonial economic set-up. First, there is the capitalist route to economic development which involves the rapid expansion of the organized industrial sector at

rates sufficiently high to absorb the entire surplus of the agricultural sector in organized industrial employment. Secondly, there is the typical communist path to industrialization via the collectivization of agriculture, the squeezing out of surplus from the villages and a high rate of forced investment in the basic industries (i.e., the Marxian Department-I). These two routes imply that the problems of the colonial structure can be solved through the achievement of a high rate of economic growth. Opposed to this orientation is the Gandhian view-point that the true objective of economic policy-making is not the setting up of a *process* of rapid economic *growth,* but the setting up of a way of life which will lead to a static and prosperous *situation.* The distinction is here between the sort of ethics which regards a process of expansion as the summum bonum and the sort of ethics that regards the perpetual achievement of limited set of economic ends as the right objective.

It is precisely at this point that we come into contact with Gandhi the philosopher as distinct from Gandhi the economist and this transition is both necessary and logical since the choice between the ethical orientations that is involved here falls outside the sphere of economic analysis.

The process of analysis by which Gandhi arrives at the rejection of the ideologies of unlimited growth is extremely interesting. There are two lines of argument involved. One relates to the abstract question of the objectives of economic activity on the level of social ethics. The other relates to a criticism of the results of not accepting the Gandhian ethical orientation in terms of an atypical but very convincing welfare criterion.

As far as the abstract ethical question is concerned, it is argued that the true sphere of economic activity is merely to provide the individuals in society with the basic minimum requirements of decent living. If this basic minimum is not attained, the individual lacks the physical requirements of the good life. Beyond this point, however, economic activity merely hinders the realization of the non-economic ends which are also essential to the attainment of what Gandhiji called a high standard of *life.* Thus, it evidently follows that

the true objective of society is to so shape the individual that he reaches a personality pattern in which his economic needs are limited to these ethical minima. In other words, plain living and high thinking should be the type of the highest form of social life.

This ethical position is of course not at all free from ambiguity. It lies essentially in the determination of what should be regarded as the minimum requirements. The difficulty is, however, more logical than practical. For, in practice, it is always possible to set up a conventional standard of what is good enough on the basis of broad-based consensus.

The other part of the Gandhian argument in favour of accepting a static and limited definition of needs is more interesting. This involves a criticism of the practical consequences of the acceptance of the opposite ideology that essentially economic needs are unlimited.

The ethical criterion on the basis of which the consequences are judged in the Gandhian philosophical structure states that economic *progress* is to be defined in terms of a reduction in the absolute number of people who feel that they are living below an acceptable minimum standard of living. As Gandhiji realized, the elimination of poverty in this sense is not assured by the mere fact of growing per capita real incomes. In the first place, the process of capitalistic growth (one of the major lines of development which follows the ideology of indefinite expansion and of unlimited needs) tends to create as a by-product of the process a large and growing number of poor people.

While objectively the standard of these poor people might rise quite rapidly over time, the needs that they feel to be essential rise even faster. As a result the broad mass of economic unhappiness grows rather than diminishes over time.

And all this is on the assumption that the prospects for capitalist growth are highly favourable in the objective sense. This is unlikely to be the general case. The analysis of the colonial set-up has shown that the process of capitalist development involves the exploitation of the villages. In the

context of the domestic economy this relationship is a direct and visible one. The only alternative to the exploitation of the domestic rural sector is the exploitation of the rural sector in the colonies. Thus, logically, the domestic village is a "colon" of the city-sector and the under-developed economy is the village-colony of the developed city-economy. A natural result of this is that capitalist development can generate all-round prosperity even in an objective sense only through the exploitation of the colonies. It follows that the current colonial economies cannot be expected to follow the same line of development successfully since, as more and more of the colonies turn into predatory city-economies, the ecological balance between predators and preyed upon will be altered and the predatory way of life would become inefficient. The domestic colonization that is now typical of the colonial economies would then become generalized with the same consequences now observable in the colonial economies—mass poverty both in the urban and the rural sectors.

Thus it follows that to accept the ideology of unlimited economic needs is to court ultimate disaster in terms of the reduction of mass poverty criterion. The only alternative to capitalist growth is the communist growth process. Gandhiji had the perception to see that the structural properties of this growth process depended on the squeezing out of a surplus from the agrarian sector by force. Thus the basis of this kind of growth process was also the exploitation of the village in favour of the city-based manufactures. The high rates of investment thus attained may solve the problems of rapid industrialization but they do not solve the basic problem of the prevention of mass poverty. As soon as the objective technical conditions of developed industrialism are provided, society would tend slowly to verge towards that prevailing in the typical developed capitalist economies. The actual events in Russia in fact indicate the at least partial validity of this contention.

Given that the process of unlimited expansion based on the ideology of unlimited economic needs leads to only unhappiness and given also that the current set-up in the

colonial economies is such that the continuance of the present system will mean the continuance of mass poverty, only the Gandhian ideal of reestablishing the economic basis of prosperous stasis is seen to be a tenable objective.

This objective has to be realized over a fairly long period of time and this implies a fundamental distinction between the policies directed towards the short, the middle and the long run.

The Short-Run Policy Framework

Let us begin by looking at the short-run policy-framework. In doing so we must remember that at the time Gandhiji was formulating his policies the end of British rule was still not in sight. Thus, he had to concentrate on organizing the defence of the village sector through means available to the villagers themselves. This provides the essential rationale of the policy of *khadi.*

There are explicity only three methods by which the surplus working capacity of the disguised unemployed in the village can be utilized. First, by organizing labour-intensive public works schemes with the aim of raising the productivity of agriculture. Second, there is the possibility that the disguised unemployed be resettled in any "empty spaces" that may be available within the country. The third alternative is to revive the village handicrafts. Since the first two processes involve the full commitment of the Government and since the British Government could not be expected to be interested in such processes, the only remaining alternative was *khadi.* As soon as we realize that there was and is an unutilized stock of working capacity inside the rural sector whose present social marginal product is zero, the use of this labour even in low-productivity activities like khadi becomes entirely socially rational. Of course, if the availability of capital in the village sector was more free and slightly more capital-intensive, village industries could very well be utilized. But such a situation did not exist.

However, even though the idea of khadi was socially rational from the point of view of the village as a collec-

tive, it was obvious that the changeover from mill-cloth to khadi implied some sacrifice in terms of personal consumption for at least the better off villagers. Thus khadi could only succeed as a part of an ethically motivated movement. Gandhiji was himself fairly clear on this. It was his idea that each villager would utilize his surplus labour time in the production of khadi cloth and try as far as possible to attain self-sufficiency. A necessary and inescapable part of this process was the boycotting of mill-produced cloth. The rationale of the process did not and could not involve the idea that certain full-time khadi workers would be subsidized by the *Government* in an attempt to make khadi economically competitive with mill cloth. On the contrary, this would clearly perpetuate that very other-dependence of the village economy which it was the objective of khadi to remove.

The entire short-run process of Gandhian economic policy was directed towards reconstituting the villages into a self-sufficient closed system as far as possible and to achieve as great a degree of the full utilization of the working capacity in the rural sector as possible. The ultimate objective of this process was thus to make the colonial economic process of exploiting the village sector an impossibility. A feature of this process was also the breaking off of the cash nexus between the city and the village. The boycott of city-goods, the refusal to pay land revenues and other cash taxes, etc. all were aimed at the attainment of this basic objective.

The Middle-Run and the Idea of Swaraj

Obviously, with the attainment of self-sufficiency of the village economy the economic basis of colonialism, the usefulness of the village sector as a source of markets will come to an end and a complete breakdown of the colonial structure will automatically follow. But this is equally obviously not the end, for the entire economic structure still remains to be reconstructed. The economy of the exploitative city-sector has been made unworkable and the defence of the village sector has been set up. By this alone, how-

ever, only the foundations of the Gandhian economic structure have been laid.

The fundamental principle of economic reconstruction involves the Gandhian idea of *Swaraj*. This is a semi-metaphysical principle and its intricacies cannot be examined in detail on this occasion. However, in its practical application to the process of economic reorganization Swaraj stands for the highest degree of localization and decentralization of production and distribution accompanied by the highest feasible degree of the vesting of the ownership of the means of production in the labourers themselves. This principle is based on the antithesis to the two typical forms of capitalist exploitation, the use of an area as a market and the use of economically dispossessed proletariat on the basis of wage-slavery.

Obviously, there will be certain industries which will have to be centralized and these should remain under collective ownership. But these will only be industries supplying the *inputs* the decentralized industries in the villages need, not those competing with the *outputs* produced by the decentralized industries. Thus the closer the product moves towards the final stage of production the greater should be the degree of decentralization and any industries which cannot be made to conform to this structure will have to be rejected.

Once this type of economic organization is attained, the machine as such will lose its exploitative character. This will be so because it will no longer be used to *displace* workers and *overcentralize* production but only to perform jobs which the workers could not have performed and only to centralize production processes that cannot be carried on effectively in a decentralized manner.

Industrial Management and Trusteeship

What will be the typical form that industrial management will take under the new economic set-up? As will be noticed, the new set up is such that all opportunities for anti-social profit-making will be removed. Thus profit-making as an organizing principle will be perfectly invalid. The question

of profit-taking is, however, different. Under the new set-up it will no longer to be permissible for the individual owner to appropriate the full amount of profit for his own use. There are two alternatives. Either the property might be nationalized or the former owner may retain control as *manager* but must regard himself as the *trustee* of the enterprise. In either case the result is the same. The latter variant is, however, preferable under the Gandhian concept of voluntary and non-violent change.

Now, just as the transition to Swaraj economics will be only achieved gradually and voluntaristically, the processes of training industrial owner-managers in trusteeship should begin even before the attainment of Swaraj economics. However, it is only in the context of Swaraj economics that the doctrine of trusteeship will attain its full meaning.

Long-Run Operations of the Gandhian Economy

Having understood the economic structure of the Gandhian economic system, let us look at the sort of operational results it can be expected to attain. In the first place, the economy will be a virtually non-growing economy. This will follow from the limited needs postulation as an absolute ethical aim. However, there is no reason to assume that a gentle upward trend in per capita income will not be attained.

In the second place, it is obvious that the operations of this kind of economy will necessarily imply a fair and even sharing out of the national income and the gains from growth. This is basically what is implied in the Gandhian principle of Sarvodaya.

However, there still remains one essential question. And admittedly this is nowhere discussed thoroughly by Gandhi. This is the question of how much should be allocated to investment and how much to current consumption. Obviously, under the system described above, once the basic minimum standard of living is attained on all hands the net rate of investment should fall to virtual equality with the rate of population growth. And this points the way to two inherent problems. First, there is the question of

whether population growth is to be limited and if so how. The second question is the optimum rate of technical progress to be sought by such a society.

The questions are interrelated. Thus, if the rate of technical progress is high and the rate of population growth fairly low, the rate of net investment would in the course of time fall to nearly zero. But if the other values of these two basic parameters prevail and the rate of technical progress falls short of the rate of population growth then the society will be compelled to increase its rate of investment indefinitely over time until an impasse is reached. Thus, it becomes rather evident that population limitation—at least in the modified neo-Malthusian form of keeping it below the expected rates of technical progress—will have to be resorted to. Here a Gandhian moral caveat against artificial birth control is likely to pose an important problem.

Conclusion

We are now ready to set out the fundamental principles of Gandhian economic thought in logical order.

First, as far as basic analysis is concerned, Gandhian thought starts off from a characterization of the colonial economic system. The exploitative role of the factory-based industries in the final consumption sectors and the parasitic role of the cities are identified. It is seen that the elimination of these sources of mass poverty is not realized simply by the removal of foreign colonizers.

Secondly, as an ethical ideal Gandhiji accepts a system in which the economic needs of the individual in society are regarded as limited in principle and the objective of the economic system is seen to be the provision of this basic minimum for all. A critique of alternative ethical positions on the basis of a Gandhian welfare criterion indicates the primacy of the Gandhian ethical orientation.

Thirdly, the short-run goal of economic policy is to make the colonial economic progress unworkable. This is the essence of the policy of khadi, the non-payment of taxes and the boycott of mass-production goods.

Fourthly, the breakdown of the colonial system must be

accompanied by its gradual replacement by Swaraj economics. The basic principles of swaraj economics are decentralization of industries and localization of markets for goods of final consumption, a relatively greater degree of centralization for the input-providing industries, the management of industrial units on the basis of the doctrine of trusteeship and the setting up of land-owning peasant farming and tool-owning artisan manufacture as the typical form of agricultural and industrial activity.

Finally, the attainment of this economic structure is sufficient to establish an era of economic sarvodaya with complete elimination of economic inequality and of exploitative relations between man and man and between the city and the village.

This summary of the Gandhian doctrine indicates the basic contributions of Gandhian thought. The most important contribution of Gandhian analysis seems to be the analytical rather than the programmatic part. This is so because of two facts. First, the belief in the Gandhian economic analysis of colonial areas is logically separable from the ethical predispositions of Gandhian analysis of the relationship between the city and the village in colonial economies. The important contribution, as far as the economist is concerned, is the identification and analysis of the internal colonial process in underdeveloped economies. This Gandhiji did with superb skill. The solution he provided, however, was not necessarily either the best or even a feasible one. The reason why Gandhian thought would even in this case remain a very important and valuable element in the theory of economic policy of colonial areas is that while Gandhian thought may not have provided a solution it has at least pointed out the need for the solution of the internal colonialism problem. Unless the formulators of economic policy succeed in providing a workable solution to this problem, effective elimination of mass poverty will be impossible of achievement.

There is thus the need for high-intensity research on the possible range of feasible solutions to the economic problem that Gandhiji identified. Elsewhere I have tried to point out

that talking in terms of Gandhian concepts might be a very helpful tool in this process. However, even if all the Gandhian contributions to the solution of the colonial economic problem should turn out to have been false starts, it will still remain true that a satisfactory solution to the problem of mass poverty in the underdeveloped economies will depend on the satisfactory solution of the Gandhian problem.

Devdatta Dabholkar

Economic Thought of Gandhi

"I WOULD LIKE TO SAY TO THE DILIGENT READER OF MY writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the latter of the two on the same subject."[1]

Gandhiji was not a scholar in the sense in which Karl Marx was. He did not try to present a pre-worked-out, complete and self-contained theory of his economic ideas. In that sense he was not the father of a 'systematic body of thought'. He himself did not very much like the term 'Gandhism'. He was seeking his own solutions to the concrete problems as he found them in the Indian situation,[2] and though many may not accept the solutions which he proposed, he must receive credit for being the first to identify some of the basic issues facing the Indian economy with its

[1] *Harijan*, 20-4-1933, p. 2.

[2] Gandhiji admitted that he had not read books on economics by well-known authorities such as Mill, Marshall, Adam Smith and a host of other authors (Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. I, p. 236). While interned during the second world war, he read the first volume of *Capital* and works by Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Bernard Shaw (D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, 1953, p. 293).

background of colonial exploitation, under-development, large-scale unemployment and under-employment. He was not content with laying the burden of the blame at the door of the foreign rule. He was seeking to provide an alternative which would give the masses a chance to achieve a higher standard of living, consistent with the maintenance of individual freedom and human dignity.

Since his approach was basically self-consistent, his solutions, worked out, elaborated and modified from time to time, automatically tended to fall within the pattern of a systematic body of thought.

Gandhiji's approach to most of the economic problems was essentially practical. Unfortunately, this is not commonly recognized. The limitations of his solutions were generally due to the limitations of the situation. The only important issue on which his approach was rather rigid and impracticable was in relation to the need for control of population. According to Gandhiji, if every man was prepared to work and if men did not hanker after a progressively increasing standard of living, the population problem need not be very acute. Further, even if there was need to control the population, this check should be exercised through moral restraint and not through the use of the means of birth control. It is a pity that Gandhiji should have developed this blind spot. The struggle for population control which India is waging and will have to wage seriously for decades to come would have been greatly helped if Gandhiji had given his moral support to the use of contraceptives. Unfortunately, this was not to be and ignorance and prejudice continue to be the stumbling block in the programme of family planning. In relation to all other problems Gandhiji's approach was very much practical.

Deep insight is many a time needed to observe the obvious. Gandhiji could well see that the economic fate of Indian masses would be mainly decided in the villages. During the British rule villages had been economically constrained and cornered. The immediate problem was to lift the villages from the depths of despair and decay. Impact of British manufacturers had only destroyed the village in-

dustries without opening up alternate channels of employment. Consequently, the pressure of population on land increased and this coupled with progressive growth of population led to the evils of subdivision and fragmentation of land and to the consequent deterioration of the agrarian economy. We must remember that Gandhiji had to seek a solution within the limits set by the fact of the British rule. Gandhiji's real insight was in realizing that even when the British left and the development of Indian industries took place the essence of the problem would still remain very much unchanged. He was not seeking only a relief solution to the problems of poverty created by the British rule but was attempting a basic reconstruction of the Indian economy.

We may here quote with complete approval the comments made by Kenneth Rivett.[3]

". . . Gandhi contributed something distinctive. He had to, for no Western, not even Japanese, strategy can cope fully with the frightful poverty of the Indian village. Western radicals might see that industrialization was doing some harm in town and country; but it was enough if they could bring a measure of order into the chaos of new cities, and ensure, through co-operatives or marketing schemes or controlled rail rates, that farmers also gained from the monetary nexus. More than this is needed in India. Because of their poverty most Indians live, and for generations will live, in the villages. It is there that poverty must be chiefly fought, however much the urban sector contributes. And to a considerable extent it can be fought there."

In the words of Colin Clark: "If I were an Indian minister, I would say: Have as much of your development in the form of cottage industry as possible: regard the factory as a necessary evil."[4]

Gandhiji had anticipated all this a long way back. He had explained his central idea of village production and village self-sufficiency—i.e. Swadeshi—in *Young India* in 1921. He had said: "The central idea is not so much to carry on a commercial war against foreign countries as to utilize

[3] *Economic Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, 1959.

[4] Address to the Indian Council of World Affairs, Delhi.

the idle hours of the nation and thus by natural processes to help it get rid of her growing pauperism."[5]

Gandhiji had mainly two 'difficulties' in relation to the village industries. His first worry was how the products of the village industries could be qualitatively improved through the development of better and better techniques. His other problem was that apart from Khadi no other industry could be universal. The Charakha was an ideal solution in the sense that it could be plied at any time, any place by any person within any age-group. It provided, therefore, a sort of an answer to the problem of unemployment and under-employment which was also universally present in India. The Charakha had its own limitations in adding to the income of the worker. Gandhiji had no illusions on this score. But he was happy if he could place even some small income into the hands of the poverty stricken villagers. It is amazing how Indians themselves are not often aware of the depths of poverty in their own country. We develop a faculty of not seeing what we do not like to see. But, as Arthur Koestler remarked after his visit to India, "Poverty in India is fathomless. Like the unconscious of the mind the deeper you go the still deeper levels are being endlessly revealed." As for Gandhiji, "He was a man who used to notice such things: he was a man who had an eye for such mysteries."

Through his Khadi economics he was trying to reach some succour to these 'lowliest of the lowly'. His insistence on the Khadi programme arose out of the absence of any other alternative which would achieve even this limited objective.

He has stated this clearly:

"The entire foundation of the spinning wheel rests on the fact that there are crores of semi-employed people in India. And I should admit that if there were none such, there would be no room for the spinning wheel."[6]

Elsewhere he says:

[5] *Young India,* 8-12-1921.
[6] *UNESCO, All Men Are Brothers,* 1959, p. 127.

"I would welcome every improvement in the cottage machine, but I know it is criminal to displace hand-labour by the introduction of power-driven spindles unless one is at the same time ready to give millions of farmers some other occupation in their homes."[7]

He goes even further:

"I would favour the use of the most elaborate machinery if thereby India's pauperism and resulting idleness could be avoided."[8]

Gandhiji's insistence on the principle of simple living and high thinking confused quite a few into supposing that he cherished poverty for poverty's sake. There is a world of difference between involuntary abject poverty and a self-chosen way of life of streamlined simplicity. The failure of the upper and even the middle-classes (including the intelligentsia whose "modernity" consisted in advocating the immediate adoption of whatever was the most modern in mechanical invention) to reach out in sympathy to the lowest classes and to accept responsibility for their minimum well-being was another reason why Gandhiji's ideas on village industries and Khadi met with an open or latent resistance from many quarters. Most of them in India failed to give him the credit which independent foreign economists were ready to give.

According to Gandhiji, a non-violent society, the achievement of which was his final goal, cannot be compatible with the existence of a wide range of economic inequality. In keeping with his spiritual Sarvodaya approach the final goal of his policy would of course have been "from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs". Every man should give his best (of time, talents and work) to the society and the society should provide for his normal needs. He said: "My ideal is equal distribution, but so far

[7] *UNESCO, All Men Are Brothers,* 1959, p. 126.
[8] *UNESCO, op. cit.,* 1959, p. 128.

as I can see, it is not to be realized. I therefore work for equitable distribution."[9]

The *Young India* of 26th November, 1931 records an important conversation in which Gandhiji answered some pointed questions in relation to the position of the priviledged classes. The discussion which took place in England when Gandhiji visited it to attend the Second Round Table Conference in 1931 was reported by Mahadev Desai. The conversation was as under:

Q. How exactly do you think the Indian Princes, landlords, millowners and money-lenders and other profiteers are enriched?

A. At the present moment by exploiting the masses.

Q. Can these classes be enriched without the exploitation of the Indian workers and peasants?

A. To a certain extent, yes.

Q. Have these classes any social justification to live more comfortably than the ordinary worker and peasant who does the work which provides their wealth?

A. No justification. My idea of society is that while we are born equal, meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is, in the nature of things, impossible. For instance, all cannot have the same height, or colour or degree of intelligence, etc., therefore, in the nature of things, some will have ability to earn more and others less. People with talents will have more, and they will utilize their talents for this purpose. If they utilize their talents kindly, they will be performing the work of the State. Such people exist as trustees, on no other terms. I would allow a man of intellect to earn more; I would not cramp his talent. But the bulk of his greater earnings must be used for the good of the State, just as the income of all earning sons of the father goes to the common family fund. They would have their earnings only as trustees. It

[9] *UNESCO, All Men are Brothers,* 1959, p. 129.

may be that I would fail miserably in this. But that is what I am sailing for.

Q. Don't you think that the peasants and workers are justified in carrying on a class war for economic and social emancipation, so that they can be free once and for all from the burden of supporting parasitic classes in society?

A. No. I myself am carrying on a revolution on their behalf. But it is a non-violent revolution.

Q. How, then, will you bring about the trusteeship? Is it by persuasion?

A. Not merely by verbal persuasion. I will concentrate on my means. Some have called me the greatest revolutionary of my time. It may be false, but I believe myself to be a revolutionary—a non-violent revolutionary. My means are non-co-operation. No person can amass wealth without the co-operation, willing or forced, of the people concerned.

Q. Who constituted the capitalists trustees? Why are they entitled to a commission, and how will you fix the commission?

A. They will be entitled to a commission because money is in their possession. Nobody constituted them trustees. I am inviting them to act as trustees. I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e., owners, not in their own right, but owners in the right of those whom they have exploited. I will not dictate to them what commission to take. I would ask them to take what is fair, e.g., I would ask a man who possesses Rs. 100 to take Rs. 50, and give the other Rs. 50 to the workers, to one who possesses Rs. 10,000,000 I would perhaps say take 1 per cent yourself. So you see that my commission would not be a fixed figure, because that would result in atrocious injustice.

Q. The Maharajas and landlords sided with the British. But you find your support in the masses. The masses, however, see in them their enemy. What

would be your attitude if the masses decided the fate of these classes when they are in power?

A. The masses do not today see in landlords and other profiteers their enemy. But the consciousness of the wrong done to them by these classes has to be created in them. I do not teach the masses to regard the capitalists as their enemies, but I teach them that they are their own enemies. Non-co-operators never told the people that the British or Gen. Dyer was bad, but that they were the victims of a system. So that, the system must be destroyed and not the individual.[10]

During Gandhiji's last detention in Poona in 1942, Pyarelal (Gandhiji's secretary) had the opportunity to discuss at length with Gandhiji various aspects of his ideal of trusteeship, and how it could be realized in our present day world. Pyarelal has the substance of this conversation on record.

In the course of our talk one day he remarked:
"The only democratic way of achieving the ideal of trusteeship today is by cultivating opinion in its favour." Further on he added, "As long as we have no power, conversion is our weapon by choice. Conversion must precede legislation. Legislation in the absence of conversion, remains a dead letter."

Later on in the course of the same conversation Pyarelal asked:

Can the masses at all come into power by parliamentary activity?
Gandhiji replied:

"Not by parliamentary activity *alone*. My reliance ultimately is on the power of non-violent non-co-operation which I have been trying to build up for the last twenty-two years."[11]

[10] *Young India*, November 26, 1931.

[11] *Towards New Horizons*, pp. 90-93; quoted in *Trusteeship* by M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, 1960.

Pyarelalji further gives a trusteeship formula which was formally approved by Gandhiji. He records:

> On our release from prison, we took up the question where we had left it in the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp. Kishorlalbhai and Naraharibhai joined in drawing up a simple, practical trusteeship formula. It was placed before Bapu who made a few changes in it. The final draft read as follows:
>
> 1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
> 2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except in so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
> 3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
> 4. Thus under State-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.
> 5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such maximum and minimum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.
> 6. Under the Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.[12]

[12] *Harijan*, 25-10-1952, quoted in *Trusteeship*, *ibid.*

It was Gandhiji's fortune, and also fate, that he was called upon to lead the struggle for independence during which various and even conflicting interests had to temporarily join together for the achievement of the first basic goal. This came too late in his life (he was 78 when India secured her independence) and even the few more years that he might have lived were denied to him and to the country through his assassination within a period of less than six months after the country's attainment of independence. Gandhiji had, therefore, hardly any time to decide on the next stage of the revolution.

The tragedy, therefore, is not that Gandhiji personally failed but that his political heirs failed to complete the unfinished revolution or even to attempt the task. They had lost all faith in mass action or at least in their own ability to lead it. That free India should have depended, not as a matter of strategy for the transition period but as a permanent policy principle, on bureaucracy to implement the radical transformation which India needed shows an utter lack of revolutionary urgency, vigour and vision. What would Gandhiji have done if he had been alive for a decade more and still in the full possession of his faculties? Perhaps a vain question to ask.

Gandhiji's was not a philosophy of poverty. He wanted to provide a basic minimum standard of living to each and every person. In 1935 he had suggested a monthly income of at least rupees thirty as a basic minimum for a family of five if the minimum necessaries are to be provided.[13] If we broadly assume that the prices have increased ten times since then (they have, in fact, increased more) the minimum for a similar family today will be Rs. 300 per month giving an average per capita annual income of Rs. 720 at present prices. The per capita which we have at present achieved is hardly Rs. 470 at current prices. The actual lot of the masses is even worse on account of unequal distribution of the national income. This will indicate how far off we are from the minimum on which Gandhiji had set his heart. In the existing context of the reality of the situa-

[13] *Harijan*, 13-7-1935.

tion it is unfair, therefore, to criticize Gandhiji as an advocate of a depressed poverty level standard of living. We are yet far from achieving the minimum he was aiming at.

Let us conclude with Gandhiji's statement of his conception of a socialistic pattern of society.

"Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or 'panchayat' having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and women knows what he or she wants, and what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour.

"In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at least the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

"Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give a strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live for. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want, before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village

in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last.

"In this there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultured human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place. But I must confess that I have never sat down to think what that machine can be."[14]

These principles are yet to be effective in practice. The true village republic is yet to be created. The appropriate machine—intermediate technology—is yet to be developed. These and such other issues are a challenge to further constructive thinking and action. But Gandhiji has stated the guiding principle:

Ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit.

[14] *Harijan,* 28-7-1948.

Bimla Prasad

Gandhi as a Political Leader

WHILE GANDHI MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS IN several fields of human activity, his title to fame rests primarily on his leadership of the Indian struggle for freedom. Although this struggle had begun much before the advent of his leadership and although even after his advent all who participated in it did not work under his leadership, Gandhi not only gave a new turn to it but also remained its supreme leader almost till it achieved its objective and India became independent. In fact he occupied such an outstanding position in Indian politics from 1919 to 1947 that it would be quite appropriate to describe this period as the Age of Gandhi.

Since in his later days Gandhi came to be more and more deified as a Mahatma in a loin cloth, his unique hold over leaders as well as people is usually explained by referring to his charisma as a *Mahatma.* That he was a charismatic leader *par excellence* cannot be disputed, but the charisma exercised by him drew its strength not so much from his image as a *Mahatma* (though, of course, this was an important factor) as from that of a fighter for India's freedom and honour. His role as an apostle of non-violence, to which references have so frequently been made since his death, had even less to do with his position among the Indian people. In this connection it is pertinent to recall that the Indian National Congress, whose leadership he acquired in 1919-20, had never supported any recourse to violent methods. What distinguished Gandhi from the earlier leaders of the Congress was not his message of non-violence, but his message of *non-violent mass action* or struggle, in-

volving open defiance of the established authority and violation of its laws. It was as the leader of such a struggle in South Africa that Gandhi first caught the attention of the Indian people. This is best illustrated by the way Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the most respected man in the Congress at the time, referred to him at the annual Congress session of 1909, while moving a resolution on the struggle in South Africa:

> Fellow-delegates, after the immortal part which Mr. Gandhi has played in the South African affair I must say it will not be possible for any Indian, at any time, here or in any other assembly of Indians, to mention his name without deep emotion or pride. (Here the huge gathering rose to its feet and accorded three hearty and most enthusiastic cheers for Mr. Gandhi.) Gentlemen, it is one of the privileges of my life that I know Mr. Gandhi intimately and I can tell you that a purer, a nobler, a braver and a more exalted spirit has never moved on this earth. . . . He is a man, who may well be described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots, and we may well say that in him Indian humanity at the present time has really reached its high watermark.[1]

Beginning with this session Gandhi's name began to be mentioned in the resolutions passed by the Congress every year relating to South Africa, a practice which had begun as early as 1894. On his return from a tour of South Africa three years later Gokhale again paid glowing tributes to Gandhi. "The Indian cause in South Africa," he remarked, "has really been built up by Mr. Gandhi. Without self, and without strain, he has fought his great fight for this country during a period now of twenty years and India owes an immense debt of gratitude to him. He has sacrificed himself entirely in the service of the cause."[2]

[1] D. G. Karve and D. V. Ambekar, (Eds.), *Speeches and Writings of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Vol. II, (Bombay, 1966), p. 194.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 445.

Gokhale's visit to South Africa symbolized the deep interest of the Indian people in the struggle of their brethren in that land under the leadership of Gandhi. The moral and material support extended by the Indian people was in fact an important contributing factor in the success of that struggle. Thus it can be safely said that by the time Gandhi finally returned to India in 1915 there was already in existence here a powerful Gandhi legend. As Pherozeshah Mehta observed while welcoming Gandhi shortly after his arrival in Bombay, during the preceding years the whole country had been resounding with the tale of his great deeds. And these deeds related not to the preaching of spiritualism or of non-violence but, as Mehta pointed out, to enabling the Indians in South Africa to maintain their self-respect and their honour.[3] Back in India, Gandhi continued to speak and fight for the self-respect and honour of the Indian people, whether it was through his speech at the Banaras Hindu University in 1916 or through his work in Champaran in 1917. And it was the same in 1919 when, with his vow of resistance against the Rowlatt Acts, he finally emerged as the chief spokesman of the Indian people, who saw in his defiance of these Acts a reflection of their own deepest urges and emotions.

Apart from this identification with the deepest urges and emotions of the Indian people, the other important factor which contributed to the emergence of Gandhi was his drive for leadership. Although in the beginning he stumbled into political activity in South Africa almost by accident, very soon he developed a strong liking for such activity and, what is more important, a strong conviction that he had with him the solutions for the major problems faced by the members of his community, if only they would follow his lead. And this conviction was not confined to the situation in South Africa, but applied equally clearly to India. In fact, while leading the struggle in South Africa, Gandhi was also thinking of the day when he would lead a similar struggle in India. It is significant in this context that his treatise on government and politics written in 1909, at a time when

[3] D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. I, (Bombay, 1951), p. 194.

he was engaged in struggle in South Africa and did not occupy any position in Indian public life, was entitled *Hind Swaraj* and dealt with the political and social structure best suited for India. In the same year, while writing to G. A. Natesan, editor of the *Indian Review,* Gandhi remarked: "I hope our countrymen throughout India realize that it [the struggle in the Transvaal going on at the time] is national in its aim, in that it has been undertaken to save India's honour. I may be wrong, but I have not hesitated publicly to remark that it is the greatest struggle of modern times, because it is the purest in its goal as well as in its methods." Referring to the Congress Gandhi added: "I venture to suggest that a struggle such as this is worthy of occupying the best, if not indeed the exclusive, attention of the Congress. . . . May I also suggest that in pondering over and concentrating our attention upon passive resistance, we would perchance find out that for the many ills we suffer from in India passive resistance is an infallible panacea."[4] After returning to India in 1915 he continued to be guided by this conviction. While showing respect to both Gokhale and Tilak and even describing the former, in all sincerity and not without considerable justification, as his political *guru,* he clearly distinguished his own programme from that of both the Moderates and the Extremists and thus maintained his independent identity. The testing of Satyagraha in Champaran in 1917 and Kheda in 1918 added to his confidence. When the Rowlatt Bills were introduced in the legislature in February 1919 he took the famous Satyagraha pledge to resist them along with some of his friends and co-workers at his Ashram at Ahmedabad without any consultation with the top leaders of the Congress, to say nothing of its being discussed at any meeting of the All India Congress Committee or its Working Committee. Yet Gandhi was fully conscious of the fact that by taking the Satyagraha pledge he had taken a step which was going to give a new turn to India's history. As he said in his statement explaining his action: "The step taken is probably the most momentous in the history of India. I give my assurance

[4] *Ibid.,* pp. 135-136.

that it has not been hastily taken."[5] Again, although the programme of non-cooperation which he was advocating in 1920 ran counter to the stand of the Amritsar Congress (1919), which had decided to co-operate in the working of the new Government of India Act, and although a special Congress session was summoned to meet in Calcutta in September 1920 to consider the issue, Gandhi did not wait for it but went ahead and launched the non-cooperation campaign on August 1, under the auspices of the Khilafat Committee issuing detailed instructions in this regard. The Congress, of course, duly followed his lead.

Gandhi was able to treat the Congress in this way because at that moment of time he symbolized the wishes and aspirations of the vast majority of the politically conscious sections of the Indian people. This happened again and again; he could feel the pulse of the Indian people in a way in which no other leader could. This was the greatest source of his strength. Gandhi, however, did not depend for his success merely on mass appeal. This programme of action which he presented to the country and to the Congress was well thought out and more than a decade had gone into its making. Based on a synthesis of the programmes of the Moderates and the Extremists of the earlier era, it was ideally tailored to suit the needs of the times and to preserve a broad unity among the nationalist ranks, at any rate among those sections of them who were eager for some action.

While during 1917-20 Gandhi did not depend on the Congress for the various initiatives he took in the political field, once he had emerged as its undisputed leader he attached great importance to strengthening its organization and to training a cadre of leaders to run it. He also did his best to foster harmony among the leaders, on the one hand, and between them and the rank and file, on the other. The younger leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Jayaprakash Narayan were treated with particular love and affection even though the former made no secret of not accepting all the views of Gandhi and the latter was trying to chart out a course of his own. On several occasions Gandhi even kept

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

himself deliberately in the background and let other leaders, like Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das in the twenties and Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel in the thirties and forties, function in the limelight. Again, there were occasions when he accepted the judgement of others and did not press his own line. There should, however, be no doubt on one point: an important aspect of Gandhi's personality as a political leader was his sense of power and his ability to maintain himself as its chief repository in the Congress over a considerable period. His resignation from the formal membership of the Congress in 1934 did not bring about any change in this situation. On occasion he could even be ruthless in his treatment of those colleagues or followers who had the audacity to challenge his leadership. This is best illustrated by his handling of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1939. When the latter got himself elected as the president of the Congress for a second term against the wishes of Gandhi and by defeating his own nominee, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, for that office, Gandhi came out with a statement declaring Sitaramayya's defeat to be his own. A little later the leaders closely associated with Gandhi, without any opposition from him, got a resolution passed by the Congress session at Tripuri asking Bose to constitute his working Committee according to the wishes of Gandhi although, according to the Congress constitution, the Working Committee was to consist of the President's nominees. When Bose met Gandhi to secure his approval, the latter refused to consider any compromise solution and made it clear that his approval would be forthcoming only if Bose renominated all the members of the outgoing Working Committee, most of whom had earlier resigned as a protest against his leadership and openly backed Sitaramayya for presidentship. This was nothing but asking for Bose's surrender. Bose, however, preferred to resign from the presidentship rather than surrender. A trusted man of Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, was then installed as president and most of the old members of the Working Committee came back to that body. Afterwards, when Bose persisted with his call for public protest against some resolutions of the Working Com-

mittee, he was debarred from holding any elective office in the Congress for three years. Gandhi made it known that he himself had drafted the resolution of the Working Committee announcing this action against Bose.

Subhas Chandra Bose would not bend, and therefore had to be broken. Jawaharlal Nehru was treated in a different, rather indulgent, way because he had shown that he could bend. There were, however, occasions when he was warned in unmistakable terms that if he did not mend his ways, he would have to forego Gandhi's support in the political field, even though the personal relationship might remain intact. In 1928, for instance, when fresh from his long sojourn in Europe, Nehru was propagating certain views not palatable to Gandhi, the latter wrote to him on January 17:

> If any freedom is required from me I give you all the freedom you may need from the humble, unquestioning allegiance that you have given to me for all these years and which I value all the more for the knowledge I have now gained of your state. I see quite clearly that you must carry on open warfare against me and my views. For, if I am wrong I am evidently doing irreparable harm to the country and it is your duty after having known it to rise in revolt against me. Or, if you have any doubt as to the correctness of your conclusions, I shall gladly discuss them with you personally. The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I can't conceal from you my grief that I should lose a comrade so valiant, so faithful, so able and so honest as you have always been; but in serving a cause, comradeships have got to be sacrificed. The cause must be held superior to all such considerations. But this dissolution of comradeship—if dissolution must come—in no way affects our personal intimacy. We have long become members of the same family and we remain such in spite of grave political differences.[6]

[6] Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters* (Bombay 1958), p. 57.

Very soon, however, a real understanding or union of hearts developed between the master and the disciple and Gandhi let it be known to some of his closest colleagues and later to the public at large that he looked upon Nehru as his political heir. More than this, he carefully guided Nehru from this point of view on every crucial occasion. In 1936, for instance, when Nehru expressed his desire to relinquish the presidentship of the Congress because of certain differences with the majority of the members of the Working Committee, Gandhi wrote to him on July 15:

> Why do you resent their majority being reflected in all sub-committees etc.? Is it not the most natural thing? You are in office by their unanimous choice but you are not in power yet. To put you in office was an attempt to find you in power quicker than you would otherwise have been. Anyway that was at the back of my mind when I suggested your name for the crown of thorns. Keep it on, though the head be bruised. Resume your humour at the committee meetings. That is your most usual role, not that of a care-worn, irritable man ready to burst on the slightest occasion.[7]

But even after 1936 Nehru was not considered indispensable—at any rate, as long as Gandhi remained in full command of the situation. This became clear at the time of the Working Committee meeting at Wardha in July 1942: when Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the President of the Congress, continued with their opposition to the 'Quit India' movement planned by Gandhi, the latter made it clear that he would like them to resign from the Working Committee if they were not prepared to fall in line.[8] This extreme step, of course, did not become necessary. Both Azad and Nehru modified their stand, the latter going to the extent of himself moving the 'Quit India' resolution at

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

[8] Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Bombay 1959), p. 76.

the historic meeting of the All India Congress Committee at Bombay on August 7, 1942.

That was Gandhi's finest hour. After the end of the Cripps drama (April 1942) he had come to the conclusion that he must not allow the insolence of the imperial rulers to go unchallenged, come what may. While not approving of the policy of Nehru and other members of the working committee to offer full cooperation with the war effort if independence was assured, he had allowed them to pursue this line more or less persistently for about three years. But the repeated refusal of the British Government to concede the Congress demand even when the Japanese were hammering at the gates of India convinced Gandhi that imperial insolence required a different treatment. Once he had come to this conclusion he was like a man possessed. He made it clear to the Congress leaders that while he very much liked his movement to be conducted in the name of the Congress, if they were not prepared to cooperate, he would still have his movement by appealing directly to the people.[9] This was in line with what Gandhi had done in 1919-20. As on the earlier occasion, so now, the Congress followed his lead. And the Indian people, through their magnificent response, again showed that Gandhi had correctly read their pulse; his burning desire to challenge the British might was a true reflection of their own innermost urge for defiance. The following excerpts from his speech to the All India Congress Committee at Bombay on August 8, 1942, show Gandhi as the leader of the Indian struggle for freedom at his best:

> Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your heart 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; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery.
>
> That something in me which never deceives me tells me now: "You have to stand against the whole world, al-

[9] Louis Fischer, *A Week with Gandhi* (New York, 1942), p. 104.

though you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face, although the world may look at you with bloodshot eyes. Do not fear. Trust that little thing which resides in the heart." It says, "Forsake friends, wife, and all; but testify to that for which you have lived, and for which you have to die."

* * *

How is this vast mass of humanity to be aflame in the cause of world deliverance, unless and until it has touched and felt freedom? Today, they have no touch of life left. It has been crushed out of them. If lustre is to be put into their eyes, freedom has to come not tomorrow, but today. I have, therefore, pledged the Congress, and the Congress has pledged herself that she will do or die.[10]

* *

1942 saw not only Gandhi's finest hour, but also his last. When the movement he had led since 1919-20 reached its grand climacteric in 1946-47, Gandhi's leadership suffered decline. He, of course, continued to be deified by the masses as before. Crowds wishing to have his *darshan* continued to swell. Shouts of *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* continued to rend the air. But Gandhi was no longer the chief factor in decision-making. On the contrary, he was in the unenviable position of supporting the most vital decisions in public which in some cases had really been arrived at in opposition to his wishes and in other without any consultation with him. The final decision, for instance, to accept the Cabinet Mission's Plan was taken in opposition to Gandhi's wishes. The day was June 25, 1946. What happened has been vividly and poignantly described by Gandhi's secretary, Pyarelal, in his monumental work covering this period of his master's life:

At 8 A.M. Bapu went to attend the Working Committee meeting. He asked me to read out the note [conveying

[10] D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI (Bombay, 1953), pp. 199, 205, 208.

his misgivings about the Cabinet Mission's Plan] which he had written to Cripps last night. He then addressed them very briefly: "I admit defeat. You are not bound to act upon my unsupported suspicion. You should follow my intuition only if it appeals to your reason. Otherwise you should take an independent course. I shall now leave with your permission."

A hush fell over the gathering. Nobody spoke for some time. The Maulana Saheb with his unfailing alertness at once took in the situation. "What do you desire? Is there any need to detain Bapu any further?" he asked. Everybody was silent. Everybody understood. *In that hour of decision they had no use for Bapu. They decided to drop the pilot. Bapu returned to his residence.*

The Working Committee again met at noon and addressed a letter to the Cabinet Mission, rejecting the proposal for the formation of the Interim Government at the Centre and accepting the long term plan with its own interpretation of the disputed clauses. In spite of it they made Bapu to attend the afternoon session of the Working Committee. At noon the Cabinet Mission invited the members of the Working Committee to meet them. Bapu not being a member was not sent for and did not go. On their return nobody told Bapu a word about what had happened at the meeting.[11]

When, however, the All India Congress Committee met in Bombay on July 7, 1946 to consider the Cabinet Mission's Plan Gandhi advised its members to accept the lead given by the Working Committee and chided Jayaprakash Narayan for opposing that lead.[12] The latter held that the trap laid by the Cabinet Mission should be avoided and preparations made for another struggle for seizure of power, and warned that it would be dangerous to agree to participate in the Constituent Assembly under the then existing

[11] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase,* Vol. I (Ahmedabad, 1956), p. 239. Emphasis added.

[12] Nripendra Nath Mitra, (Ed.), *The Indian Annual Register* 1946, Vol. II (Calcutta, n.d.), pp. 137-38.

conditions.[13] The warning proved dangerously true. The situation went from bad to worse with the formation of the Interim Government. The demands and counter demands of the different parties and communities filled the atmosphere with suspicion and hatred and communal rioting started on an unprecedented scale, sapping the morale of the Congress leaders and making them eager for a negotiated settlement even at the cost of the unity of the country. The voice of Gandhi now became more and more a voice in the wilderness. The Congress leaders, entrenched in seats of power in New Delhi, were no longer keen even to consult him. He was overjoyed when Nehru paid a visit to him in Noakhali for this purpose in December 1946. In a note handed to Nehru on the eve of his departure Gandhi observed:

> Your affection is extraordinary and so natural! Come again, when you wish, or send someone who understands you and will faithfully interpret my reactions . . . when in your opinion consultation is necessary and you cannot come. Nor is it seemly that you should often run to me even though I claim to be like a wise father to you, having no less love towards you than Motilalji.
> Do not depart from the spirit of the draft you showed me yesterday. . . . Somehow or other I feel that my judgement about the communal problem and the political situation is true. . . . My reason wholly supports my heart. I notice daily verification. So, I suggest frequent consultations with an old tried servant of the nation.[14]

This was asking for too much now. While Gandhi was moving slowly from one place to another in the riot-affected areas on his healing mission, events in New Delhi were moving with a momentous speed. Within a few months of Gandhi's visit to Noakhali partition was more and more appearing as inevitable. In the first week of March 1947 the Con-

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.
[14] Pyarelal, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

gress Working Committee passed a resolution demanding the partition of the Punjab, separating the areas inhabited by non-Muslims from those inhabited by the Muslims. Gandhi learnt about this resolution only from the press and had no communication from any of the top Congress leaders for a fortnight. In a letter to Nehru dated March 20, 1947, he asked for clarification: "I have long intended to write to you asking you about the Working Committee resolution on the possible partition of the Punjab. I would like to know the reason behind it. I have to speak about it. I have done so in the absence of full facts with the greatest caution. . . . I could only give my own view which was against any partition based on communal grounds and the two-nation theory." On the same day he wrote a similar letter to Patel: "Try to explain your Punjab resolution if you can. I cannot understand it." Nehru in his reply explained that the resolution flowed naturally from the previous decisions of the Congress and remarked that it was "the only answer to partition as demanded by Jinnah." Patel's reply showed anger: "It is difficult to explain to you the resolution about the Punjab. It was adopted after the deepest deliberation. Nothing has been done in a hurry or without full thought. That you had expressed your views against it, we learnt only from the papers. But you are, of course, entitled to say what you feel right."[15]

This letter makes it clear that the Congress leaders no longer considered it necessary to consult Gandhi before taking an important decision and were also not interested in explaining it to him afterwards. During his visit to Delhi in the first week of April Gandhi discovered that some of them even found it difficult to spare time to talk to him at length. In a letter at this time he wrote: "I have been here four days, but I have not met the Sardar for more than a few minutes. . . . Sometimes I feel that perhaps I am the only one here in the whole company with spare time on hand."[16]

[15] *Ibid.*, Vol. II (Ahmedabad, 1958), pp. 34-5.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

In such a situation it was futile for him to think of playing any role in the decision-making process and he soon realized it. In utter despair he wrote to Patel on the 12th April:

> I . . . see that there is a wide and frequent divergence of views between us. In the circumstances, is it desirable that I should see the Viceroy even in my individual capacity? Think over it dispassionately, keeping only the country's interest before you. Discuss it with others if you like. There should not be even a shadow of suspicion in your mind that I am making a grievance of it. I am only thinking as to what my duty is in terms of the highest good of the country. It is just possible that in the course of administering the affairs of the millions you can see what I cannot. Perhaps I too would act and speak as you do if I were in your place.[17]

This reads very much like a letter of abdication. And so in effect it indeed was. For Gandhi had clearly abdicated his role of leadership in the Indian nationalist movement. He hardly played any significant role in the decision-making process of this movement during this period. The decision to accept partition had certainly been taken against his wishes. Yet he meekly accepted this decision and when the All India Congress Committee met in its fateful session on June 14 to consider this matter he advised that body also to do the same.

How to account for this decline, almost collapse, of Gandhi's leadership in 1946-47? We must first of all remember that while he was facing the most difficult situation of his life, he was not at all in the best of health or spirits. When the Cabinet Mission arrived, Gandhi was in his seventy-seventh year. His health as well as his spirits had been sapped during his last imprisonment in the Aga Khan Palace. While there, he had lost his wife and his secretary, Mahadev Desai, who had been more than a son to him, and had suffered from a long illness himself. More devastating than all this had been the effect on his mind of the failure

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

of his calculations in 1942. In spite of the use of such expressions as a 'fight to the finish', 'open rebellion' and 'short and swift struggle' he had continued to hope that a serious struggle might not be really necessary and that it might be possible to strike an honourable bargain with the British because of the combined pressure of defeat abroad and the prospect of rebellion at home. Even after the All India Congress Committee had passed the Quit India resolution and Gandhi had given the message, 'Do or Die', he did not expect to be arrested immediately and was in fact looking forward to another round of negotiations with the Viceroy.[18] That may perhaps explain why he had not till then issued any instructions regarding the plan to be followed in the impending struggle. In fact no such plan had even been discussed in detail with the members of the Congress Working Committee. The prompt and ruthless action of the Government had come to him as a surprise.

Thus it was a tired and depressed Gandhi who came out of the Aga Khan Palace in 1944. He had been in a somewhat similar situation in 1924 and again in 1934. Perhaps his psychic system was such that he required a period of recuperation after a struggle. One difference, however, was that now he was very old and therefore feebler than on the earlier occasions. The situation too was very much different. On earlier occasions Gandhi could concentrate for some time on his constructive programme leaving the political decisions to the other leaders. Now he had no time for recuperation and had to face a very critical situation shortly after his release. The situation required great clarity of vision and strength of will, both of which Gandhi did not at that time possess. The firmness shown by the Government in dealing with the Quit India movement coupled with the victory of the United Nations over the Axis Powers had perhaps led him to conclude that the British position in India was still quite strong. He failed to take note of the collapse of British power as a result of the war and to understand the nature of the impact of the Quit India movement, the I.N.A. trials and the naval mutiny on the public mind

[18] Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6, 82.

and particularly on the mind of the Indian soldiers. This alone can explain his retreat from his stand in 1942 that the British must withdraw from India immediately and not bother about the differences among the Indian parties which could be properly settled only after the British had left. Only on some such assumption, again, can we explain his offer of co-operation with the war effort if a provisional national government was established at the centre in 1944, his blessings for the Bhulabhai-Liaquat Pact, his support for the Wavell Plan and his initial enthusiastic reaction towards the Cabinet Mission's Plan. Later on he developed doubts regarding the last mentioned Plan, but by then it was too late, as most of the members of the Congress Working Committee felt committed to accept it. In such a situation Gandhi advised them to act according to their own light and asked the All India Congress Committee to support their decision. Later on he explained his action by saying that while his instinct was opposed to the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's Plan, his reason did not support his instinct. This really amounted to saying that he failed to come to a clear conclusion about the attitude to be adopted towards the Cabinet Mission's Plan. This could not inspire the members of the Working Committee with confidence in his judgement and was bound to limit his role in decision-making.

Gandhi's mission in Noakhali has been usually very highly eulogised as an act of great courage and dedication. That it indeed was, but by deciding upon this step he was really doing something similar to what he had done earlier by concentrating on his constructive programme: leaving the political decisions from day to day in the hands of the other leaders. Only on this occasion these decisions were of far greater importance. While he was moving in the villages of Noakhali and then of Bihar, the fate of India was being decided by the leaders in New Delhi. Gandhi arrived in the capital too late to affect the shape of things. By that time the die had been cast and the decision to partition India taken. Besides his absence from the decision-making centre, two other factors contributed to his helplessness. One was

a further decline in his will power and the other, further aggravation of the political situation.

In a way the two factors were closely related. For the decline in Gandhi's will power was partly caused by the deterioration in the political situation. Apart from this, however, he had to contend with the hard fact that his chief disciples no longer seemed to need him. To them he began to appear more and more as too old, almost senile, and not capable of guiding them properly. The extraordinary experiment in 'Brahmacharya' which he started while in Noakhali might have strengthened this feeling. It also took too much of Gandhi's time and attention, and increased his feeling of loneliness and isolation from some of his closest colleagues and followers. Most of those whom Gandhi took into confidence about this experiment expressed their dislike, Sardar Patel going so far as to describe it as irreligious.[19] All this must have sapped his will power. He certainly felt incapable of imposing his will on his chief disciples like Nehru and Patel who, having tasted power, were not willing to go into wilderness again and who, besides, felt that the alternative to partition at that moment was chaos and an indefinite continuation of butchery and mutual killing.

The latter prospect unnerved not only the disciples, but also the Master. The most powerful sanction behind his leadership had been the recourse to a mass struggle. But this sanction, he felt, could not be forged in the situation existing in 1947. There was so much communal frenzy in the air that a mass struggle at that time might have meant only more of communal killings. Besides, a mass struggle at that time might not have remained predominantly nonviolent. Soldiers and policemen were likely to join it and fight with arms. The large number of demobilized soldiers, particularly those who had served in the I.N.A., would have also done the same. The socialist leaders who were then talking of a struggle might have been happy at such a pros-

[19] See Gandhi to G. D. Birla, February 14, 1947, in G. D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma* (Bombay, 1953), pp. 322-23; also Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi* (Calcutta), 1953, pp. 131-37, 170-88 and Pyarelal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 569-605.

pect, but not so Gandhi. In any case, the older leaders of the Congress were not at all keen on a struggle. The younger leaders, particularly the Socialists, were keen but Gandhi knew that they had no commitment to non-violent means. And he thought, not without justification, that he was too old to train a new cadre of leaders. All this contributed to his hesitation and vacillation and finally to the feeling that he had no option but to support what his chief disciples were doing according to their own light. Leadership thus passed from him to his disciples with his own willing consent and blessings.

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